The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents

by

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ABSTRACT

The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents

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Marital breakdown shows an increase in societies across the world. An increase in the divorce rate is also evident in recent statistics in South Africa. However, in many instances a marriage does not end in a legal divorce, but rather in marital separation. Marital separation is usually regarded as a temporary separation by the couple, with the intent to decide whether to continue with the marriage or not. In many cases marital separation turns into a permanent separation of the couple, where the father usually leaves the family home while the children remain in the care of the mother. As marital separation does not involve a legal process, parents often make informal arrangements for the care of the children. In the Xhosa community the father is regarded as the carrier of the family lineage and thus plays an important role in the life of the male child. The researcher was interested in how Xhosa adolescent males who remained in the care of their mothers, experienced the marital separation of their parents.

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. A qualitative research approach and a phenomenological research design was followed to obtain the personal views of the participants. Semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview schedule was used to collect data from 12 Xhosa male participants. The participants were selected by means of purposive sampling, based on certain sampling criteria.

The findings of the study indicate that most of the participants' parents did not inform them of their marital separation, while the topic was also not discussed over the longer term. The marital separation of their parents had an influence on various aspects of the participants' lives. In the context of this study, the effect of the marital separation on cultural norms and practices, was a prominent theme in the findings.

It is recommended that social workers should be sensitive to the effects of parental separation on the holistic developmental needs of children, including the effects on cultural practices in certain communities, such as the Xhosa community in the case of this study. The researcher further recommends that more extensive studies on marital separation be conducted, including studies with larger sample sizes, with children of different age groups, and in diverse cultural contexts.

KEY CONCEPTS

Marital separation

Divorce

Adolescent

Xhosa

Parental roles and responsibilities

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CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Marital breakdown is an increasing phenomenon in societies worldwide (Cohen, 2002:1019). The most recent figures on divorce in South Africa show that there has been an increase in divorce rates between the years 2011 to 2013, with a total of 20 980 divorces that were registered in 2011; 21 998 in 2012; and 23 885 divorces registered in 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2013:35). Divorce is defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage (Benokraitis, 2011:417; The Diagram Group, 2008:247; MacMillan Dictionary, 2010:1). In 2013 a total number of 21 073 children under the age of 18 years were affected by the divorce of their parents (Statistics South Africa, 2013:42).

In some instances, parents separate without going through a legal divorce process; generally known as marital separation. Although marital separation is intended as a temporary period of separation in which partners can make decisions about maintaining a stressful marriage or not, it often turns into a permanent separation between the parents (Benokraitis, 2011:416). The focus of this study was on marital separation.

The effects of marital separation are very similar to that of divorce. With both divorce and marital separation the family unit breaks up and usually becomes a family that is headed by the mother, while the father leaves the family home (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Dobson, 2002:142; Gill, 2000:226; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Leibovitz, 2010:111). The family unit therefore ceases to be intact.

To explore the concept of marital separation, one first needs to understand the family as a system (Bannister, 2007:20). The family is regarded as the basic unit of society and the primary context in which children develop (Berk, 2013:567; Patel, 2005:167). Although many different family types are recognised, the nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and children, is still the most common family type in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013:16). The nuclear family was also the focus of this study.

The family is the main social institution responsible for the survival, protection, development and stability of its members, and fulfils specific functions (Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane & Rama, 2004:69; Hutchinson, Afifi & Krause, 2007:25; Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009:23; Patel, 2005:167). These functions include membership, economic support, nurturance, socialisation, and protection of its members (Patterson, 2002 in Department of Social Development, 2013:6). A stable and supportive family environment is important for children's development and well-being (Louw & Louw, 2014a:393).

In all families, family members are assigned specific roles. In the nuclear family, adults fulfil the parental roles of mother and father (Benokraitis, 2011:32; Kunz, 2011:37). Parents are responsible for the care and protection of their children. They have to provide for the developmental needs of their children, including their health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity formation, family and social relationships, social presentation, and self-care skills (Department of Health, 2000 in Wilson, Ruch, Lymbery & Cooper, 2008:287). The father and the mother usually have specific but complementary roles and responsibilities in terms of the care of their children (Benokraitis, 2011:32; Smetana, Camplone-Bar & Metzeger, 2006:32). Fathers generally perform a more instrumental role within the family, which includes providing in the material needs of the family and represents authority in the home (Benokraitis, 2011:32; Lamb, 2010:21). Mothers' roles are associated more with expressive functions which involves emotional support and nurturing (Benokraitis 2011:32; Berk, 2013:436).

Marital breakdown leads to the loss of one of the parents in the home (Emery, 2012:40) and can have a significant effect on the children in the family (Benokraitis, 2011:435; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). Marital breakdown can occur through divorce or through marital separation. In order to uphold the best interests of children in divorce cases in South Africa, a divorce cannot be granted unless the court is satisfied that there is sufficient provision for the care of minor children (Mediation of Certain Divorce Matters Act, Act 70 of 1979, Section 6). This stipulation applies to civil and customary marriages. Parents can engage in divorce mediation to assist them to make arrangements in terms of care, education, contact and support for the children, while minimising potential conflict between the parents (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:296; Benokraitis, 2011:440; Boniface, 2012:103). Divorcing parents can further be assisted to

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draw up a parenting plan, which is a written agreement that is registered with a family advocate, and includes decisions in terms of where the child will live, contact with the parents, maintenance, and the educational and religious upbringing of the child (Children's Act 38 of 2005, Section 34(1)(a)(b); Robinson, 2009:79).

