AN EXPLORATION OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP QUALITY OF ADULTS FROM DIVORCED PARENTS IN WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT

Parental divorce is not a uniform experience and diverse experiences associated with parental divorce may account for variation in romantic relationship outcomes among children of divorce. It is very likely that parental divorce may influence young adults' romantic relationships by shaping their attitudes towards marriage or divorce and their commitment to their own relationships. Intimacy, security, commitment and trust in adult relationships are often threatened by having experienced a parental divorce sometime during childhood.

The aim of this study was therefore to explore the quality of romantic relationships of (young) adults whose parents divorced. Little research has explored the connection between experiencing parental divorce as a child and the quality of the child's adult romantic relationships. The study employed a qualitative research approach, and semi-structured interviews were conducted. The sample consists out of 11 Namibian adults between the ages of 25 and 35 years that lives in Windhoek, and who are in a long-term romantic relationship or married; the parents of one person in the relationship had divorced when he/she was growing up.

The results revealed that almost all participants had a negative experience of their parents' divorce which affected their perception toward divorce. Unfavourable attitudes toward own divorce were reported and favourable attitudes toward others getting a divorce. It further revealed that the overall level of commitment in the relationships of the participants resulted as very high. Participants' satisfaction in their current relationship also resulted as high. Moreover, the quality of their relationships was not negatively affected.

The study recommends interventions in the form of providing therapy to children of divorce and educating parents about the effect of divorce on the psychological functioning of children and adaptation.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
IPA	Interpretative phenomenological analysis

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the children having divorced parents.

The process of divorce is never easy, but:

“It doesn’t matter who you are, or where you come from.

The ability to triumph begins with you”.

~ Oprah Winfrey ~

Do not give your past the power to define your future!

DECLARATIONS

I, Alnè Steenkamp, hereby declare that this study is my own work and is a true reflection of my research, and that this work, or any part thereof has not been submitted for a degree at any other institution.

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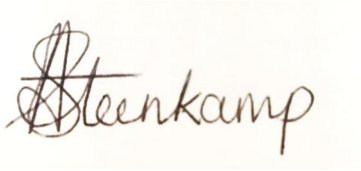
Alnè Steenkamp		28 October 2021
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This first chapter contains the introduction, background and motivation for the study. It also focuses on the problem statement, justification for the study and research objectives.

1.1 Background of the Study

Marriage is a frequent phenomenon that may have a huge impact on people's lives (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). However, researchers such as McDermott, Fowler and Christakis (2013), Pazvakawambwa, Indongo and Kazembe (2013), and Solomon (2013) found that marriage dissolution is also a frequent phenomenon that appears to increase significantly over time.

In the Namibian context, 17% of marriages end up in divorce (Solomon, 2013) and in 2018 and 2019, 2864 Namibians approached the High Court at Oshakati and Windhoek; and about 2159 marriages were dissolved by the high court in those years (Kandjungu, 2020). This is problematic since a divorce between parents may have a negative impact on their children and the children's romantic relationships.

Kazembe (2013) used the data from the *Demographic and Health Surveys* (DHS) of 1992, 2000 and 2006, which indicate that the risk of marriage dissolution increased dramatically over the lives of Namibian people. Efforts have been made to identify some factors that can explain this phenomenon of family transmission of divorce. Factors that were identified include a lower commitment to marriage, weaker norms related to a lifelong marriage and an increase in behaviours that interfere with a rewarding marriage (Storksen et al., 2007). The number of children under the age of 18 in single-parent families due to divorce has gradually increased as divorce has become more prevalent (Zhang, 2020).

When a couple get divorced, there are a lot of consequences, not only for the individuals that are getting divorced, but for their children as well (Cui et al., 2011). Individuals who experienced parental divorce were more likely to use negative communication patterns, such as criticism and contempt, and have difficulty with forming interpersonal relationships (Roper,

Fife and Seedall, 2020). Furthermore, Roper et al. (2020) also wrote that children from divorced families tend to struggle more with psychological development, academic performance, social relationships, self-esteem and anger issues. Although children are remarkably resilient, the effects of divorce may persist beyond childhood into young adulthood (Roper et al., 2020).

Braithwaite, Doxey, Dowdle & Fincham, (2016) wrote, that research has consistently shown that parental divorce is associated with short- and long-term adverse outcomes for children of divorce. These children have higher levels of conduct problems and lower levels of school achievement, psychological adjustment, self-concept and social adjustment (Braithwaite et al., 2016). Moreover, adult offspring whose parents divorced, experience poorer mental health and more marital discord compared to their peers whose parents did not divorce (Braithwaite et al., 2016). According to Lee (2018), it has generally been found that, children from divorced families are less likely to develop a positive romantic relationship and more likely to exhibit negative behaviours which include negative attitudes toward committed romantic relationships, distrust in their relationships, conflict and love affairs and instability in romantic relationships.

Literature illuminates many negative effects of parental divorce; however, positive outcomes can also occur. According to Roper et al. (2020), reasons why divorce may be prudent would be to leave an abusive relationship, infidelity or serious addictions, for example. Some individuals from divorced families may experience economic improvement, greater happiness especially after high conflict, increased confidence and learn how to become more independent (Roper et al., 2020). It is also important to note that some individuals use their parents' divorce as motivation to succeed in their committed relationship and to avoid putting their own children through the difficulties that accompany divorce (Roper et al., 2020).

1.2 Problem Statement

One out of every three marriages world wide ends up in divorce every year (Lotter, 2010). Each year in Norway, 25 000 children experience their parents' divorce and in the United States approximately one million children experience parental divorce (Stokkebek, Iversen, Hollekim & Nessc, 2019). Over the past three decades, the divorce rate in China has been on the rise from 0.35 per 1 000 people to 3.2 per 1 000 people between 1980 and 2017 (Zhang, 2020). It is reported that there are approximately 25 000 divorces each year in South Africa of which 73 per cent of South African children have been affected by divorce in 2010 (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Louw & Louw, 2014). In 2016, data showed that 25 326 divorces were granted in South Africa and 55 per cent of these divorce cases involved children younger than 18 years (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

Nearly half of marriages today end in divorce and it is therefore important to examine how young adults from divorced parents cope with the task of developing their own romantic relationships (Cui et al., 2011). Empirical literature has establishes that the influence of divorce on offspring has a variety of negative outcomes and, later on, consequences that might include negative attitudes and behaviours related to romantic relationships (Cui et al., 2011), problematic interpersonal processes within romantic relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016), problematic communication and conflict tactics in one's romantic relationships, and relationship commitment and satisfaction problems (Cui, Fincham & Pasley, 2008).

In Namibia, is a gap in research on how many children experience parental divorce, at what ages it is more prevelant and how affects their future/current romantic relationship. The literature review carried out for this study revealed that, appart from media reports on divorce rates in Namibia, little empirical research has been conducted in the Namibian context.

1.3 Research Assumptions

The overall aim of this study is to explore the quality of romantic relationships of (young) adult men and women whose parents divorced. The following three research assumptions were made:

1) Negative experience of participants' parents' divorce is expected to influence general perception toward divorce.
2) Young adults whose parents are divorced are expected to report unfavourable attitudes toward divorce.
3) Unfavourable attitudes towards divorce are expected to be positively associated with lower commitment and satisfaction to a current romantic relationship, which in turn is expected to negatively affect romantic relationship quality.

1.4 Significance of Study

This study will contribute towards the existing body of knowledge and literature relating to divorce and its impact on the future relationships of the children of divorced parents. Furthermore, information will be gathered about the romantic relationships of Namibian adults whose parents divorced when they were children.

Most empirical research in the field has been directed towards exploring the reasons for divorce. However, little research has explored the connection between experiencing parental divorce as a child and the quality of the child's adult romantic relationships (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020; Rhoades, Stanley, Markman & Ragan, 2012; Whitton, 2008). Furthermore, there is limited research about what factors might influence the impact of parental divorce on the offspring's future relationship quality (Cui et al., 2011). According to Braithwaite et al. (2016) and Cui et al. (2011) a number of potential mechanisms have been found, but have not been verified by evidence yet. Finally, very limited research has been conducted in the Namibian context to explore such connections and factors.

Due to the vast amount of possible negative consequences for children of parents who are getting or have been divorced it is important to a) raise awareness about the possible effects of divorce on children's future romantic relationships; and b) develop effective treatment strategies to minimise the negative consequences as much as possible. In order to explain the phenomenon to the public and develop effective treatment plans, normative research on the possible effects of divorce needs to be conducted.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Ideally, sampling should be done until redundancy is reached (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). However, due to time and financial constraints the sample was limited to a maximum of 20 participants. Furthermore, the applied purposive sampling technique, is a non-probability sampling technique (Bless et al., 2013) which means that the sample is not randomly selected and, hence does not represent the general population. Finally, the sample will be drawn from a specific population in terms of age, geographic location and ethnic group. As a result, the findings will not be generalised to all offspring of divorced parents in Namibia.

1.6 Delimitations

The proposed study will only include adults who: are 25-35 years old; have experienced parental divorce as a child; live in Windhoek; and have been in a romantic relationship for at least two years. The age restriction was chosen so that participants can explain in detail their experiences and sensibilities, and are more likely to have experience in relationship dating. The researcher resides in Windhoek, thus, collecting data from Windhoek-based participants would be easier, and more cost- and time-effective than from farther afield. The two-year or longer relationship restriction would ensure a couple knows each other well and that they are comfortable with each other.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1.7.1. Divorce

Divorce is a legal separation of a couple. It is the process of terminating a marriage or marital union. If you have a civil marriage your divorce will be dissolved using civil or customary law (JUSTIA, 2019). This entails cancelling the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage, thus dissolving the bonds of matrimony between a married couple (JUSTIA, 2019).

1.7.2. Romantic Relationship

Romantic relationship can be definded as a voluntary relationship between two individuals who intended that they will each be a significant part of their ongoing lives together. Romantic relationships have been described in terms of closeness, emotionality, the yearning for intimacy and a strong attraction towards eachother (Lumen Learning, 2021).

1.7.3. Relationship Quality

Some relationship theories consider commitment, intimacy, passion and satisfaction as factors of relationship quality (Kito, 2016). Others say the major components of relationship quality are commitment, intimacy, love, satisfaction, passion and trust (Kito, 2016). However, some believe that relationship quality is associated with a host of positive outcomes, including greater subjective well-being, better physical health and a lower risk of substance abuse (Kito, 2016; Washington, 2020). Pfund, Brazeau, Allemand and Hill (2020) state that high conscientiousness predicts greater relationship quality and that relationship quality is evaluated with respect to satisfaction, commitment and one's preference for alternative partners over their own. This thesis will only examine relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment as concepts of relationship quality.

1.8 Outline of Chapters

This thesis is presented as follows:

Chapter 1 provides the introduction and background to the study. It states the problem, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study and defines important terms.

Chapter 2 comprises the literature review. The literature review discusses how parental divorce influences the children's future, commitment to a relationship and their relationship satisfaction. The theoretical framework is also included in this chapter i.e., the Social Learning Theory and Attachment Theory.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used in the study. It includes information about the research design and methods, the population, sample size and sampling methods, and describes the research instruments. The procedures that were followed to collect data and analysis methods are also discussed.

Chapter 4 represents the results found through this study.

Chapter 5 discussed the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 draws the conclusion of the study and provides recommendations to improve the well-being of adults from divorced families. It also notes limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a literature review and the theoretical framework for this study. The literature review appraises the influence of divorce on the adult offspring and how it affects the offspring's commitment and satisfaction in his or her romantic relationships. The theoretical framework section discusses the relevant theory which forms the basis for this study.

2.2 Literature Review

2.2.1 Influence of Divorce

The effects of divorce are diverse and complex and not all children of divorce experience difficulties in their own relationships (Cui, Fincham & Durtschi, 2011). Parental divorce is not a uniform experience and diverse experiences associated with parental divorce may account for variation in romantic relationship outcomes among children of divorce (Cui et al., 2011). According to Sands, Thompson and Geysina (2017), a large number of children are at increased risk of negative consequences associated with parental divorce. These children have higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems, and lower academic achievement and social functioning (Sands, Thompson & Gaysina, 2017). The emotional response to divorce, irrespective of the child's age, is likely to be painful (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Not only is parental divorce associated with a variety of negative consequences in younger children, it also has consequences in adult offsprings' romantic relationships. Solomon (2013) agrees that relationships of children from divorced families are profoundly affected by the divorce of their parents. It negatively affects adjustment and also negatively impacts on the formation of the adolescents' intimate relationships.