In contrast to divorce, marital separation is often an informal process that does not involve a legal process (Benokriatis, 2011:416; Kunz, 2011:239). Parents tend to make informal arrangements for the care of the children (Pieterse, 2007:58). However, similar to divorce, marital separation involves a high degree of instability and emotional distress for the family, including for the children in the family (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294-295; Benokraitis, 2011:417).

Divorce and marital separation can have substantial effects on the children in the family, and these effects could be long lasting (Benokraitis, 2011:417; Berk, 2013:591; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Kelly & Emery, 2003:357; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). For children, parental separation can result in a change of lifestyle, a change in parenting and in the child's relationship with the parents, emotional and behavioural problems, academic difficulties, changes in friendships, and health problems (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:204-205, 301; Basson, 2003:99; Baxter, Weston & Qu, 2011:88; Benokraitis, 2011:436-437; Berk, 2013:591; Clark-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:168; Cloete, 2005:2; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667-670; Kunz, 2011:247; Lamb, 2010:177). In her work as a social worker, the researcher regularly came into contact with Xhosa adolescent males whose parents have separated. The researcher noticed that the parents often separated indefinitely with no provisions made in respect of parenting between the mother and the father.

In the Xhosa community fathers play an important role in the lives of adolescent males. Examples of the role of the Xhosa father described in literature, refer to fathers as the carriers of the family lineage with the result that the adolescent male's personal identity is based on father's lineage, clan and ethnic heritage (Momoti, 2002:50; Saracho & Spodek, 2008:821). Fathers also play a significant role in one of the cultural practices involving the Xhosa adolescent male, namely the male circumcision ritual that is still

highly practiced in Xhosa communities (Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). Mothers are usually excluded from these cultural practices (Venter, 2011:95).

In her work experience the researcher observed that many Xhosa adolescent males remained in the care of their mothers after the marital separation of their parents. Literature indicates that mothers are mostly the custodial parent of dependent children in cases of marital separation or divorce (Dobson, 2002:142; Gill, 2000:226; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Leibovitz, 2010:111). Given this observation, the researcher took interest in finding whether or how marital separation of parents would affect Xhosa adolescent males in cases where the fathers were absent from the home.

Adolescents are children in the adolescent life stage, which begins around the age of 11 to 13 years and ends at around 17 to 21 years (Louw & Louw, 2014b:304). Adolescence is the life stage between childhood and adulthood, and is characterised by significant changes in all developmental domains, namely physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development (Berk, 2013:6; Louw & Louw, 2014b:303-304).

Physical development during adolescence includes a growth spurt and the onset of puberty (Berk, 2013:204; Santrock, 2009:356). Early or late maturation can be challenging for adolescents and has gender specific characteristics. Boys who experience early maturation are generally well-adjusted, self-confident and more popular, while boys who experience late maturation tend to be tense and anxious (Berk, 2013:208; Louw & Louw, 2014b:311). Because of the onset of puberty, children during this phase achieve sexual maturation and adolescents become more aware of their sexuality (Louw & Louw, 2014b:313). Body image becomes important and many adolescents feel self-conscious about their rapidly changing bodies and other signs of physical maturation, such as the lowering of their voice (Santrock, 2009:38). As a consequence, an important developmental task for adolescents is to adapt to these changes and accept their physical appearance (Berk, 2013:211).

Adolescents enter the formal operational stage described in Jean Piaget's theory of *cognitive development*, which means that they acquire the skills for more abstract, systematic and scientific thinking (Berk, 2013:253). Their advanced thinking skills may

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result in idealism and argumentativeness, which often leads to conflict with parents and other adults (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2008:445). The development of adolescent egocentrism is a characteristic aspect of the adolescent's cognitive development (Berk, 2013:255; Santrock, 2009:372-373). Adolescent egocentrism leads to higher self-consciousness. It also results in an under-estimation of the consequences of behaviour, which is seen as contributing to adolescents' greater tendency for risk-taking behaviour.

In terms of *emotional development,* adolescence is a life stage characterised by mood swings, emotional outbursts, as well as feelings of loneliness, embarrassment and nervousness; emotions which are often related to the physical, hormonal, social, and cognitive changes during this stage (Berk, 2013:207). Identity formation is a key developmental task in the *personality development* of the adolescent, and involves the achievement of a clear and consistent definition of the self – who they are, what they believe, where they fit in, and what their future direction will be (Berk, 2013:469; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:321). Identity formation also involves the development of a socio-cultural identity, according to which the adolescent includes the values of his[1] culture into his personal identity (Berk, 2013:475; Louw & Louw, 2014b:342-343). When adolescents fail to form a clear identity, identity confusion occurs, causing them to be unsure about themselves, struggle to make decisions, lack self-confidence, and become anxious (Louw & Louw, 2014b:343).

Social development during adolescence involves two key aspects: the development of autonomy and the belonging to the peer group. Adolescents develop a strong need to be independent and to achieve autonomy, thus making decisions and taking responsibility for their own choices (Louw & Louw, 2014b:362-364). Parents still play an important role in guiding and supporting adolescents in their development. Adolescents tend to spend less time with their families and more time with the peer group (Berk, 2013:579; Louw & Louw, 2014b:367). They develop a strong need to belong and conform to the peer group, which often results in submission to peer pressure (Louw & Louw, 2014b:370; Santrock, 2009:395). The effects of conformation and peer pressure can be either negative or positive.

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[1] In accordance with the focus of this study, the adolescent is referred to in the masculine form.

According to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of *moral development*, adolescents start to internalise moral rules and norms to guide their behaviour. During early adolescence, adolescents tend to follow rules in order to gain the approval of others, while adolescents in the late adolescent phase follow rules based on respect for the moral norms of society (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:392-393). They are concerned about doing their social duty, respecting higher authority, and maintaining social order (Papalia et al., 2008:453).

In this study the focus was on the Xhosa adolescent male. As in the Xhosa culture the father plays a significant role in the development of the adolescent male, the researcher wished to explore the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents specifically in instances where the adolescent remained in the care of the mother. The ecological systems theory takes into account the influence of culture on child development, and formed the theoretical foundation of the study.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was based on the ecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory emphasises contextual influences on children's development and views the developing child as embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem (Berk, 2013:26-27; Louw, Louw & Kail, 2014:29-30; Thomas, 2005:346).

The *microsystem* is seen as the persons and institutions in the child's most immediate environment and consists mostly of the child's parents, home, and school (Louw et al., 2014:29; Thomas, 2005:346). The influence between the child and the microsystem is bi-directional which indicates that the environment will influence the child's development, but that the child will also have an influence on the immediate environment (Louw et al., 2014:29; Papalia et al., 2008:36). In the context of the study, the marital separation of the parents is thus expected to affect the child.

The second layer indicated in the ecological systems theory represents the *mesosystem*, which involves the connections between the different microsystems in the child's life (Berk, 2013:27). The ecological perspective indicates that "what happens in one

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microsystem is likely to influence the other microsystems" (Louw et al., 2014:29). Because of the interrelatedness of the systems, changes in the home can therefore have an influence on the child's functioning in other systems, such as the school or peer group. Divorce and parental separation may lead to changes in the family's residence, a change in the child's contact with the non-resident parent, as well as changes in the child's school and peer group (Baxter et al., 2011:88; Benokraitis, 2011:437; Berk, 2013:591; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Smyth, Temple, Behrens, Kaspiew & Richardson, 2008:29).

The *exosystem* represents settings of which the child is not directly part, but that still affect the child (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29; Papalia et al., 2008:36). The exosystem contains formal institutions such as the parent's workplace or health services in the community. The exosystem also contains informal networks, such as friends and extended family that can support the family. On the level of the exosystem, marital separation of the parents can result in changes in the socio-economic status of the family, as well as in the formal and informal support networks that are available to parents and to the child (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Kunz, 2011:246).

The *macrosystem* is the outermost layer of the ecosystems and consists of cultural norms, values and customs as well as laws of society (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29-30; Papalia et al., 2008:36). In the context of this study, the researcher wished to explore amongst others whether cultural norms and practices in the Xhosa community had an influence on the life of the Xhosa adolescent male after the marital separation of his parents. The experience of marital separation of their parents might be different for Xhosa adolescent males than for adolescent males who grow up in Western cultures.

Bronfenbrenner indicates that life changes happen over time, and refers to changes over time as the chronosystem (Berk, 2013:28). Specific to the life of the Xhosa adolescent male, it transpires that the cultural practice of the male initiation ceremony has been instituted in the amaXhosa as far back as the eighteenth century (Meel, 2005:58; Meissner & Buso, 2007:372). This practice has not changed much over time and is still a commonly practiced ritual among the Xhosa people (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtumane,

2004:36; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410; Vincent, 2008:434).

In the context of this study the interrelatedness of the systems described in the ecological systems theory implies that marital separation of parents could affect the Xhosa adolescent male, his family, and the home situation (the microsystem) as well as other systems, for example the school and friendship group, and the father's new home and family system (the mesosystem). Marital separation of the parents could also affect aspects such as the adolescents' participation in practices determined by the Xhosa culture (the macrosystem), which seems not to have changed over time (the chrononsystem). The researcher therefore regarded the ecological systems theory as applicable to the study.

1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research indicates that parental divorce or separation has negative effects on the children, for example negative emotional, behavioural and academic consequences, and changes in residency and in their standard of living (Benokraitis, 2011:435; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). In divorce cases, which refer to the formal dissolution of marriage, legislation allows for measures to uphold the best interests of the child. The Mediation in Certain Divorce Matters Act (Act No. 24 of 1987), Section 6, stipulates that a divorce cannot be concluded unless satisfactory arrangements have been made for the care of the children. Further, Section 33 in the Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for mediation and parenting plans, according to which formal arrangements in terms of parental responsibilities are made.

In the semi-rural area on the border between Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal where the researcher worked, she came into contact with Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated. She observed that when their marriages fail, many parents revert to marital separation as an alternative to divorce. Although marital separation is seen as a temporary measure in which parents decide whether to continue with the marital union or not (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2007:285; Benokraitis, 2005:425), the researcher observed that for these parents marital separation often became a more permanent arrangement.

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As there was no legal divorce, the parents tend to resort to informal arrangements for the care of the children in the family (Pieterse, 2007:58). Often children are inadequately informed about the situation so that they have no clear guidelines about the roles of both parents, while parental conflict may continue after the break-up of the marriage and the involvement of the father in the life of the children tend to decrease (Ball & Hiebert, 2006:80; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Kelly & Emery, 2003:353; Pretorius, 2008:15; Robinson, 2009:79).