Cui and Fincham (2010) wrote that it is very likely that parental divorce may influence young adults' romantic relationships by shaping their attitudes towards marriage or divorce and their commitment to their own relationships. There is not much known about which characteristics

of family of origin influence young adults' ability to have successful romantic relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010). In addition, Solomon (2013) agrees that relationships of children from divorced families are profoundly affected by the divorce of their parents. It negatively affects adjustment and also negatively impacts the formation of the adolescents' intimate relationships (Solomon, 2013).

McDermott et al. (2013) wrote that adolescents may learn destructive traits from parents and import these problematic tendencies into their own romantic relationships. The consequences of divorce cause adolescents to have more partner changes in adulthood, relationships that are less stable or satisfying and more perpetration of intra-partner violence (Fergusson, McLeod & Horwood, 2014). These adolescents may fail to learn important interpersonal skills, for example the ability to communicate clearly or compromise effectively.

Furthermore, Bethell (2010) suggests that evidence suggest that, on average, adults who experienced parental divorce as children have poor psychological adjustment, lower socioeconomic attainment, and greater marital instability compared with adults reared in a nuclear family. Several studies have begun to explore intergenerational transmission of marital instability. Intergenerational transmission of marital instability posits that parental marital status influences children's subsequent marital trajectories (Sprague & Kinney, 1997). According to Sprague and Kinney (1997), there are several explanations for this, such as, that the divorce of one's parents was the most important factor predicting one's subsequent marital success. Other researchers such as Sprague and Kinney (1997) state that factors such as parental marital happiness are also important to examine when attempting to understand the transmission of marital instability and attitudes and behaviours of young adults who experienced parental divorce. Moreover, parental divorce may have a negative impact on an adult child's relationship quality and stability; however, research also shows that if the divorce occurred during the childhood of the adult, the marital disruption of that individual would be

greater, relatively (Bethell, 2010). Sometimes children from divorced parents hold unrealistic standards in romantic relationships (Orschell, n.d.). These unrealistic standards cause the person to feel less satisfied in a relationship, which can increasingly lead to a lack of intimacy. Interestingly, adults from families in which the parents had divorced were more likely to be insecure compared with those who came from intact families (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020).

Intimacy, security, commitment and trust in adult relationships are often threatened by having experienced a parental divorce sometime during childhood (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). There are two explanations why divorce influences offspring romantic relationships. One is that adult children of divorced parents have learned a maladaptive interpersonal style, which results in unsatisfactory interactions and relationships; the other is that young adults from divorced parents may be fearful that their relationships will dissolve, much like their parents, and are thus afraid to become too involved in romantic relationships (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). However, in contrast to this, there are also studies that find no differences in offspring of parental divorce at all (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020).

In terms of the impact of family dynamics on children, Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) suggest that divorce is a culmination of an extended process of changing family relationships involving a lengthy sequence of pre-divorce experiences. Thus, children's reactions often depend on family conditions or circumstances before or after actual divorce (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009). Sprague and Kinney (1997) wrote that the effects of divorce may lessen in intensity over time; individuals whose parents had been divorced for longer periods of time reported more trust and altruism in their current romantic relationship. This suggests that parents who wait until their children are older to divorce may actually make their offsprings' romantic relationships more difficult in terms of their ability to trust and act selflessly (Sprague & Kinney, 1997). Miles and Servaty-Seib (2010), wrote that during the late-teen years, parents seem to have the greatest influence on their offsprings' views concerning divorce and that this influence was found to

persist regardless of their offsprings' own relationship experiences. Having witnessed parental divorce can be associated with unique challenges in forming relationships (Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010). According to Bojuwoye & Akpan (2009), parental divorce might not be as devastating for younger children as for older children, since younger children are less able to make sense of all the changes that are occurring at the time.

2.2.2 Commitment within a Romantic Relationship

There are different conceptualizations of commitment found in the literature. Romantic relationship commitment is seen as individual dedication or the desire to be in a relationship and improve its quality for mutual benefit of both partners (Konstam, Curran, Celen-Demirtas, Karwin, Bryant, Andrews & Duffy, 2019). According to Konstam et al., (2019), commitment in a relationship is a key element in relationship quality and stability. Whitton et al. (2008) explains that relationship commitment is a personal desire and intent to maintain a specific relationship for long term. It is argued that there are two constructs to commitment: first, interpersonal commitment, which is defined as dedication: and the second, constraint commitment, which is equivalent to the psychological significance of phrases, such as, "I want" and "I must" (Janicka & Szymczak, 2019). Dedication is related to the desire to maintain the relationship with a partner (Janicka & Szymczak, 2019). Furthermore, Janicka and Szymczak (2019) wrote that commitment is associated with the continuation of relationships between partners and it is expressed as the will to stay in a relationship due to a sense of duty; additionally, it plays an important role in the process of partner matching. According to Konstam et al. (2019), relationship commitment is a complex and multifaceted concept that refers to a desire for a combined future with another person.

It is assumed that the essence of commitment and dedication derives from building mutual psychological and physical dependence between partners (Janicka & Szymczak, 2019). It presents an indispensable dimension in satisfying relations between partners in close dyadic

relationships (Janicka & Szymczak, 2019). Commitment also refers to a promise, and communication is often the way partners express their desire for a committed future together; such communication also includes messages about the state of the relationship and future plans (Konstam et al., 2019). 'Commitment talk' is how emerging adults approach commitment at the beginning of a romantic relationship, such as discussions about the relationship and future plans (Konstam et al., 2019). Sometimes, commitment talk can be intimidating since partners might feel exposed and threatened in the relationship, which might cause feelings of uncertainty and stagnation in the relationship (Konstam et al., 2019).

Konstam et al. (2019) wrote that, in addressing the subjective quality of commitment in relationships, postmodern theories have drawn attention to the processes of constructing meaning through conversations and interpretations with one's partner. What is important of commitment, is that it is not stable, but fluid and dynamic (Konstam et al., 2019). The meaning of commitment constantly changes in the context of the relationship because it is located in the interaction between the two partners (Konstam et al., 2019). Thus, there are changes in the quantity and quality of commitment that each partner experiences towards the other (Konstam et al., 2019). Shimkowski, Punyanunt-Carter, Colwell and Norman (2018) wrote that people from divorced families typically do not view marriage or long-term romantic relationships as a lifelong commitment. These children experience less closeness with others, learn their relationship styles from their parents and often imitate their parents' divorce behaviour (Shimkowski et al., 2018).

Environmental factors such as parental divorce affects the lifetime decisions of their offspring and the offspring's readiness to make a long-term commitment to a romantic relationship. Research indicates that experiencing parental divorce as a child may have a negative impact on their commitment in relationships in the future (Whitton et al., 2008). According to Miles and Servaty-Seib (2010), adult children of divorce are more concerned about the rupture of their

own future marriages. They report lower levels of marital or romantic relationship commitment (Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010). On the contrary, there are researchers that found that adult children of divorce have similar expectations to have marriages and romantic relationships that are both high quality and enduring (Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010).

Konstam et al. (2019) also wrote that for early adulthood couples, commitment includes themes of communication, togetherness, friendship, trust, equality, keeping one's word, and supporting each other. Others also include themes such as, complete loyalty, continual communication, investment in the relationship and familial influences (Konstam et al., 2019). Overall, Konstam et al., (2019) denotes that commitment is associated with loyalty, responsibility, fidelity and faithfulness and that it includes behavioural demonstrations of support, explicit communication of love and devotion and integrity. During the emerging adulthood phase, romantic relationships become a more prominent focus, although they are frequently experienced as confusing, conflictual, and unstable (Konstam et al., 2019). Forming, maintaining, and ending romantic relationships are significant developmental tasks for emerging adults and how these relationships are negotiated impacts on well-being, mental health and behavioural adjustment (Konstam et al., 2019). Although most young adults anticipate an equal likelihood for marital success, their commitment to work through difficulties with a partner might be associated with what was modelled by their parents (Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010). Furthermore, van Schaik and Stolberg (2001) wrote that young adults have a fear of commitment exhibited by different types of behaviour.

South (2013) concluded that there are many adults of divorced parents that do not believe in marriage and also expressed that they did not want to get a divorce. They specifically hoped to avoid divorce because they did not want their children to experience what they did growing up. This led to some participants not engaging in marriage or a committed relationship (South, 2013). There are various reasons why offspring avoid a romantic relationship: they might not

feel ready, are inflexible, have high expectations of their partner and want to be more mature (South, 2013).

Divorce could present numerous challenges in terms of children' own romantic endeavours and Shimkowski et al., (2018) stated that women from divorced families were less likely to have a secure attachment and less idealistic about romance. Whitton et al. (2008) found that for women, parental divorce retained a small but significant negative effect on relationship commitment. Women whose parents had divorced reported lower relationship commitment than women from intact families (Rhoads et al., 2012; Whitton et al., 2008). However, despite these associations observed in women, parental divorce was not associated with men's relationship commitment (Whitton et al., 2008). One possible explanation for these gender differences may be that, women are socialised to be more relationship-orientated than men, and they may be more attuned to their parents' marital dissolutions and its lessons regarding the impermanence of marriage. South (2013) also noted that some adults of divorced parents push people away to avoid having a romantic relationship and avoid what their parents went through others enter into commitment with the belief that they can easily exit if they are not satisfied.

Research indicates that adult offspring of divorce have attitudes reflective of low relationship commitment (Riggio, 2004). This lack of commitment may affect behaviours and attitudes within all types of personal relationships and may be an important factor contributing to feelings of anxiety about participating in personal relationships and for development of social support in young adulthood (Riggio, 2004). On the other hand, children who experience parental divorce learn that marriages do not necessarily last forever, and may interpret divorce as an indication that parents were unwilling to work out problems or go through difficult times. These children who experienced divorce feel less anxious about relationship dissolution because they have seen their parents become happier after divorce (Riggio, 2004). Less anxiety

may be positive for young adults of divorce; however, this may also reflect their willingness to terminate dissatisfying relationships (Riggio, 2004).

In conclusion, being conscious of the fragility of a romantic relationship by observing parental divorce may lead women, more than men, to hold back on their commitment to their relationships (Whitton et al., 2008). Some studies confirm a mutual dependence between satisfaction in a relationship and commitment to it, with a more satisfying relationship between partners being accompanied by an increase in commitment (Janicka & Szymczak, 2019).

2.2.3 Satisfaction in a Romantic Relationship

Relationship satisfaction has become a central construct in the field of basic relationship research and marital therapy literature, and serves as a cornerstone in understanding how relationships work (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Unique features of satisfaction represent happiness, similar to its definition as "positive feelings about the relationship" (Kito, 2016).

With regard to relationship satisfaction, the close-independent dimension, which is intimacy, passion and commitment, correlates with the degree of passion that a person believes to have in a relationship (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). McDermott et al., (2013) wrote that the greater the feelings of satisfaction, stability and commitment that partners have in their relationship, the more supportive the relationship is. In turn, the more supportive the relationship is, the greater are the feelings of satisfaction, stability and commitment that partners have for their relationship (McDermott et al., 2013). Pfund, Brazeau, Allemand, and Hill, (2020), found that a sense of purpose was positively related to greater relationship quality, assessed by high levels of relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment.

In contrast with Whitton, et al's, (2008) findings, Cui, Fincham and Pasley (2008) found that witnessing parental divorce has a negative impact on the offspring's later relationship efficacy, which may further result in decreased relationship happiness and satisfaction. An individual's appraisals and beliefs about his/her own relationship skills play an important role on how he or

she responds to conflict; these responses may further determine the efficiency of attempts for conflict resolution, which is also associated with an individual's relationship satisfaction (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). Furthermore, van Schaick and Stolberg (2001) explained that parental marital status also influences your adulthood intimate relationship quality, and experiencing parental divorce may result in more insecure and less-trusting relationships, as well as more anxiety and avoidant attachments in intimate relationships. Compared with youth who grew up in intact families, those who grew up with divorced parents reported lower romantic relationship satisfaction (Cui et al., 2011). Decreased commitment towards a relationship could also decrease relationship satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Braithwaite et al., (2016) argued that parental divorce predetermined less commitment among children of divorce, whereas parental conflict predicted higher levels of conflict and poorer relationship satisfaction.

Roper et al. (2020), reported that individuals who experienced parental divorce were more likely to have lower parental regard, report lower relationship satisfaction and experience relationship distress compared with those whose parents did not divorce. Lower couple satisfaction was strongly associated in adults who experienced parental divorce (Roper et al., 2020). Lee (2018) also found that adult offspring of divorced parents were less likely to be satisfied in their current romantic relationships; males were less satisfied with their relationship than females. Rhoads et al., (2012) discovered that family structure could affect women's and men's relationships differently, in that women from divorced parents reported lower trust and satisfaction and higher conflict and ambivalence, whereas men's perceptions tended to be more dependent on the marital status of their partner's parents. On the other hand, Pfund et al., (2020) found that no evidence of difference by age or gender in relationship satisfaction.

One reason for lower satisfaction in the relationship could be because adult children of divorce may have learned a maladaptive interpersonal style, which results in unsatisfactory interactions and relationships (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Furthermore, Egeci and Gencoz, (2006)

reported that their participants with secure attachment styles reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and those who had confidence in their ability to solve problems tended to be more satisfied as well. Their theory suggests that adult attachment style is an important factor of relationship satisfaction, because it shapes an individual's expectations on behaviour in romantic relationships (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006).

When studying relationship satisfaction of adult offspring of divorce, communication skills has been found to play an important part (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). Ineffective communication skills tend to intensify conflict situations. Communication misunderstandings, getting angry with one's partner without listening and insisting on one's own point of view are the basic characteristics of ineffective communication (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). According to Egeci and Gencoz (2006), whenever these communication problems increase, a couple's ability to solve problems decreases and so does relationship satisfaction. Therefore, communication skills are a crucial factor for relationship satisfaction (Egeci & Gencoz, 2006). In addition, parental conflict predicted higher levels of conflict and poorer relationship satisfaction in the relationships of emerging adult children of divorce (Braithwaite et al., 2016).

2.2.4 Attitude Towards Divorce of Offspring of Divorced Parents

Attitudes related to romantic relationships could predict future relationship and marital attitudes and behaviours (Cui et al., 2011). It is, therefore, important to examine how young adults from divorced parents cope with developing their own romantic relationship and the attitudes and behaviours they have towards it.

Cui et al. (2011) observed that children of divorce could form different perceptions of their parents' divorce based on their degree of exposure to interparental conflict. During young adulthood, individuals from divorced families make decisions regarding relationships or marriage and their own future families. Studies have indicated that individuals are more likely to hold pro-divorce beliefs if they have experienced the divorce of their parents (Amato & De

Boer, 2001; Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010). It is found that adult children of divorce were three times more likely to think about divorce than offspring with continuously married parents (Amato & De Boer, 2001; Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010).

It is found that children from divorced families are more likely to hold favourable attitudes toward divorce that those from intact families (Lee, 2018). They are more likely to think of ending their current romantic relationship, because they do not have to remain in an unsatisfying relationship when they could seek happiness with someone else; this is because they have first-hand experience that relationships or marriage do not necessarily last a lifetime. It is important to keep in mind that holding favourable attitudes toward divorce, does not necessarily directly translate into decreased relationship or marital optimism (Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010). However, according to Cui et al. (2011), it is expected that having a favourable attitude towards divorce would lead to low commitment in a relationship.

Offspring of divorced parents may be less likely to trust their own partners and have confidence in the longevity of the relationship because of their parents' divorce. By witnessing the demise of something that was supposed to last forever, these offspring may be less likely to trust the institution of marriage and be less trusting in their own relationships (van Schaik & Stolberg, 2001). This notion is consistent with the more accepting attitudes of divorce that is found in young adults of divorced parents and their thoughts that divorce could be a future possibility for them (van Schaik & Stolberg, 2001).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theory of Bandura, the Social Learning Theory and of Bowlby, the Social Attachment Theory will form the underlying theoretical framework of this study.

2.3.2 Social Learning Theory

One theory that explains the influence of divorce is the Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977). It suggests that children learn social behaviour by modelling the behaviour, social interaction and relationship patterns of their caregivers and that their parents' relationship influences the children's own romantic relationship experiences in adulthood (Rhoades et al., 2012). As a result, children of parents who are not modelling a healthy relationship learn a variety of conflict behaviours that can shape their own conflict behaviour and other behaviours in later romantic relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010). According to Rhoads, et al. (2012), a less positive role model of romantic relationships may also lead to lower adjustment, lower levels of commitment and more negative communication in the children. Finally, witnessing the divorce of one's parents may influence the children's attitude towards marriage or divorce in general, and their commitment to their own relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010).

The Social Learning Theory also proposes that children of divorce learn problematic interpersonal processes that their parents practiced and possibly apply it in their own romantic relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016). Children also learn important skills from their parents on how to have successful romantic relationships, such as, how to express love and affection to one's partner, how to handle conflict when it arises, and how to compromise (Washington, 2020). In addition, Rhoades et al. (2012) wrote that much of the work on the intergenerational transmission of divorce has been based on the Social Learning Theory and many studies have examined how witnessing poorly managed conflict between one's parents is related to communication and conflict patterns in children's adult relationships. Children of divorce demonstrate higher rates of problematic communication and conflict tactics in their own relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016); this is an example of the Social Learning Theory.

The Social Learning Theory can also explain how good parent and child relationships are linked to a child's own romantic relationships (Lee, 2018). The interactional skills and

behaviours they learned through their relationship with their parents can be applied to their other primary intimate and meaningful relationships (Lee, 2018). Furthermore, the social Learning Theory Explains that, learning behaviours are strengthened or weakened by the significance the role models hold and the frequency of exposure to the role models and their behaviour (Lee, 2018). Thus, young adults of divorce may shape their behaviour in their romantic relationship by observing marital interactions between their parents (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Adding to the theory, Cunningham and Skillingstead (2015) state that children from divorced parents are exposed to poor models of dyadic behaviour and may not learn the skills and attitudes that facilitate successful functioning of a relationship. The absence of positive role models and of memories of parents working through relationship problems leaves children of divorce without a realistic sense that relationships can change without resulting in divorce (Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015). Thus, these children do not learn how to navigate relationship struggles, nor how to persist through difficult times (Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015).

The theory also supports how commitment towards romantic relationships can be influenced by parental divorce and how parental conflict is associated with decreased commitment among those whose parents divorced (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui & Fincham, 2010). According to the theory, this might be that because parents got divorce and the children were part of this process, they may feel less committed towards a romantic relationship or marriage because they might fear the dissolution thereof.

The Social Learning Theory also suggests that parental divorce and parental conflict can affect offsprings' attitudes towards divorce (Braithwaite et al., 2016). It has been demonstrated that these attitudes are more liberal among children of divorce and these children are reported to be more favourable towards divorce (Braithwaite et al., 20016). Furthermore, Cui and Fincham

(2010) also explain that based on this theory, it is likely that parental divorce may influence young adults' romantic relationships through shaping their attitudes towards divorce.

2.4 Chapter summary

As supported in this chapter, parental divorce has an effect on the romantic relationship of adult offspring. It has also been found that divorce may cause problems in a romantic relationship and why these problems occur. This chapter discussed the many ways in which divorce influences the romantic relationship of adult children of divorced parents.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and describes the procedures followed while conducting the study. Thus, it discusses research design, population, sample, research instruments, the procedure followed, data analysis and research ethics.

3.2 Research Design

This study utilised a non-experimental design by collecting descriptive information to explore the quality of romantic relationships that adult offspring from divorced parents experience. The study was conducted in Windhoek in the Khomas Region of Namibia.

This research followed a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews. A qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on the reality of what happened and to gain a richer understanding of the subjects' experiences and perceptions. This research design also encourages two-way communication such as dialogue (Willèn, 2015), and gives the participants an opportunity to talk openly about their personal experiences and create meaning around those experiences; it also allows the researcher to explore participants' responses in depth (Solomon, 2013). The questions were structured in such a way to reveal the participant's commitment within the relationship, identify how satisfied the participant is in the relationship and what the participant's attitude is towards divorce.

According to Larkin and Thompson (2012), it is important to conceptualise meaning of the context for each participant, as the experience holds significance for the participant. This study therefore involved exploring and describing each participant's unique emotional experiences of parental divorce that he/she perceived had an influence on their own romantic relationships. For this reason, a phenomenological design was used for the study; this approach focuses on the way in which people actually experience the world and account for their experiences (Hogg

& Vaughan, 2014). It also focuses on how individuals make sense of their world around them; that is, people link meaning to a social reality and they act on the basis of that meaning (Bryman, 2011). Phenomenological design emphasises how a person interprets a situation and it attempts to put things in perspective from that person's point of view (Bryman, 2011). Moreover, researchers attempt to describe the phenomenon under investigation as experienced by, or through the eyes of, their respondents (Bless et al., 2014).

3.3 Population

Bless et al. (2013) describe a population as an entire set of people that is the focus of a research project and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics.

There is no statistical indication of how many children in Namibia are affected by divorce. Although the population number is undefined, in 2016, Namibians between the ages of 25 and 34 years constitute 44.2% of the population, forming the largest age group (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017). The Khomas Region has a population of 415 780, which is 17.9% of the total number of Namibians (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017). Out of the 415 780 people in the Khomas Region, 56.6% are between the ages of 25 and 34 years (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2017). It was from this population that the sample for this study was drawn.

The population of this study consisted of 11 Namibian adults between the ages of 25 and 35 years that were living in Windhoek, and who were in a long-term (two years or longer) romantic relationship or married at the time of the study; the parents of one person in the relationship had divorced when he/she was growing up. Participants came from various demographic backgrounds; 7 of the participants were females and 4 participants were males.

3.4 Sample

A sample in research refers to a subset of the whole population, which is investigated by a researcher (Bless et al., 2013). A sample is used as it is not always practically possible to

approach all individuals or elements in a population (Salkind, 2012). Moreover, Marshall (1996) stated that generalisability is not the ultimate goal of qualitative research, but rather that the goal is to adequately answer the research question.

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to select units that form part of the sample, based on the researcher's judgement of which units will be most useful or representative (Sehlabaka, 2014). This is a non-probability sampling method and suitable for this study in the sense that the researcher would be able to select the most eligible participants for the study (Solomon, 2013). A referral system was also used; identified key participants purposively located other participants across Windhoek who fitted the inclusion criteria (Strydom & Delport, 2007). This sampling technique was selected as it best suited the researcher's time and financial budgets.

Participants included in the study had to meet the following criteria: 25–35 years of age; either male or female; residing in Windhoek; in a long-term (two years or longer) romantic relationship; came from a family of divorced parents or else his/her spouse did; and was willing and available to participate. According to Creswell (2014), in a phenomenological research study, the number of participants should range between 5 and 25. A total of 11 adults of divorced parents made up the purposive sample for this study.

3.5 Research Instruments

In the present study, face-to-face, in-depth and semi-structured interviews (see Annex C, page 77) were conducted with all the participants by the researcher. The use of semi-structured interviews assisted participants to share their beliefs and perceptions on divorce, and how it had affected their romantic relationships. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport (2005) described how semi-structured interviews are organised around areas of particular interest, allowing sufficient flexibility to explore participants' responses in depth.

Focus points of the semi-structured interview included the adults' feelings and experiences of divorce; how they view divorce in general; contributing factors that influence their commitment; and the satisfaction they feel in their romantic relationships. The researcher aimed to understand the participants' experiences and how their parents' divorces influenced their romantic relationships. The interview guide (see Annex C, page 77) consists of demographic questions, close-ended questions and open-ended questions that are intended to gather information about the participants' perceptions of their parents' divorces, and their overall attitudes towards divorce. The semi-structured interview questions were compiled using key concepts and guided by the research assumptions for this study that is presented in Chapter 1. This research instrument was tested by the researcher and her supervisor, and no suggestions for modifying it were made. The researcher was also able to determine the time it takes to carry out the interview. Testing the schedule helped in establishing effective communication techniques to build rapport with the participants. Furthermore, it created an opportunity to test the credibility and accuracy of the interview questionnaire.

All participants were interviewed individually by the researcher, this is to reduce the risk of being enmeshed in other participants' positions and views on the questions asked (Stokkebekk et al., 2019). The interviews were conducted in English. At the end of each interview, the participant's experiences were assessed and if there were difficult matters, it was brought to a closure by providing supportive therapy. Each interview was between 20 and 45 minutes long. Having received consent from the participant, each interview was recorded; this allowed for a more complete record than notes taken during the interview (De Vos et al., 2005).

The aim was to understand the experiences of the adults and the meaning they had made of those experiences. It was important that the information gathered was understood from the participants' perspectives. Their in-depth descriptions of their experiences and patterns of commitment and satisfaction within romantic relationships established the validity of the study.

The researcher ensured credibility by spending sufficient time with participants to establish rapport, set them at ease and, consequently, they felt comfortable sharing personal and sensitive information. Repetition and rephrasing of questions were used to enhance credibility.

3.5.1. Credibility

De Vos et al. (2005) describe that, in-depth descriptions show that the interactions between participants and the researcher are more valid. In addition, Creswell (2014) also emphasises that real life provides a composite of different perspectives that do not always coalesce; thus, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of a study. To ensure credibility of the interview, the researcher followed critical steps. These included spending time to establish a good rapport before starting the interview and to make sure that the participant was comfortable, and repeating and rephrasing questions to gain credibility of the participants' answers.