In Xhosa communities the father plays a significant role in the life of the adolescent male. In the Xhosa culture the formation of the identity and sense of belonging of adolescent males are strongly related to the father's role as the carrier of the family lineage (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). The initiation ritual for adolescent males, in which the father plays a prominent role, is also significant in the development of the Xhosa adolescent male (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtumane, 2004:36; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410; Vincent, 2008:434).

Based on the above, the researcher wished to explore how Xhosa adolescent males experienced the marital separation of their parents, specifically in cases where these children remained in the care of the mother while the father left the family home. In a literature search through the catalogue and electronic platforms of the University of Pretoria library the researcher could not find any literature that specifically focused on the topic. Hosegood and Madhaven (2012:259) also indicate that information on men's involvement in families, specifically in the lives of children, are scarce.

The following research question was stated for the study: What are the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents?

1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents.

The following objectives were stated for the study:

- To theoretically contextualise divorce and marital separation.
- To theoretically describe the effects of parental divorce and marital separation on children and highlight the context of the Xhosa adolescent male.
- To explore and describe the experiences of the participants regarding the effects of marital separation of their parents on their developmental needs.
- To explore and describe the views of the participants of the influence of the marital separation of their parents on their cultural identity and participation.
- To make conclusions and recommendations for social work services to Xhosa adolescent males who experience parents' marital separation.

1.5 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the researcher wished to explore and describe the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents, a qualitative research approach with an exploratory and descriptive purpose was followed (Babbie & Mouton, 2005:81; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96). Applied research was applicable to the study, as the information gained could be used in social work practice in interventions with Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Neuman, 2006:27). The researcher wished to gain information on the lived experiences of the participants in the study, therefore a phenomenological research design was followed (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:317; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012:191).

The study population (Welman et al., 2012:52) was all Xhosa adolescent males who experienced the marital separation of their parents and who were known to a specific welfare organisation in Port Shepstone, near the border of Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The sample for the study was selected according to specific sampling criteria, therefore purposive sampling was utilised (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392; Welman et al., 2012:69). The final sample for the study consisted of 12 Xhosa adolescent males who complied with the sampling criteria.

Data was collected by means of semi-structured one-to-one interviews with the use of an interview schedule (Greeff, 2011:351-352; Kumar, 2005:131; Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2005:178; Welman et al., 2012:166). The interviews were conducted in the

home language of the participants, namely isiXhosa. A pilot study was conducted with two adolescents who complied with the sampling criteria (Welman et al., 2012:18). Based on the scarcity of information on the topic and the challenges to recruit research participants, these two adolescents were included in the final sample for the study.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the transcripts formed the basis for data analysis (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:342). The data was analysed according to the process for qualitative data analysis as described in Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011:404-419). The researcher implemented strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Bless et al., 2013:236-237; Lietz, Langer & Furman, 2006:447-451; Schurink et al., 2011:420).

A detailed description of the research methodology will be presented in Chapter 3. The ethical considerations for the study will also be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.6 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are relevant to the study:

Adolescence is the life stage which, depending on individual and sosio-cultural factors, begins between the ages of 11 or 13 years, and ends between the ages of 17 and 21 years (Louw & Louw, 2014b:304). Berk (2013:6) defines adolescence as the life stage which marks the transition from childhood to adulthood and falls between the ages of 11 and 18 years. In this study the latter definition of adolescence was adopted and an adolescent is defined as a person between the ages of 11 and 18 years.

Family refers to a group in society that is related based on kinship, adoption, foster care, or ties of civil, customary or religious marriage, civil union or cohabitation, and that is not bound to a specific physical residence (Department of Social Development, 2013:11). In this study the focus was on a specific family type, namely the **nuclear family** that consists of a father, a mother and their biological children; which is the most common family type found in urban and rural areas in South Africa (Amoateng et al., 2004:69; Department of Social Development, 2013:16; Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009:23).

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Marital separation is a temporary period of separation of marital partners in a highly stressful marriage, with the aim of considering whether to continue with the marriage or not (Benokraitis, 2011:416). Marital separation indicates an ending of marital cohabitation and could result in a permanent separation where the marital partners live apart on a permanent basis, however without legal agreement (Kunz, 2011:237). **Divorce** is defined as the legal dissolution of a marriage (Benokraitis, 2011:417).

Xhosa refers to a South African ethnic group composed of related groups of isiXhosa speaking people who form part of the larger Nguni language group and live in the south eastern region of South Africa, the Eastern Cape, stretching towards the region of KwaZulu-Natal (Joyce, 2010:38; Valchev, Van de Vijver, Nel, Rothman, Meiring & De Bruin, 2011:236). In this study the term refers to members of the Xhosa ethnic group who live in the Port Shepstone area near the border between the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher views the following aspects as limitations of the study:

- The study was an exploratory study conducted with a small sample of 12 participants. The findings of the study can therefore not be generalised to the larger population.
- Participants were from the Xhosa culture and the research findings cannot be generalised to adolescents and families in other cultures.
- Further, the research was conducted with Xhosa adolescents who lived in a semi-rural context. The research findings can therefore not be generalised to Xhosa adolescents who live in urban and rural contexts in South Africa.

1.8 CONTENTS OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is presented in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: General introduction to the study

A general introduction to the study was presented in this chapter. The research topic was contextualised, and the rationale and problem statement, the theoretical framework, goal

and objectives of the study, a summary of the research methodology, and the limitations of the study were described.

Chapter 2: Marital separation and its effects on children

The focus of this chapter is on main themes relevant to the research topic. A discussion of the family in society, parental responsibilities and roles, marital breakdown with a focus on divorce and marital separation, the effects of marital breakdown on children, and the adolescent life stage with referral to the Xhosa adolescent male, forms the literature background to the study.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and empirical findings

The research methodology and ethical considerations for the study are described in Chapter 3, followed by the presentation of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

The key findings of the research and conclusions are presented in Chapter 4. Based on these, recommendations for practice and research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2

THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL SEPARATION ON CHILDREN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Marital breakdown is a phenomenon that affects many families worldwide (Bojuwoye & Akpan, 2009:175; Cohen, 2002:1019). South Africa is no exception and in recent years there has been an increase in the number of divorces in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2012:9; Statistics South Africa, 2013:6). Professionals in the social sciences professions agree that the divorce of parents have a significant impact on children (Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). However, in some instances parents do not go through legal divorce procedures, but instead opt for marital separation. Marital separation is also evident among customary marriages (Pieterse, 2007:58) and, similar to divorce, can have harmful effects on the children in the family (Finley & Schwartz, 2010:164).

The goal of this study was to explore the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. In this chapter the researcher provides a literature review as a background to the empirical study that will be discussed in Chapter 3. The literature review focuses on the role of the family, parental responsibilities, and on divorce and marital separation as well as the effects thereof on children in the family. As the focus of the study was on Xhosa adolescent males, an overview of adolescence as a developmental stage, also referring to the adolescent in the Xhosa culture, is included.

2.2 THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY

The family is regarded as the basic unit of society (Amoateng & Ritcher, 2007:4, Belsey, 2005:11, Patel, 2005:167). Berk (2013:567) describes the family as "the child's first, and longest lasting, context for development." In this section, the family and the roles and functions of the family will be described.

2.2.1 Defining the family

The family is defined as a "societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or

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cohabitation, and go beyond a particular physical residence" (Department of Social Development, 2013:11). In past decades, the family has been defined as a heterosexual, reproductive, monogamous and economically co-operative unit, however due to the protection of constitutional rights of people, the definition has been broadened to include other definitions of the family (Cheal, 2008:2). Benokraitis (2011:4-5) indicates that, because of changes in contemporary household arrangements, there is no universal definition of the family and that it may even become more difficult to define the family in future. This reality is acknowledged in the *White Paper on Families in South Africa* in which thirteen specific family forms are described (Department of Social Development, 2013:16-17).

Among the different family types, for example three-generation, skip-generation, and single parent families, the nuclear family is still the most common family type in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2013:16). This family type consists of the mother, father and their biological or adoptive children, and is the most common family type found in rural and urban areas in the country (Department of Social Development, 2013:16; Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009:23). The nuclear family is also the family type that formed the focus of this study.

Developmental psychologists emphasise that "children need warm, loving, and stable home environments to grow and develop in a healthy manner" (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:8). The family thus needs to fulfill certain roles and functions towards its children.

2.2.2 Roles and functions of the family

The family is seen as the main social institution that structures the lives, activities and relations of men, women and children of a particular family (Hutchinson et al., 2007:25). Families are responsible for the survival, protection, development, and stability of its members, including children below the age of 18 years (Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009:23; Patel, 2005:167).

The family fulfils its functions towards its members mainly by means of two types of roles: instrumental roles and affective roles (Peterson, 2009 in Department of Social

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Development, 2013:6). Instrumental roles include the provision of physical resources, for example food, clothing and housing. Affective roles involve the provision of emotional support and encouragement. Patterson (2002 in Department of Social Development, 2013:6) indicates that the family has five main functions towards its members. These functions and their benefits for family members are summarised in Table 2.1 below and are subsequently discussed.

Table 1: The functions of the family

Functions	Benefits for the family members
Membership	The family members are provided with: - a sense of belonging - personal and social identity - meaning and direction in life.
Economic support	The family members' basic needs, including food, shelter and clothing are provided for. These resources enhance the development of the family members.
Nurturance, support, socialisation	The family members' needs are met in terms of their - physical development - psychological development - social development - spiritual development. The members attain social values and norms.
Protection of vulnerable members	Vulnerable members, e.g. young and ill members, and members with disabilities, receive care and support.

(Source: Patterson, 2002 in Department of Social Development, 2013:6)

The family plays a vital role in the establishment of family routine, whereby the family members are provided with support, continuity and consistency as well as guidance in order to build a sense of identity within the family (Hutchinson et al., 2007:25). Routines provide family members with security and direction, and empower family members to be resilient in the face of challenges they may face in the outside world (Cook & Du Toit, 2005:75; Friesen & Brennan, 2005:297). The family gives family members a sense of belonging and a sense of place in society, and children obtain their social position based on the social class of the family (Benokraitis, 2011:7; Kunz, 2011:11).

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The provision of material resources for the survival of its members, is regarded as one of the most important roles of the family (Alber, Van der Geest & Whyte, 2008:27; Kunz, 2011:11). The family provides its members with the resources needed for their physical survival, such as food, shelter and clothing. Families help their members to access different kinds of resources, for example material, educational and spiritual resources (Centre for Social Justice, 2010:6). The family needs to be involved in the lives of its younger members by guiding them to make healthy choices regarding important decisions they make in life (Friesen & Brennan, 2005:297).