3.5.2. Accuracy

To demonstrate reliability, asking for clarification and following-up when unsure of certain facts is important (Sehlabaka, 2014). In addition, Whittaker (2009) describes how the researcher can ensure reliability by considering whether the concluding findings are supported by sufficient evidence. In this study, the researcher also used a method of peer debriefing to enhance accuracy of the study and add validity to the study. This process involved a peer researcher to review the draft of the interpretations and ask questions about the study to ensure that the results would resonate with people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

Creswell (2014) recommended multiple approaches and strategies to enhance the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of the findings. The researcher used rich, full content descriptions to convey findings, used peer debriefing, and member checking in order to make the study more accurate. One strategy that the researcher also used was member checking, by giving the

draft report to some of the participants to determine whether they thought it was accurate (Creswell, 2014).

3.6 Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (SHS/0002/2021). The first three participants were known to the researcher who approached them individually to verbally explain the purpose of the study. The rest of the participants were contacted on referral of the other participants. A letter was sent via email to each potential participant that explained the study in detail including the nature, purpose and risks of it. Once an interest in participating in the study was expressed, a meeting was arranged to conduct the interview. The time and location of the meeting were adapted to suit a participant's preference to make it as convenient as possible, but a quiet place with privacy was favoured.

Before an interview started, the participant was informed that it would be confidential and anonymous, and that he/she could withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the participant was informed that participation was voluntarily and that he/she would not receive any payment for participation. After the above-mentioned terms and conditions were explained, the participant signed a consent form, stating their willingness to participate and granting permission for the interview to be recorded. The participant was also given an opportunity to ask questions if he/she had any.

The interviews were conducted in a quiet, isolated area to promote a safe and non-judgemental environment or via Zoom, a cloud-based video-conferencing tool, which some of the participants preferred. Adequate COVID-19 health protocols were in place for face-to-face interviews. The environments of the interviews further promoted self-disclosure and helped establish rapport.

The interviews were approximately 30 minutes long. Afterwards, the participants were asked if they knew of any other people that matched the criteria for the study; any referrals were contacted later by the researcher.

At the end of each interview, the signed consent forms, voice recordings and field notes were numbered, dated and identified, and filed. This also assisted in determining reliability, following Creswell (2014) who described how qualitative researchers should document the procedures of their studies and as many of the steps of the procedures as possible. The researcher debriefed at the end of the interview to ensure that she had captured the participant's responses accurately. To confirm that the participant had not been re-traumatised by relating his/her experiences of parental divorce the debriefing included questions such as: "How do you feel about the interview?" and "Would you like to have counselling?" These questions were to ensure that the participant had not suffered any emotional harm or distress through sharing their experiences. Most participants found the interview therapeutic and felt better after sharing their story.

When a draft of the interpretations where done, the researcher also used a method of peer debriefing. A peer researcher was asked to review the draft and ask questions about the study to ensure that the results would resonate with people other than the researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the information the researcher collected (Whittaker, 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used in this study. IPA is a qualitative approach analysis which aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experiences and aims for insight into how a person makes sense of a given phenomenon (Smith, 2015). According to Smith and Osborn (2014), IPA is a valuable tool for a researcher on examining a complex topic. It is explicitly idiographic in its commitment to examining the

detailed experiences of each case and examine topics which are complex and emotionally laden (Smith, 2015).

Every word of the recorded interviews of each participant was typed daily into word-processing documents. These transcriptions were then analysed manually and important information for the research was highlighted. Gaining a good overview of the data by re-reading the transcripts, the researcher identified similarities and differences between participants' experiences and started to recognise links and relationships between the different aspects of the participants' experiences.

To add value to the study, the researcher incorporated short, salient quotations, embedded quotations and long quotations of the participants; these provide evidence to accept the interpretations as plausible. Interpretations of the transcripts were explained to support or falsify reported findings in the literature review. These connections between the research results and the literature review are presented in Chapter 4.

3.8 Research Ethics

Beins and McCarthy (2012) state that ethical considerations are relevant to every research study. In order to avoid the exploitation of research participants, applicable ethical standards should be mandatory during research. In this study, the researcher ensured that all ethical considerations were well thought out before the research process began, and was conducted with approval of the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

According to Cresswell (2014), the researcher is obligated to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants. The participants' rights to privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and lack of harm were protected throughout the study and during the debriefing after the interview. The researcher ensured that each participant understood the aim of the study, what to expect during the interview process and that participation was voluntary. The researcher

developed a consent form (refer to Appendix B), and provided her mobile number and email address to participants in case they had any questions at any stage of the study.

All information shared by the participants is kept confidential. The audio recordings of the interviews were stored in a lockable cabinet and will be kept for five years to ensure that the data is available if it is requested, after which the recordings will be destroyed.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the research design used in this study. In addition, it outlined the population studied, the sample and sampling procedures used and the mechanisms of data collection. The data analysis procedure was briefly discussed, and ethical considerations in the study were explained. The next chapter presents the results the researcher obtained from this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative research carried out to meet the objectives of the study. The chapter begins with the participants' demographic details. It then continues with the results of the analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews with the participants. The participants' own words are quoted, and are linked to themes identified by the researcher to respond to the assumptions of the study.

4.2. Sample Description

4.2.1. Demographic Data

There was no predetermined distribution of gender, race or age of the participants required for this study. Eleven participants took part, of which seven were females (63.6%) and four were males (36.4%) (Fig. 1). The participants represented three ethnic groups (Fig. 2), and ranged between 25 and 35 years of age (Fig.3).

Most participants were between six and ten years old when their parents divorced (63.6%); four (36.4%) were teenagers (Fig. 4). The participant who was oldest at the time of her parents' divorce, was 18 years old.

At the time of the interviews, five (46%) of the participants were married, two (18%) were engaged and four (36%) were in relationships of at least two years (Fig. 5).

Figure 1: Gender distribution of participants

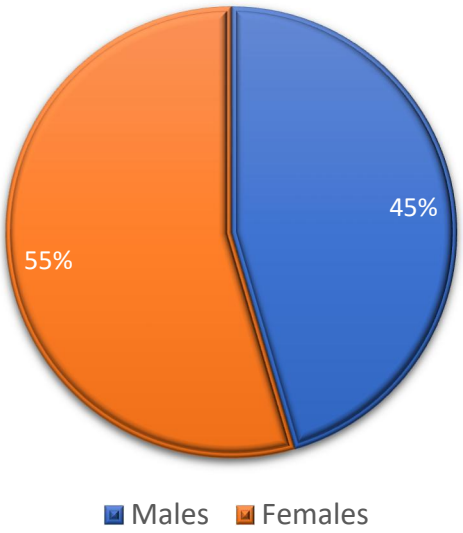

Figure 1: Pie chart showing gender distributions, 7 females (55%) and 4 male participants (45%).

Figure 2: Ethnic groups of participants

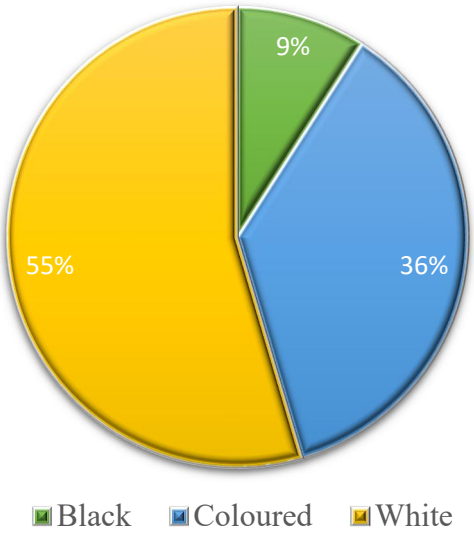

Figure 2: Ethnicity of the 11 participants.

Figure 3: Ages of participants

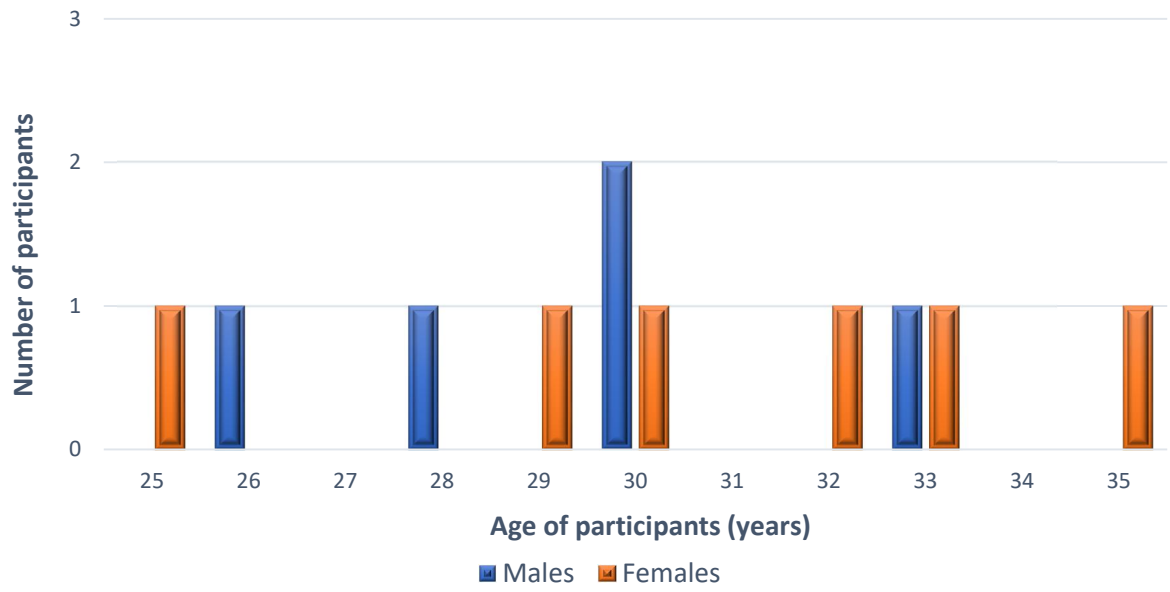

Figure 3: Distribution of participant age at the time of the study.

Figure 5: Marital status

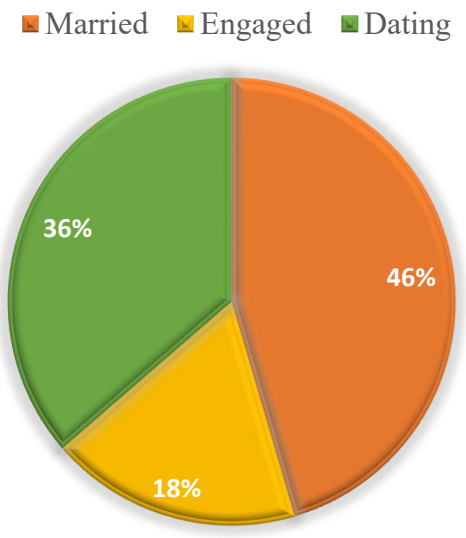

Figure 5: Marital status of the study participants.

Figure 4: Age of participant at time of parental divorce

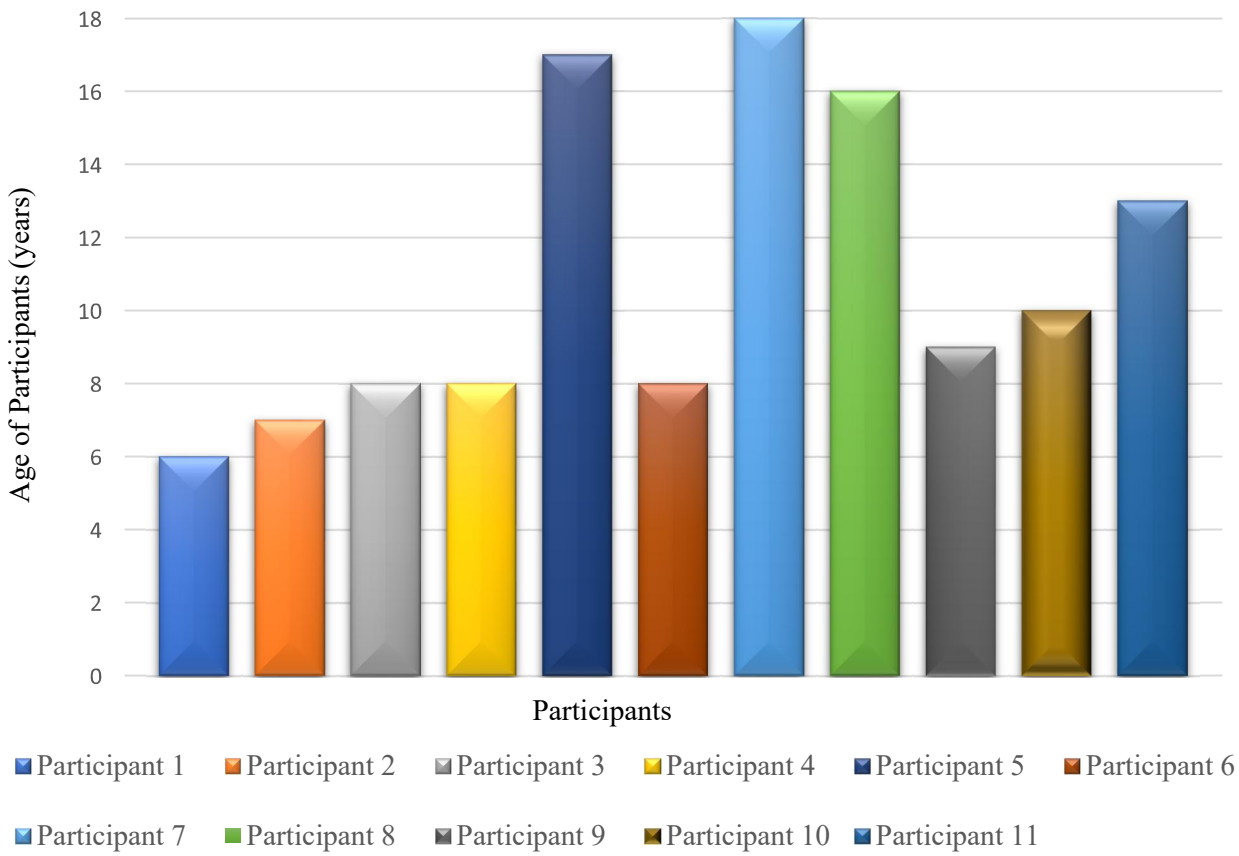

Figure 4: Participant age at the time of his/her parents' divorce.

4.3. Background Analysis of Participants

A brief background to each of the participants is given below.

a) Participant 1

Participant 1 was a 32-year-old white female born in Windhoek who had been married for seven years. The couple had a 3-year-old son. The participant had dated her husband in school, but they broke up and only got back together again after university. Her parents divorced when she was 6 years old. The reason for her parents' divorce was mainly due to financial reasons.

b) Participant 2

Participant 2 was a 30-year-old white female born in Gobabis. She had been engaged for four years at the time of the interview; the couple had dated for four years prior to their engagement.

They had a 5-year-old son. Her parents divorced when she was 7 years old because her mother had an affair. Although her father had wanted to work through it, her mother wanted a divorce.

c) Participant 3

Participant 3 was a 28-year-old white male, born in Otjiwarongo. He had been married for four years at the time of the interview. The couple had two children, a 4-year-old daughter and a 6-month-old son. His parents divorced when he was 8 years old because his father had an affair.

d) Participant 4

Participant 4 was a 29-year-old white female, born in Walvis Bay. At the time of the interview, she had been engaged for nine months. She and her fiancé had dated for 13 years before they got engaged. The couple had two daughters; a 9-year-old and a 4-year-old. Her parents divorced because her father had a drinking problem which caused a lot of conflict in the home.

e) Brief background information of Participant 5

Participant 5 was a 26-year-old coloured male, born in Keetmanshoop. At the time of the interview, he had been in a two-year relationship with a white female. His parents divorced twice. The first time, he was 12 years old. They got back together and remarried; they divorced again when he was 17 years old. The second divorce was only finalised two years ago. They divorced because of communication problems.

f) Participant 6

Participant 6 was a 35-year-old coloured female, born in Windhoek. She had been married for six years. At the time of the interview, after dating her husband for five years. The couple had a 9-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son. When the participant was 8 years old, her parents divorced because her father had a drinking problem.

g) Participant 7

Participant 7 was a 33-year-old black Oshiwambo female, born in Onamulunga, a village in northern Namibia. At the time of the interview, she had been in a relationship for nine years.

Her parents divorced when she was 18 years old and no longer living at home as she was at university. The reason for the divorce was because her father was drinking too much.

h) Participant 8

Participant 8 was a 25-year-old coloured female, and the younger sibling of Participant 5, and was also born in Keetmanshoop. At the time of the interview, she had been in a relationship for two years. The first time her parents got divorced, she was eleven years old. The second time they divorced, she was 16 years old, but the divorce was only finalised two years ago. Her parents divorced was because of communication problems.

i) Participant 9

Participant 9 was a 30-year-old coloured male, born in Windhoek. He had been in a three-year relationship at the time of the interview. His parents divorced when he was 9 years old, he thinks it was because they did not like each other anymore.

j) Participant 10

Participant 10 was a 30-year-old white male, born in Oudtshoorn in South Africa. When he was one, the family moved to Windhoek. He had been married for four years at the time of the interview, and he and his wife had a 6-week-old baby. When he was 10 years old, his parents divorced because his mother had been unfaithful.

k) Participant 11

Participant 11 was a 33-year-old white male, born in Windhoek. He had been married for eight years at the time of the interview. He was a father of two boys, the eldest was 9 years and the youngest was 5 years old. When Participant 11 was 13 years old, his parents divorced because his father had been unfaithful.

4.4. Themes that Emerged from the Study

The effects of parental divorce on the romantic relationships of the participants, their attitudes towards divorce and their commitment to, and satisfaction in, their own relationships were

extracted from the interview discussions. The data revealed that experiences in participants' own relationships and their attitudes towards divorce differed according to the participants' individual experiences and depending on the level of conflict between their parents. Seven themes, each with a number of sub-themes, that emerged through the 11 interviews (Table 1).

Table 1: *Emergent themes and sub-themes through interviews with the adult children of divorced parents*

	Themes	Sub-themes
1.	Experience of parental divorce	Confusion Emotionally effected Behavioural problems Trauma (physical abuse, alcohol abuse, aggression) Financial difficulty No effect
2.	Management of parental conflict	Physical abuse or fights Shouting and insults Ignoring one another Threats Avoidance
3.	Management of own conflicts	Physical fights Shouting and insults Ignoring one another Calm discussion Avoidance (compromise)
4.	Perceptions of marriage	Positive viewpoint towards marriage Negative viewpoint towards marriage
5.	Attitudes towards divorce	Negative viewpoint towards self-divorce Positive viewpoint towards others' divorce
6.	Relationship commitment	Values Ambition Affection

		Loyalty Respect Love Stability Partner's character Communication Acknowledgement of own mistakes and Flaws
7.	Satisfaction in the relationship	Rewarding Stability (financial, emotional, spiritual) Friendship Communication Lack of support and assistance

The following section will discuss and summarise, under the seven main themes (Table 1), the main trends, patterns, similarities and differences that emerged from the information collected. Links between the key findings and literature are briefly discussed.

4.4.1. Experiencing Parental Divorce

Below follow the various experiences of the 11 the participants during the time of their parental divorce, as they reported during the interviews.

Participant 1: *"I was very little, but what I could remember was that my mother worked away a lot and my father looked after us. I can't remember my parents fighting, but sometimes we would sleep somewhere else for a while and go back home again. My mother told us we are going to visit our grandparents and we just never returned home. My parents would come and visit us at my grandparents, but never together."*

Participant 2: *"It was very emotional; I would say, dramatic. I did not know where I fitted in anymore. My parents' divorce happened quite fast and we moved away with my mother. For a few years during the divorce and afterwards, everything was confusing and unorganised."*

Participant 3: *"It wasn't a good time in our lives. I remember there were a lot of fights, domestic violence and threats in the house, even before the divorce. My mother told us that they are getting a divorce. My father was very quiet about it and never discussed it with us, maybe because he felt like a failure, I don't know."*

Participant 4: *"I was young at that time, but I remember my mother and my father fighting a lot. He drank a lot and when he went out drinking, he would come home late and they would start to fight. The fighting would get physically violent at times. We always had that fear when my father went drinking, because we never knew what would happen when he came back home. When my parents got divorced, it was a very bad time, because we moved out with my mother and went to stay with my grandmother. Everything changed financially as my mother had to look for a job to take care of us."*

Participant 5: *"The first time my parents got divorced was really hard on me and I had a difficult time accepting it. Everything was perfectly fine, but one day my father just took his stuff and left the house. The second time was better because I understood what was going on and I could see the relationship was not healthy; they did not speak to each other for over two years. They never told us that they are getting a divorce again ... my father just left us again."*

Participant 6: *"My mother had told us what was happening. In a way I saw it coming, because we would stay weekends with my aunt and my father wasn't there; he would also come and go as he liked. I was very upset with the divorce, because I had a very good relationship with my father. We went to stay with my mother, and I remember I blamed her for the divorce for a few years after ... and my mother never said anything bad about my father."*

Participant 7: *"It was the year I went to university. My mother did not want us to be there, to see the moving and them splitting up. She gave us a choice [on] where we would like to stay - with our father or with her - because she did not want to be accused of taking us with her. My father had a drinking problem, so neither of us wanted to stay with him. It wasn't nice, especially for my father. He got a bit depressed, but he started to go to church, which I think*

helped him a little bit. At that time, my mother felt free because she was out of this abusive marriage. My father was verbally abusive for the most part. I also felt free to a certain extent, because we were happy that the fighting had stopped and we could finally sleep in peace and be happy, although the family was separated. I think it was a good thing that we were not there to witness everything that was going on during the divorce."

Participant 8: *"The first time, my mother did not tell us anything. It was very confusing because she was sad all the time and we did not know why. I was young and thought this is normal. The second time they got divorced was a relief. It was very awkward in the house for about a year. My mother slept in my room and my sister and I slept in her room. It was just strange … because it is like two people living in the same house, but having different lives. At that time my mother said a lot of bad things about my father. She also told us everything that was happening between her and my father, like, she showed us messages between him and another lady. It was a sad time, because it was so nice to have both parents together, and I was sad because the divorce was very messy. There were a lot of fights and one time my father broke down the door … and once he was drunk; he choked on his own vomit and we had to take him to the hospital. Not only were my parents involved in the divorce, my uncle from my father's side was also involved and he would say bad things about my mother to us."*

Participant 9: *"What I can remember is the fighting. I did not feel sad or anything at that time, it was just something that happened. After the divorce I did not care about anything, and nothing bothered me … I was, and still am, a happy-go-lucky person. We moved to a different house so we did not see my father that often - only every second weekend - but our relationship was still good. To be honest, I am 30-years-old now and, a long time after the divorce, I realise that I am definitely a lot more insecure than I was before."*

Participant 10: *"My parents had a lot more arguments. One evening they called us to sit at the table and told us they are getting a divorce. It was really sad and difficult at that time. We did not know about everything that was going on … I think my parents wanted to protect*

us against that. However, a room's door can only keep that much away, so there were some things that we heard."

Participant 11: *"My parents did not just get a divorce. It was a very bad time in my life. I am the youngest of five children and all my siblings were out of the house. My father was unfaithful and my mother needed time to process everything. She moved to Kakamas in South Africa, and she met someone there. When things got difficult in South Africa my mother would come back to Windhoek and stay with us again. This is what messed me up. When I got back from school, the house would be empty and on the table counter there was a letter from my mother saying she had left. Then my father and I would try to continue with our lives. Whenever my father had moved on - maybe met someone - and just as we got our lives back on track, my mother would suddenly show up. This pattern continued for four years and finally they got divorced. What my parents did, psychologically messed me up in every way and that is probably why I also had behavioural problems."*

It is clear that each participant experienced their parents' divorce differently. Inevitably, divorce changed the family structure of the participants. Some of them moved in with their grandparents, or lived in a single-parent house-hold. From the analysis of the data, it is clear that their lives were disrupted by the reorganisation of the household. Some participants experienced fear, confusion, trauma from the fights their parents had, as well as the way they handled the divorce, which in some cases caused emotional distress and financial difficulty. As children, they had to adapt to living apart from their biological parents and to the new circumstances.

There is evidence that there is a diminished quality of parenting during the first two years following a divorce (Solomon, 2013). Factors such as emotional instability, less patience, inability to maintain an organised household routine and lack of supervision when children have to make decisions at a young age all contribute to the deterioration in the quality of

parenting (Solomon, 2013). Furthermore, research on parent hostility from Papp, Cummings and Schermerhorn (2004) shows that youth from such homes exhibit more psychopathology and more problems than youth not exposed to such hostility.