Affection is a basic human need, and one of the roles that families need to fulfil is to provide its members with affection and nurturing (Department of Health and Human Service, 2008:16; Kunz, 2011:12). Based on positive interactions within the family, children learn to respond appropriately to parents, siblings and significant others, and develop clear expectations from each other (Cook & Du Toit, 2005:75, Friesen & Brennan, 2005:297, Kim-Cohen, 2007:277; Wu, Hou & Schimmele, 2008:1607). A positive family environment strengthens a sense of belonging and commitment to one another, in which each member is appreciated, recognised, valued, allowed to share experiences, and support one another (Centre for Social Justice, 2010:6). Families that create a secure emotional environment for its members can promote the emotional and psychological well-being of the family members (Ajidahun, 2011:398; Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:30). Thus, parents who provide positive nurturing to their children, assist their children to adjust constructively to life (Greener, 2006:44). Family support is a critical element in the overall development of a person, from childhood to becoming productive and responsible citizens in society (Patel, 2005:167).

Families are also responsible for the socialisation of its members according to societal values, norms and customs, so that the members learn socially acceptable behaviour (Louw & Louw, 2014c:143). Through socialisation, the members of the family get to internalise the societal values and culture which shape their social identity in a particular social environment (Bahadur & Dhawan, 2008:74, 77). Parents thus play a significant role in ensuring that younger family members are incorporated into their culture (Strong & Cohen, 2013:137).

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The family is regarded as the fundamental unit of the society for the protection of vulnerable members such as children (Mathambo & Gibbs, 2009:23; Patel, 2005:167). It provides its members with physical protection as well as economic security and stability (Benokraitis, 2011:6). In the South African context, the definition of *care* in the Children's Act includes that children should be protected from any form of physical, emotional or moral harm (Children's Act 38 of 2005).

In conclusion, the family has a direct influence on children's overall well-being. Louw and Louw (2014a:393) indicates that children who grow up in stable and emotional supportive families tend to show better school performance, higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, positive behavior, better emotional health, and higher levels of resilience.

The focus of this study was on Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated. As a background to the discussion of marital breakdown, the roles and responsibilities of parents towards their children will first be discussed.

2.3 PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARENTAL ROLES

The members of a family are generally assigned certain roles, with adult family members performing the role of parents and taking responsibility for their children (Benokraitis, 2011:32; Department of Health and Human Service, 2008:16, 27). In the context of this study, parental responsibilities and roles are discussed as it relates to the nuclear family or so-called traditional family, consisting of the father, mother and their children (Department of Social Development, 2013:16).

2.3.1 Parental care and responsibilities

Parents in a family unit are the co-holders of parental responsibility and have a duty of care towards their children. In the South African context parental responsibilities and parental rights are defined in Section 18(2) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, and includes the responsibility and right to care for the child, maintain contact with a child, to perform the role of guardian of the child, and to contribute to the child's maintenance. The Act provides an inclusive definition of care in relation to a child.

Care, according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005, includes the provision of suitable living conditions, financial support, and safeguarding the well-being of the child. Care also refers to protection of the child against all forms of harm, including physical, emotional or moral harm. It further involves protection and promotion of the child's rights and securing the child's education, including the child's religious and cultural education. The child should also be guided with regards to decision-making and behaviour, while parents need to maintain a positive relationship with the child. Lastly, care implies that any special needs that the child may have should be accommodated and that the best interests of the child need to be ensured in all matters affecting the child.

Parental responsibilities are acquired according to complex rules of law (Wilson et al., 2008:217). In South Africa, parental responsibilities of fathers and mothers are indicated in Chapter 3 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

Parents or caregivers need to provide in the developmental needs of their children. The Assessment Framework (Department of Health, 2000) provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the developmental needs of children, parenting capacities, and the influence of the environment and community on the child and family (Trevithick, 2012:324; Wilson et al., 2008:287). This Framework indicates the following developmental needs of children (Department of Health, 2000:19):

- Health

The health needs of the child involve the child's growth, development, and physical and mental well-being. Provision in health needs include an adequate diet, exercise, medical, dental, and optical care. For older children, health needs include advice and information on health issues such as sex education and substance use.

- Education

Education needs focus on the child's cognitive development. These needs include opportunities for play and social interaction, as well as access to books, school, and educational activities.

- Emotional and behavioural development

The child's emotional and behavioural needs firstly involve the provision of opportunities for early attachment. Parents/caregivers further need to teach children to appropriately demonstrate feelings, adapt to change, respond to stress, and exercise self-control.

- Formation of the identity

The formation of the identity relates to the child's sense of being a separate and valued individual. The identity includes the child's self-image and self-esteem, a positive sense of race, age, religion, gender, sexuality and abilities, as well as a sense of belonging to the family, the peer group, and the wider society and culture.

- Family and social relationships

Children's developmental needs in terms of family and social relationships are supported by a stable and caring relationship with parents/caregivers and siblings. These needs also include the need for age-appropriate friendships with peers.

- Social presentation

A child's needs in terms of social presentation includes dressing appropriately in a specific context, as well as maintaining personal hygiene and cleanliness. These developmental needs also relate to a growing understanding of the way in which one's appearance and behaviour are perceived by others.

- Self-care skills

Self-care skills involve the child's ability to function with increasing and age-appropriate autonomy. It includes the child's competency in terms of communication, regulation of emotions, problem-solving, and participation in activities away from the family.

Parental care requires a holistic perspective that focuses on all domains of the child's development, namely the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral domains. The family, as the primary unit in society, is largely responsible for the care, protection and development of its children (Department of Social Development, 2013:3).