Participant 2: *"For two years after the divorce, my mother did not allow us to see my father. We could only speak to him over the phone. At that time, we blamed her for everything and there were feelings of resentment and a bit of hate towards her. We had to move a lot from town to town and we also struggled financially. The type of relationships my mother had were very strange to us."*

Participant 3: *"We did not see my father a lot. My mother took care of us, but she had a difficult life and lots of stress to take care of three children. Later, I blamed my father because he wasn't a dad to me. I could not learn from him like the children with dads in my class."*

Participant 4: *"Everything changed, financially we were worse off. Sometimes, when we were little, I had to look after my sister because my mother went out with friends."*

Participant 8: *"One night my father drank so much he passed out and started to choke on his own vomit. We had to take him to the hospital."*

Participant 11: *"Whenever my mother came back to live with us, I accepted my mother with open arms. I did not want to go to school, because I just wanted to be with her. The times when my mother left, I was heartbroken. I would do anything for my mother; the times she was there, she baked rusks and I had to sell them. When I brought home the money, she would tell me to make more money, she used me like that."*

4.4.2. Management of Parental Conflict and Conflict in Own Romantic Relationship

The ways in which a participant's parents manage conflict is compared to how each participant manages conflict in their own relationships in Table 2.

Table 2: *Conflict management by participant's parents and by participants in their own relationships*

	Parental conflict management	**Own conflict management**
Participant 1	*"They did not fight in front of us a lot. It would happen once in a while. However, my mother liked to throw things and would also shout. My father is the calmer one; he would talk loudly, but not in an aggressive manner. One time they were having an argument and my mother threw a hairdryer at my father."*	*"When something bothers me, I will say it immediately. My husband will defend himself in a loud and offensive manner even if he did not mean it. I will tell him not to shout at me. Usually, we would have arguments in the car, and when we arrive home, we would be mad at each other for a while and apologise later. We will never fight in front of people. I have also learned to keep quiet at times and say something when things are calmer."*
Participant 2	*"My parents had a very good relationship; they never fought in front of us and we did not see or hear them fight."*	*"We do not fight or argue in front of people or our child. Sometimes we will make a comment or two in front of them. We will talk about it in our room and never fall asleep being mad at each other. I can get mad and fall asleep, but he does not like it, so then we will sort things out. We don't yell at each other or get physical; he says I get loud sometimes."*
Participant 3	*"My parents would usually shout at each other and then my father would get physical. He would sometimes hit my mother. There was one evening, my mother threatened my father with a revolver and said he must eat. They started to fight very badly. He physically assaulted my mother, but it was a normal thing in our house."*	*"The first reaction is usually the worst; we will shout and yell at each other. Afterwards when we are calmer, we will sit down and talk about what happened. Sometimes our arguments would continue a little longer and I will talk loudly to express myself. My way of handling conflict is the same as my parents ... not really what my father did, but more how my mother handled it."*

Participant 4	*"My parents fought, shouted and swore at each other. My father would sometimes throw stuff. There were times he would push all the plates off the table and throw chairs in the air. Their fights were very bad. I can't remember if they ever talked it through or sort it out. I just know that after the fighting, we would go stay at my grandmother until both calmed down. They would also sometimes ignore each other and then we see they are suddenly talking again."*	*"Without thinking about it, I handle conflict like my parents did. The way I react is just like my mother. I can't stay quiet. We usually shout at each other and insult one another. He will curse me and I will do the same. Sometimes it will also go further and he will get physical. He will also ignore me for a few days. I have learned that way of handling conflict is not effective and it is not helping the issue. I am trying to handle things different than my parents. Nowadays, I will walk away and when he is rude to me, I will tell him it is not nice to treat me like that. Sometimes I fail, but other times I get it right."*
Participant 5	*"The arguments between them went on for very long. They would shout at each other and my mother would involve me and my sister most of the times. My parents never resolved anything, After the arguments they would ignore each other for a few days."*	*"I try to handle conflict different than my parents did. My girlfriend also wants to resolve conflict as soon as possible. Sometimes I will raise my voice and then we will shout at each other, but it happens rarely. I will try hard to avoid any shouting, because I have seen what the effect it had on my parents."*
Participant 6	*"My mother hid their arguments so well. She never shouted or was looking for arguments and she never told us there were problems. When my father had a few drinks, he would get upset and became very loud and have arguments with my mother, and at times he would also get violent."*	*"My husband is a very calm person. When he gets upset, he will take time out and find his ground. Whereas I get angry. I will get out my feelings and sometimes I will get too excited I guess, but it has been working for us, because then both of us know where we stand with each other. We end up ignoring each other and then revisit the problem and talk about it."*
Participant 7	*"They would not listen to each other. I think they are both stubborn in nature, so it was difficult for them to get along and agree on things. For the most part it was just verbal aggression, especially from my*	*"I do not handle conflict like my parents did. Maybe we have a bad fight once in two years. Like if he felt disrespected or so. One time, when we had an argument, I wanted to ignore him and I was on my phone talking to my*

	father's side. They would have arguments about something simple as 'let's pay the school fees' and then it escalated to something different. My father would say horrible things. He wasn't open and receptive towards others' opinions. After the argument it was never really spoken about. I have seen other elderlies come and intervene, but between the two of them they did not talk it through."	*friend, he grabbed my phone because he was angry and I did not really want to listen to him at that point. But we talked about it afterwards, sort it out and left it there."*
Participant 8	*"They would first shout and then ignore each other. They would also communicate through us a lot. Like, my mother would tell us something to say to our father and he would do the same. They tried to talk about it calmy, but when they would make a decision on something, my father would not stick to the decision and would do something different which also ended up in a fight."*	*"I am like my father. I do not speak about things that bother me or when I am mad; I will stay quiet. I would only talk about something if my boyfriend asks me. When we have an argument, we won't shout at each other because I really don't like it. He wants to sort things out immediately and I feel I don't want to talk about it at that time. Then he will force me to talk."*
Participant 9	*"My father wanted to talk about things immediately. He has a strong personality and it was always a loud argument with shouting and swearing involved. What I can remember [is that] the arguments would sometimes get physically violent."*	*"I am like my father. I want to sort things out immediately and get it over and done with. Most of the times it is just a misunderstanding or one of us is a bit sensitive to what the other one says. Sometimes we get really mad at each other and we will shout at each other, but I will never hurt her physically. I saw a movie once where the couple agreed to not sleep while still mad, and I live by that rule."*
Participant 10	*"Both my parents have very strong personalities. My mother always think that she is right and my father is very dominant and he liked to argue and reason with someone. He would always*	*"I handle conflict the same as my parents in a way. I am an introvert, so I will not really talk about an issue that I have. The issue has to build up over time before I will say something. I would rather try to solve it myself or*

	have the last word and no one can talk back to him or give their opinion, because he will shut it down. Usually, they would ignore each other for a few days and avoid the topic the argument was about."	*compromise. I do not like conflict at all and luckily my wife as well, so we won't be looking for it. If we have an argument, my wife will talk very loudly and then we will take a break. When things are calmer, we sort it out."*
Participant 11	*"My parents never had arguments that I knew of. They started to have a lot of arguments insulting each other when my father was unfaithful."*	*"When we have arguments, we can ignore each other for two weeks or more. We are over the shouting and insulting phase."*

The responses of the participants can be linked to the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1977). It is evident that some participants (45,45%) learned their behaviour from their parents, whereas most participants (54,55%) deliberately decided not to handle conflict in the same way as their parents did. It could be that the exposure to the conflict impacted the participants to such an extent that they decided to change their behaviour, or to behave differently. Some participants had to deal with a parent who abused alcohol and became aggressive, or used verbal abuse and/or physical violence. In some homes, the environment was unpredictable and unstable. The research that was done by Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch, (1996) indicated that it is important for parents to protect their children from exposure to intramarital conflict, as witnessing the conflict is seriously harmful to children.

4.4.3. Perceptions of marriage

During the divorce of their parents, the participants experienced a time of emotional instability and a disrupted sense of security. For most of them, to restore the sense of security was, and remains, important. Almost all participants wanted to get married even after the divorce of their parents; however, they have different perceptions about marriage. Some participants struggled to find themselves and know who they are as a person.

Participant 1: *"I want to get married and I refuse to walk the same road as my parents."*

Participant 2: *"It does not bother me to get married. I don't know what a marriage will change in an eight-year relationship."*

Participant 3: *"I am not against marriage at all. I am not always sure what is the husband's responsibilities in the relationship, because I did not have that example. I struggled to know who I want to be and at times I felt lost. I always felt that I want to have a good, stable household."*

Participant 7: "*Marriage is a beautiful thing. Marriage is what you make it to be … and my partner and I are not my parents, we can make our marriage work."*

Participant 8: *"I don't want to get married now. I really want to make sure that he is the right person. You should not feel rushed to get married. One day, I want to get married."*

Participant 9: *"I think it is a stupid old tradition that we are indoctrinated with. The fact that my parents got divorced and people around me also got divorced might have an influence on my viewpoint. If you love a person, then you don't need to sign a contract to show it. Stand up every day and love that person and show your love towards them. You don't need a paper to show your love."*

4.4.4. Attitudes towards Divorce

To better understand how witnessing parental divorce affects young adults' attitudes toward their own relationships, the participants reported on their attitudes towards divorce and if they would get a divorce.

Participant 1: *"There was a time I could have gotten a divorce, but I worked through my issues. I don't want to get a divorce, but I feel some people hurt each other too much and should just get a divorce."*

Participant 2: *"Divorce seems like something that is part of the normal living today. I feel that people need to work through everything and try to sort out their problems, especially when children are involved. If they really can't, then it is okay to get a divorce."*

Participant 3: *"I am not for divorce at all. Work through the issues and sort it out or find a middle ground. I feel everybody can forgive and can move forward. Divorce is bigger than you and becomes bigger than you."*

Participant 6: *"I think each one does what is good for them. A lot of the time I think it is a good thing, because having two people stay together that just can't get along for whatever reason is not heathy."*

Participant 7: *"I honestly think, if you can't get along you should opt for divorce, because I feel there is so much damage done in the marriage if you do not understand each other."*

Participant 9: *"If you are not happy with someone then get out of that relationship. However, I think to get divorced is an easy way out sometimes, especially if you give up easily or when you are unfaithful. If marriage is really that serious, then why is there something like a divorce? There should not be something like that if marriage is for life, you should just make it work then."*

Participant 11: *"I don't believe in divorce when there are children in the house. When my last born write his final exam in matric, then I would sign divorce papers. I would not mess up my boys the way my parents messed me up. I would not allow that."*

The results show a variety of perspectives towards divorce. Six out of the 11 participants were against divorce for themselves. They reported that they would do anything to work out their issues and fix the relationship or wait until the children are out of the house before they sought a divorce. However, only four of the 11 participants were against divorce for other couples. They reported that if the relationship is not working, or if the children are negatively affected by the parental conflicts and instability of the parental relationship, then that couple should get divorced.

4.4.5. Relationship Commitment

There are a number of subthemes that emerged in defining what aspects the participants consider important in romantic relationship commitment. These include: values, ambition, affection, loyalty, respect, love, the character of the partner, communication and resolution of conflict. Each of the participants gave their own interpretation of commitment in various contexts, depending on what they associate with it and regarding factors to consider when committing to a partner. Presented below are the subjective opinions participants revealed regarding what each considered romantic commitment to be and what it entails.

Participant 2: *"I think when you are in a relationship, from the first day commitment needs to be there on every level. Like, good values, commitment and ambition, are things to consider so that the two will be on the same level."*

Participant 4: *"I think there are a lot of things that plays a role in being committed. But I feel, if you love a person, hug them and be intimate, then that is romantic commitment. I feel a person must not cheat, and has to be honest, loyal, and have respect."*

Participant 6: *"I am a very practical person and I am realistic when it comes to certain things. When deciding to commit to him, there were a lot of factors I had to consider. He got a son from a previous marriage which was a factor … also, would it work financially? Where are we going to live? Yes, there is the aspect of love, but that is not the only factor to consider."*

Participant 7: *"For me it includes considering your partner in everything about your life. When making big decisions about your life or something, you need to involve your partner in that. The type of person they are … and what they want to get out of a relationship. Because, when you are not on the same page in what you want from each other, you are going to go in different directions and that would not end well."*

Participant 8: *"I think to be committed is to make sacrifices. You have to give up a lot … and it is not a bad thing but you have to do it."*

Participant 10: *"You need to know if you as a couple can handle conflict, and if you can communicate effectively. Conflict will sometimes change the whole dynamics of the relationship and you need to know if you are able to handle it before you want to commit to a partner. When you commit to a partner you should be able to accept when you have done something wrong and acknowledge your mistakes."*

Although people have different viewpoints about commitment, some participants reported that they would not be committed to their partner if they did not have children. These participants only committed to their partners because they had children together and did not want to disrupt the children's lives, and not necessarily because they had anything in common with their partner.

Participant 4: *"My honest opinion, without children we not would be together anymore. There were a lot of times I wanted to leave him, but now that we have children, I don't want to disrupt them. I am staying with him and hope it will go better in the future. It (their relationship) has improved from the past."*

Participant 6: *"If we did not have children, I don't think I would still be in this relationship. When I met him, I was young and did not really see him as a potential spouse, but I got pregnant and we decided to work on the relationship. When we started to get serious there were children involved and we are very different people. He is much older and we also differ in things we like, but we have grown to appreciate each other's differences."*

Participant 11: *"I am very committed to my wife. Yes, I have cheated on her more times than we are together in years, but I am still committed. It was just a moment of weakness, I guess. I will be committed to my wife until I sign the divorce papers when my youngest son is done with school, and she knows that."*

The results clearly show that most of the participants were committed to their relationship. Out of the 11 participants, only three of them stated that they did not think they would still be with

their partner if they did not have children. All the other participants stated that they would still be in a relationship with their partner a year from the interview. These results could be interpreted that 72.73% of the participants are committed to their partner. The overall level of commitment in the relationships of the participants was very high.

4.4.6. Satisfaction in the Relationship

Participants reported on their satisfaction with their partner as a spouse, and with the relationship. The results presented differ for each participant as their needs in the relationship also differ.

Participant 3: *"I am satisfied with my relationship. I am not a touchy (affectionate) person, so she will come and ask for a hug. I am really trying to change my mindset, because we did not grow up in a house where we show each other love and be affectionate. If I can change some things in our relationship, it would be to spend more time together, not only as a family, but alone as well. I think those are the times I miss, because so much is going on. I would not say our relationship is so much passionate than before. If I could be honest, I would turn it up a nudge. I enjoy my relationship with her a lot … the way we work together, although I second guess myself and the choices we make. I compare it a lot to other people and to see if other people are also doing it like that. There is stuff we are working on, obviously, and also think that to be satisfied is an ongoing thing to work on … but, currently, I am satisfied. However, I feel that selfishness is such an evil thing, and a person falls so quickly into it, but I am cautious about that."*

Participant 4: *"We [have been] together for a very long time and I feel you need to make things interesting, because sometimes it gets boring. I want to keep things interesting and spice things up, but currently we are not doing it. When we have drinks, we would be silly and playful, but during the week I really feel he satisfies himself. Sometimes when we are intimate, he does not care about satisfying me. There are also times he will wake me up to get intimate*

and I don't feel like doing it. When I say no, he will get upset, but he will get over it soon. With regards to spending time together, I still feel we should spend more time together as a family. In the early stages of our relationship, we could spend time together, but he is not a person that will organise something or plan a romantic evening, I will do most of it. Our relationship is also not rewarding. I feel I could get more help and assistance with the children, like to bath them and make food when I work late. There are also things we can't talk about, like who will pay for what and other financial decisions, because, it always ends up in a fight. When I have a bad day, I would rather talk to a friend than to him. Currently, I am not that satisfied with our sexual intimacy but, on spending time together, I am partly satisfied."

Participant 7: *"I am actually quite satisfied, especially the emotional intimacy. I feel that I am very much connected to my partner, because he does not leave me out of his life. We don't stay together - he lives in another town. I would not change our intimacy. Obviously, we could always improve, but I can say it is between an eight and a nine out of ten. All I would change is us staying together when we get married. I have been living in a distance relationship for so long; it is exhausting and sometimes I miss my boyfriend all the time."*

Participant 8: *"I feel we can be better friends. Sometimes we would not click or would take something serious when someone is making a joke. I think he would be a good husband one day, but sometimes I feel that he is too scared to try new things. I feel bad to want him to change, but I really feel like that sometimes. Also, his family, I don't feel very comfortable around them. I am satisfied at the moment; it is nice to have a partner to do things with."*

Participant 9: *"I am very satisfied with my relationship and with my partner. Although I don't want to get married or have children, I am very happy with her as a partner and with the relationship. Sometimes I wish I could take her phone away because she is a lot on her phone. But it is something small and besides that I am still very happy."*

Participant 10: *"I am very satisfied. Now, with a six-week-old baby, all your attention is focused on him. But that does not bother me, I feel closer to my wife in a sense."*

Participant 11: *"I am happy with my relationship. Even though my wife gained a few kilograms, I am very satisfied on all levels of our relationship. We have our trouble, but I would not want it with any other person."*

The overall level of satisfaction of participants with their relationships is high. A lot of the participants reported that they were very satisfied, although, they would like to change some aspects of the relationship. However, the aspects that some of the participants wanted to change in their relationship did not necessarily mean that they were not satisfied.

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter recorded the empirical findings of the study. First the participants' backgrounds were given to provide a better understanding of their responses. A summary of the themes that emerged from the study was provided and linked to the participants own words. Overall, they had very different experiences of their parents' divorce, however, they held some similar viewpoints towards marriage and divorce. The levels of commitment to, and overall satisfaction within participants' relationships were also mostly high.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the findings presented in Chapter 4 of the study are discussed in relation to the objectives of the study and the existing relevant literature. As previously stated, the aim of this study is to explore the quality of romantic relationships of adults whose parents divorced. The discussion in this chapter will provide an overview of the main points that speak to the findings and research objectives.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

This study was concerned with the effect that parental divorce has on the quality of the romantic relationships of their adult offspring. It was anticipated that participants' negative experiences of their parents' divorces would influence their general perceptions toward divorce and that they would report unfavourable attitudes toward divorce. Furthermore, it was expected that unfavourable attitudes towards divorce would be reflected with lower commitment to and satisfaction in a current romantic relationship, which in turn would be expected to negatively affect romantic relationship quality. Published research findings (Cui et al., 2011; Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015; Lee, 2018; Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010; van Schaik & Stolberg, 2001) support such a scenario – i.e., adult children of divorced parents will have lower quality romantic relationships because of lower levels of commitment and satisfaction and favourable attitudes toward divorce. The main outcome of this study, however, was in disagreement with these previous findings.

In order to arrive at the assumptions of the study, four areas were pursued to guide the study. The first explored the experiences that young adults went through during their parents' divorce. The second explored their perceptions on self-divorce and on other people getting divorced. The third explored commitment to their relationships and their views on what commitment meant to them. The final area explored their satisfaction in their relationships, and what they

would change. By combining the last two areas of exploration, the quality of their romantic relationships could be assessed. These four areas are discussed below.

5.2.1. Theme 1: Experience of Parental Divorce

The participants' experiences of divorce were discussed in relation to the feelings that these now young adults had after the divorce. On analysis, it was clear that most participants were exposed to some kind of violence and/or abuse prior to and during their parents' divorce.

Negative consequences associated with parental divorce, including higher levels of emotional and behavioural problems of children of divorce, are cited in the literature e.g., Sands et al., 2017). Solomon (2013) agreed with Bojuwoye and Akpan (2009) that, irrespective of the child's age, the emotional response of children to divorce is highly likely to be painful, and that these children's relationships are affected by the divorce. The results found in this study correspond with this. Most participants experienced emotional trauma, confusion, sadness, difficulty in processing what was happening and insecurity. Participant 11 reported having had behavioural problems, because he was unsure how to handle everything and thus misbehaved or got into trouble.

Another aspect on which results from this research study greed with the literature, is that adults of divorced parents are likely to be more insecure (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020). Participants related that at the time of the divorce they felt very insecure and did not know who they were as a person even at the time of the interview, they felt insecure in decisions they had to make in their relationships. Furthermore, children whose parents divorced may suffer emotional distress connected with grief, loneliness and poor self-esteem (Solomon, 2013), which persist into adulthood (Thadathil & Sriram, 2020); some of the participants this study did experience this and could be linked to their experiences of conflict between their parents.

Children of divorce can be negatively affected depending on the degree of exposure to parental conflict (Cui et al., 2011). Furthermore, research by Buchanan et al. (1996) indicated the importance of parents protecting their children from exposure to conflict between parents, as it can seriously harm their children. The traumatic experiences that the young adults went through as children reflected in poor psychological functioning as they could not control their emotions and for some, their behaviour.

Sprague and Kinney (1997) wrote that the effects of divorce may lessen in intensity over time. Certainly, individuals in this current study whose parents had been divorced for longer periods of time reported more trust and altruism in their current romantic relationship than those whose parents had more recently divorced. Other studies suggest that parents who wait until their children are older to divorce may actually make their offspring's romantic relationships more difficult in terms of their ability to trust and act selflessly (e.g., Frost & Pakiz**,** 1990); such results were not found in this current study. The adults that were older when their parents divorced were glad that they could have both parents in their lives until they were older and have a better understanding of why their parents were getting a divorce. These participants also do not have any difficulty in trusting or acting selflessly in their relationships.

5.2.2. Theme 2: Attitude towards Divorce

Through the analysis and the identification of the possible factors, answers to the second focus of the study - the participants' attitudes towards divorce concluded that children of divorced parents do not have favourable attitudes towards divorce. As indicated in Section 2.2.4, Cui et al. (2011) found that children of divorce could have different perceptions of divorce based on the degree of exposure to parental conflict. Although the participant's perceptions to divorce varied in this study, the results did not support the literature.

Studies indicate that children from divorced families are likely to be pro-divorce and have positive attitudes toward divorce (Lee, 2018; Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010; van Schaik &

Stolberg, 2001); this is thought to be due to their first-hand experience that marriages do not necessarily last a lifetime. Such attitudes are more common among children of divorce and they are also likely to be less trusting of the institution of marriage in their own relationships (Braithwaite et al., 2016; van Schaik & Stolberg, 2001). Contradicting the literature, this study found that young adults in romantic relationships in Windhoek do not hold pro-divorce beliefs and attitudes toward divorce. Most of the participants were against divorce and were prepared to compromise to solve their problems and to work on their marriage. Furthermore, they were not more liberal minded toward divorce as literature reported and they still believed in the institution of marriage and permanency thereof. Moreover, although they reported that they were not in favour of divorce for themselves, they did not object to other people getting a divorce.

5.2.3. Theme 3: Commitment within a Romantic Relationship

Regarding the third focus of the study, commitment in the romantic relationship, the results revealed that most of the participants were really committed in their relationship and toward their partners. These findings do not correspond with the literature about an adult's commitment within a romantic relationship when he/she has come from a divorced family (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Cui et al., 2011; Roper et al., 2020; van Schaik & Stolberg, 2001). The overall levels of commitment of participants to their parents and their marriages were high. However, some participants believed they would not still be together if it were not for the children, and one participant reported that he had been unfaithful multiple times. Such beliefs and actions demonstrate less commitment to their relationships, or could lead to it (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2011).

Whitton et al., (2008) tested the hypothesis that divorce is associated with less relationship commitment for women than it is for men. Their findings suggest that women whose parents are divorced are more likely to enter marriage with relatively lower levels of commitment,

while for men there was no significant effect of parental divorce on this (Whitton et al., 2008). The results of this study partially match the findings of Whitton et al., (2008) as more female participants reported that they would not be in the relationship if it were not for the children.

5.2.4. Theme 4: Satisfaction in a Romantic Relationship

The participants in this study reported that, in general they were satisfied with their partner and their relationship. This is not in accordance to what the literature presents. A study done by Fergusson et al. (2014) concluded that one of the consequences of parental divorce is that adult children have less stable or less satisfying relationships. This is because parental divorce causes children to have unrealistic standards of relationships which results in them feeling less satisfied with their relationship, and also results in less intimacy (Fergusson et al., 2014). Furthermore, another study found that intimacy, security, commitment, and trust in adult relationships are often threatened by experiencing parental divorce sometime during childhood (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). As mentioned above, more female participants expressed that they were only in the marriage for their children and a male participant had multiple affairs.

Lee (2018) suggested that satisfaction in the current romantic relationships of adult offspring of divorce was less likely, and especially so for males. Results from this study found that all participants were satisfied in almost all aspects of their relationship. Only one female participant reported of not being satisfied in the relationship; four females were satisfied, wanting to change nothing about their relationship and two wanted to change one aspect of it. All male participants said they were satisfied in their relationships, but wanted to change one or few things, except for one who did not want to change anything. Thus, the study agrees with Lee (2018) by suggesting that males are less satisfied in their relationship because relatively more male participants wanted to change an aspect in their relationship than the female participants.

5.2.5. Social Learning Theory and Managing Conflict

The Social Learning Theory suggests that children learn social behaviour by observing and imitating the behaviour, social interaction and relationship patterns of others, especially their parents (Rhoades et al., 2012). The results of this study show that the Social Learning Theory is to an extent applicable to the manner in which participants handle conflict in their relationships.

Some participants handle conflict in the same manner as their parents did; others do not. More participants did not handle conflict like their parents did, as they had seen the impact of such interactions. In this regard, one could say that Social Learning Theory does not apply to these participants. They had learned important skills regarding how to have successful romantic relationships, such as, how to express oneself, how to handle conflict when it arises and how to compromise (Washington, 2021), by learning from what lacked in their parents' relationships.