Traditionally, fathers and mothers perform different roles in the family (Benokraitis, 2011:32). Each parent plays a particular role in family life and is thus perceived differently from each other by their children (Smetana et al., 2006:32). In the following sections the roles and responsibilities of the father and the mother in the family will be outlined.

2.3.2 The role of the father within the family

A father is defined as a specific male who is biologically or socially linked to a child (Lamb, 2010:388). Fathers render their duties and responsibilities as part of their right towards their respective families, according to social institutions. Fatherhood is thus a social role that men undertake to care for their children (Morrell, 2006:18). In this study, a father refers to the biological father of the child.

Fathers traditionally perform the instrumental role in the family, thus providing for food, shelter, and for other material needs of the family (Benokraitis, 2011:32). The father's economic support plays a significant role in the family as it prevents material deprivation and contributes to a less stressful family environment (Amato, 2005:92; Lamb, 2010:21).

In addition to their instrumental role, fathers also engage in social and expressive roles in the family. Starting during infancy, the sensitive care and interaction of fathers with their children contribute to the attachment security of the child (Berk, 2013:436). Fathers who maintain a balance between their instrumental and social roles demonstrate to their children that the children are important to them (Amato, 2005:92). In this way, fathers also contribute to a child's internal working model (Main, Hesse & Hesse, 2011:427). The child's internal working model represents a set of expectations about the self and the availability of others, and guides all future relationships of the child (Berk, 2013:430).

Fathers provide firmness and restraint in managing children's behaviour, especially in problematic situations, and are therefore viewed as crisis managers in the home (Lamb, 2010:370). This is also the case in traditional African families where the father is regarded as the authority figure in the family (Richter, Desmond, Hosegood, Madhavan, Makiwane, Makusha, Morrell & Swartz, 2012:5).

The actions and example set by parents influence their children's gender development; thus the development of a gender identity and of gender-type behaviour (Louw & Louw, 2014d:195-196; Santrock, 2009:254). Fathers and mothers interact differently with their children (Berk, 2013:437). Where mothers tend to focus more on physical care, affection, and gentle play with their children, fathers are more involved in playful interaction and physical and energetic games, especially with their sons. In terms of the socialisation of their children, it seems that fathers tend to pay more attention to their sons and engage more with them, while they also actively promote their sons' intellectual development (Santrock, 2009:254).

Paternal behaviour thus has a notable effect on children's behavior and emotional characteristics (Amato, 2005:990). Fathers are regarded as moral teachers and gender role models (Lamb, 2010:21). The presence of a caring, responsible and supportive father can have a significant impact on the lives of their children and families (Morell, 2006:18). Numerous research studies indicate that children who have fathers that are present and actively involved in their lives, are likely to experience better functioning on social, emotional, and cognitive levels and show better academic performance (Department of Social Development, 2013:24).

Hearn (2002:245) believes that fatherhood is a cultural phenomenon that has its own forms and power, which will have significant implications in the transmission of masculinity and men's practices. Hosegood and Madhaven (2012:259) support the view that fathering is an important aspect in the development of South African men's identity.

Being a father requires parental motivation, where fathers are committed to fulfil their roles and responsibilities towards their children and family (Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2008:49). Although there are societal expectations for the roles and responsibilities of fathers, there are times where fathers do not perform according these expectations (Morell, 2006:14). The roles of fathers can be influenced by different factors, including the structure of the family (e.g. marriage and co-residence), the quality of immediate relationships (e.g. the marital relationship and relationships with the children), the father's employment status and income, as well as his personal qualities (e.g. personality, parenting style, beliefs, and cultural background) (Ritcher et al., 2012:5).

It is recognised that not all fathers are involved in the lives of their children. Statistics show that in the South African context, the phenomenon of absent fathers are more prevalent among African children (Department of Social Development, 2013:24). Based on the advantages of the father's involvement for children, it is advised in the White Paper on Families in South Africa that involvement of fathers in their children's upbringing should be encouraged (Department of Social Development, 2013:40).

2.3.3 The role of the mother within the family

A mother is defined as "a women in relation to a child or children" (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006). In this study, a mother refers to the child's biological mother. The traditional role of the mother focuses on the expressive roles in the home, which are related to emotional support and nurturing care within the family unit (Benokraitis, 2011:32). Mothers are known to engage more with their children on an emotional level (Berk, 2013:437; Parke & Buriel, 2006:435). They tend to possess interactional skills that lead to closeness between them and their children, and have positive effects on the children (Blume, 2006:41). Although mothers are the primary attachment figures for their children, their regular presence also plays a role in the formation and nurturance of children's attachment to their fathers (Berk, 2013:436; Bowlby & McIntosh, 2011:555). The quality of the child's attachment with the father is thus strongly mediated by the mother's presence (Ball & Daly, 2012:63).

Mothers are regarded as the emotional core of the family due to their accessibility and the supportive role they play (Benokraitis, 2011:32; Blume, 2006:41). Based on their supportive role, mothers tend to have a stronger psychological control over their children and, as a result, children seem to feel obliged to maintain loyalty to their mothers (Eysenck, 2009:386).

In modern times, many mothers are employed in the formal labour force (Benokraitis, 2011:19). This is also the case in South Africa, however maternal employment does not necessarily have a negative effect on the children in the family, especially if the mother receives support from other family members (Louw & Louw, 2014c:136).