On the other hand, the participants that do handle conflict in the same way as their parents did, support the Social Learning Theory. They failed to learn important interpersonal skills, such as the ability to communicate clearly or compromise effectively (Washington, 2020). Considering the intergenerational transmission, these participants support the Social Learning Theory as well, as they witnessed poorly managed conflict between their parents and currently do not have healthy conflict styles in their relationships (Rhoades et al., 2012).

According to Rhoades et al. (2012), less positive role-modelling of romantic relationships may also lead to lower levels of commitment and more negative communication in the children. In addition, Braithwaite et al. (2016) found parental conflict predicted higher levels of conflict and poorer relationship satisfaction in the relationships of adult children of divorce. However, this study does not fully support the above-mentioned findings of Rhoades et al. (2012) because the participants reported high levels of commitment and satisfaction.

5.3 Relationship Quality of Adult Offspring

In this study, relationship quality was evaluated by examining the level of satisfaction and commitment in a romantic relationship. Combining all the results of the study, the overall relationship quality of the participants reflects relationships of good quality. This finding contradicts the literature which states that parental divorce may have a negative impact on adult children's relationship quality and stability (Bethell, 2010). This study shows that parental divorce does have an impact on the adult offsprings' romantic relationship, but that it does not have an influence on the overall quality perceived and reported by the participants.

5.4 Chapter Summary

It is clear that multiple inferences can be made from the results of this study. The results with regards to negative experiences of parental divorce were discussed as well as the adult children's attitudes toward divorce. In addition, the findings relating to commitment and satisfaction of the adult children's romantic relationships, which affect their romantic relationship quality, were discussed. The discussion above highlights the limitations of this study, which will be discussed in Chapter 6, as well as the conclusions drawn and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study and conclusions regarding the attitudes young adults from divorced families have towards divorce and the overall quality of their own romantic relationships based on their commitment to, and satisfaction in, their relationships. It also identifies limitations of the study, as observed by the researcher. Lastly, recommendations are made regarding divorce and to minimise its effect on children and the quality of their future romantic relationships; recommendations for future studies also provided.

There is a notable gap in research on the quality of romantic relationships of adult children of divorced parents in Namibia. From the literature reviewed, it is clear that research on parental divorce and its influence on the romantic relationships of the adult offspring is a comparatively new area of investigation, much of current knowledge on divorce and its influence on the offspring, is about direct influences. The scarcity of literature on the Namibian situation also motivates for further research. In this final chapter of dissertation, the final conclusions from the study are drawn and recommendations for future work are made.

6.2 Conclusions

Previous studies within Namibia have shown that 2,864 of Namibians experienced dissolution of their marriages over 2018 and 2019 (Kandjungu, 2020). To date, there has been no study that shows how many of these marriages involve children who would also experience the divorce. The aim of this study was to examine whether participants had experienced their parents' divorce negatively, and whether divorce had influenced how these adult children perceive divorce; it also aimed to explore the quality of these adult children's romantic relationships based on their levels of commitment to them and satisfaction they felt in them.

The research objectives of the current study were designed to make meaning of the current quality of the romantic relationship of adult children of divorced parents. The findings of this study also provided important information related to the impact divorce can have on children that experienced their parents' divorce, especially when they experience parental conflict.

To conclude, this research highlights that the influence of divorce is significantly different between offspring, and far more complex than anticipated. With various factors that played a role in the process of divorce, such as parental conflict, confusion, unstable relationships and emotional trauma, the overall experiences of the participants were difficult and unpleasant at the time. We cannot assume that all children of divorced parents will struggle personally or in their romantic relationships, however, it is safe to say that children of divorced parents are likely to encounter temporary difficulties at least. Overall, participants perceived their potential of own divorce unfavourably. In many cases the level of commitment to, and satisfaction in, their romantic relationships was high, representing romantic relationships of high quality.

6.1. Limitations

The present study had the following limitations:

a) This study is limited by the small sample size of participants, which restricted ethnicity of the participants among other potential variables. The small sample size also does not allow the findings to be diversified or to be generalised to the broader population.

b) Lack of statistics on the numbers and background characteristics of children from divorced families in Namibia to identify a meaningful sample and potential variables, also limited the study.

c) The sample size obtained is sub-optimal for making generalisations on the findings to the global early adulthood population from divorced parents. However, it could provide useful inferences into experiences especially within a developing country.

d) Finally, this study is limited because it only focused on young adults aged 25-35 years. It could benefit from wider criteria to include participants from more diverse age groups.

6.2. Recommendations

More research should be carried out to expand the results of this study, whereby the specific focus would be to link, relate and find correlations between pre-divorce experiences and the post-divorce effects on the quality of the romantic relationships of adult children. There is also a need to conduct research on the positive effects of divorce, as most research focuses on the negative aspects. It is also recommended that the current study be repeated, but as a longitudinal study, and with more participants from different ethnic groups.

6.2.1. Recommendations to Professionals and Policy-makers

Children going through parental divorce, need to be identified and recognised as children in need of support. Counselling should be provided to help with the new experiences of divorce. This is important, because it could indicate where preventive intervention efforts should be focused to reduce the impacts of parental divorce on the children and their future romantic relationships. Educating parents about the effects of divorce on the psychological functioning of their children, and on possible ways they as parents can support their children, could only be beneficial. Such counselling might also help children adapt to the new situation, provide emotional support, teach healthy communication and conflict management skills and mitigate the negative psychological effects of divorce.

6.2.2. Recommendations to Parents

Children from divorced families need to overcome their hurt, anger, guilt, confusion and feelings of abandonment, and make the necessary emotional, intellectual and social adjustments. The researcher is of the opinion that parents should talk to their children about their decision to divorce. Such open discussions and honest questioning can help children verify facts and gain a better understanding of the situation and the plans going forward. Taking the children for counselling can help to avoid any trauma they might experience and help them to cope within the new environment and will allow them to learn and develop healthy communication and conflict management skills.

6.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the main conclusions with regard to the general findings of this study. Recommendations were made regarding interventions and future research, and limitations of the study were also outlined and discussed. This study has provided important findings regarding the experiences of young adults of divorced parents, from which recommendations could be made. These recommendations may assist in preparing these adult children for romantic relationships, and are not only beneficial to the individuals. Therefore, although there are clear limitations to this study, it has still been able to provide a beneficial contribution to mitigate the negative experiences of young adults from divorced parents and improving the quality of their romantic relationships.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: SHS 0002 Date: 04 October 2021

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Decentralized Ethics Committee (DEC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the School of Humanities, Society & Development Decentralized Ethics Committee.

Title of Project: An Exploration of Romantic Relationship Quality of Adults from Divorced Parents in Windhoek, Namibia

Researcher: Alne Nel
Student Number: 202022366
Supervisor(s): Dr. Armas. E. Shikongo

Centre for Research Services

Take note of the following:

1. Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the ethics committee. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
2. Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the ethics committee
3. The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the ethics committee (through the Chairperson) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by the ethics committee
4. The ethics committee retains the right to:

i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

The ethics committee wishes you the best in your research.

Prof. Trywell Kaluzopa (Chairperson, Decentralized Ethics Committee)

Prof. Davis Mumbengegwi (Head, Multidisciplinary Research)

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

UREC Annex 5F: Informed Consent for Qualitative Studies

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for:

Adults living in Windhoek, between 25-35 years, that is currently in a romantic relationship/married for two years and longer and is from a divorced family. I am inviting you to participate in research for my Master's degree, title exploring romantic relationship quality between adult males and females of divorced parents.

Name of Principal Investigator:	Alne Steenkamp
Name of Sponsor:	N/A

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (this section, to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form.

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

Introduction

I am Alne Steenkamp, pursuing a Master's degree at the University of Namibia. I am doing research on how parental divorce influence one's own relationship. I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them by either contacting me by email or telephonically.

Purpose of the Research

Divorce of parents have many outcomes on the children. It can either be positive or negative. We want to find out if your parents' divorce has an influence on the quality of your romantic relationship. All the above information might help other health professionals like counsellors, psychologists and parents to learn about the effects it has on romantic relationships and how they can improve their ways in helping the offspring to minimize negative aspects they might have.

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in a one-on-one interview discussion that will take about half an hour which includes questions that I will ask you.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are from a family where your parents got divorced and you are currently in a romantic relationship for two years and longer.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you agreed earlier.

Procedures

We are asking you to help us learn more about how divorce might influence the romantic relationship of the children experiencing divorce. You will participate in an interview with myself – Alne Steenkamp. During this interview, I will sit down with you in a comfortable quiet place at an agreed upon location. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and I will move on to the next question. The recording will be kept on a USB with a password protection and a pseudonym. The recordings will be destroyed after 30 weeks.

Duration

We will meet once for interviewing you and each interview will last for about 30 minutes. We can either meet in person or if you feel comfortable, we can do a zoom session.

Risks

We are asking you to share with us some very personal and confidential information, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about how to plan treatment for children or adults from divorced parents and to minimize their personal struggles that might arise when they are in a romantic relationship.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Confidentiality

We will not be sharing information about you to anyone outside of the research team. The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number and pseudonym on it instead of your name. Only the researchers will know what your number is and we will lock that information up with a lock and key. It will not be shared with or given to anyone except my two supervisors (Dr Shikongo).

Sharing the Results

Nothing that you tell us today will be shared with anybody outside the research team, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that we get from this research will be put together with other participants' responses to create a summary of all the different viewpoints and influences. Each participant will receive a summary of the results with pseudonyms.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and choosing to participate will not affect your job or job-related evaluations in any way. You may stop participating in the discussion at any time that you wish without your job being affected. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview and discussion to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact?

If you have any questions, you may contact me, Alne Steenkamp at 0817836799 or alne.nel@gmail.com

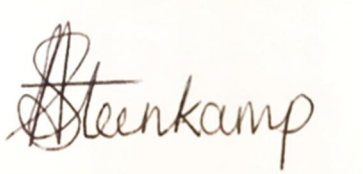
This research has been reviewed and approved by the relevant Ethics Review Committee at the University of Namibia, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. The committee reports to the University's Centre for Research Services. If you wish to contact this Centre, please call +264 61 206 4673 or send an e-mail to research@unam.na.

Declaration by investigator

I declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to ……..
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above.
- I did/did not use an interpreter. (*If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*

Signed at (*place*) ……..…….. on (*date*) ……..…….. 20…..



…… ……

Signature of investigator Signature of witness

APPENDIX C: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

AN EXPLORATION OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP QUALITY OF ADULTS FROM DIVORCED PARENTS IN WINDHOEK

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Instructions:

Thank you for your participation in this study involving the influences of parental divorce on the romantic relationship of the offspring. Your participation is voluntary and it is within your right to choose not to answer any question asked. Information collected, will be kept in the strictest of confidence. Your personal identifying information is not necessary for this study, thus, ensuring your anonymity, privacy and confidentiality. Before we start do you have any questions?

1. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE INFORMATION

Date of interview: Duration: to

Participant number/code:

2. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1.1 Name: 1.2 Age:

1.3 Place of birth: 1.4 Gender:

1.5 Ethnic Identity: 1.6 Place of residence:

1.7 Marital Status: 1.8. Home language:

1.9 Year of parental divorce:

INTERVIEW GUIDE:

The following questions will be about your parents' divorce and how you experienced it. If you feel that you don't want to answer a question, you are welcome to tell me, then we continue to the next question. It would be of great help if you can answer as detailed as possible.

. Experiencing the divorce of your parents might have an effect on you as a person and the way you view things. Just thinking back to the time:

a) Please tell me about your parents' divorce.

. Describe your parents' relationship:

a) How did they manage conflict?

b) How are you and your spouse managing conflict?

1. What was the relationship between you and your parents?
   a. Before divorce:
   b. During divorce:
   c. After divorce:

2. What do you think about marriage in general?
   a. Have you always felt this way
   b. How much of your feelings results from your experience of parental divorce?

3. What is your current perception about divorce? (What do you think about divorce?)
   a. Have you always felt this way?
   b. How much of your feelings results from your experience of parental divorce?
   c. Do you think divorce is necessary?

4. What is important to consider when deciding to commit to a romantic partner?
5. How satisfied are you with the intimacy of your relationship?
6. How much do you think you are in a passionate relationship?
7. How much do you think your partner is committed to the relationship?
8. How much do you rely on your partner for stability in this relationship?
9. How easy was it for you to begin this relationship?
10. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?
11. How satisfied are you with your partner as a spouse or potential spouse?
12. How satisfied are you with your marriage or relationship?
13. How likely do you think you will be in this relationship one year from now?
14. Any additional comments or is there perhaps anything you would like us to talk about that we left out?

Thank you for participating in this study. Do you have any questions? Do you feel that you need a counselling session?

Questionnaire was administered in person …..……. or online …….