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2.3.4 The role of the extended family

In some families, grandparents play a critical role in the quality of life of the family. Bertera and Crewe (2013:179) indicate that grandparents in African American families can strengthen families by providing support, lowering stress, and being involved in the transmission of family traditions.

The role of kin should also be considered within the Black South African context (Richter et al., 2012:11). Louw and Louw (2014a:431) mention for example that supportive connections with the extended family is one of the factors that can enhance resilience in families and children. In terms of the role of fathers, Mkhize (2006 in Richter et al., 2012:11) highlights the important roles that "social fathers" and significant kin play in child rearing. Richter et al. (2012:2) indicate that, for different reasons, South Africa has one of the highest incidences of absent fathers in the world. In such situations maternal grandfathers and uncles often assume the role of "social fathers" who support the children's mother in providing for the child's livelihood and education, as well as providing children with paternal love and guidance.

One of the factors that affect the parental roles in the family, is the dissolution of the parental marriage. Worldwide, there is an increase in marital breakdown (Cohen, 2002:1019). In South Africa an increase in divorce figures were recorded between 2011 and 2013, after a decreasing trend from 2003 to 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2013:43). The phenomenon of marital breakdown is discussed in the next section.

2.4 MARITAL BREAKDOWN

Marriage is a legally recognised union between two people and is legally acknowledged in South Africa as civil marriages, customary marriages, and civil unions (Statistics South Africa, 2013:1). During the lifetime of the marriage, members of the family are born or get adopted, and as a result different types of families emerge (Department of Social Development, 2013:16).

The marital union can be legally ended through divorce (Benokraitis, 2011:417). Divorce and the legal requirements in terms of the children involved, are discussed next.

2.4.1 Divorce

Divorce is defined as the legal and formal dissolution of a marriage (Benokraitis, 2011:417; Collins, 2005:483). The legal termination of a marriage that was contracted between two people must be effected by a judge of court or a competent authority (Macmillan Dictionary, 2010:1).

South African statistics indicate that the number of registered divorces in the country showed an increase in recent years, from a number of 20 980 in 2011 to 23 885 in 2013 (Statistics South Africa, 2013:35). Divorces registered during 2013 mostly occurred in the black and white population groups, with 8 656 and 7 561 divorces respectively.

As a result of divorce, the family ceases to be an intact family and becomes a family that is usually headed by the mother, as fathers make up the majority of non-custodial parents (Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Leibovitz, 2010:111). For the children involved, divorce usually implies the loss of one parent in their lives (Emery, 2012:40). In 2013 a total number of 21 073 children under the age of 18 were involved in the registered divorce cases in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2013:42).

Divorce brings a lot of pain and stress to those involved, especially to minor children (Afifi, Huber & Ohs, 2006:2; Benokraitis, 2011:435; Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge & Bates, 2010:283). Further, divorce does not necessarily bring an end to the conflict that caused the separation of the parents. It might for example happen that custodial mothers are manipulative and withhold children from having contact with the father or alienate children from their fathers (Ball & Hiebert, 2006:80; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Pretorius, 2008:15). Fathers, on the other hand, may retaliate by emotionally and financially disengaging from their children (Robinson, 2009:79). In doing so, they do not give consideration to the child's best interests and the father-child bond suffers as a result (Frank, 2007:119). The father may form a relationship with a new partner and may as a result not accommodate their own children (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Saracho & Spodek, 2008:821).

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Due to continuing conflict between parents and the fact that fathers make up the majority of non-custodial parents, the father's contact with the children diminishes and the nurturing role of the father often falls away (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111; Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy: 2008:124). Marta (2004:10) asserts that many parents fail to acknowledge that children are not rubber bands that can be stretched out of shape and then be expected to snap back into position, but are living beings with their own feelings.

Courts of law in South Africa confirm that sufficient provision should be made to care for children of divorce so as to make the divorce less stressful for minor children. In order to serve the best interests of children involved in a divorce situation, it is stipulated in the Mediation of Certain Divorce Matters Act (Act No. 24 of 1987) that a divorce cannot be granted until the court is satisfied that sufficient provision has been made for the care of minor children involved. In Section 6 of the mentioned Act, which constitutes an amendment of Section 6 of the Divorce Act (Act 70 of 1979), it is stated:

> A decree of divorce shall not be granted until the court … is satisfied that the provisions made or contemplated with regard to the welfare of any minor or dependent child of the marriage are satisfactory or are the best that can be affected in the circumstances.

As stated in Section 8(3) of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998, the Mediation of Certain Divorce Matters Act, 1987 (Act 24 of 1987) and Section 6 of the Divorce Act (Act 70 of 1979) also applies to the dissolution of a customary marriage.

Divorce mediation is one of the provisions the courts offer to divorcing couples for reaching consensus, if possible, on important aspects related to the divorce.

2.4.1.1 Divorce mediation

Divorce mediation is a provision that families are afforded by the courts of law during a divorce process, whereby a mediator assists the parties to resolve conflict over economic, personal and child-related issues (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:296). The mediator facilitates the process by empathic listening, balancing power between the parties, taking into consideration the rights of all family members, and leading the parties

to make decisions (Boniface, 2012:103; Goldberg, Frank, Sander, Rudolph & Rudolph, 2003:111; Lowenstein, 2009:234). Divorce mediation helps the couple to make decisions on aspects such as custody arrangements, education of the children, contact arrangements, and child support (Benokraitis, 2011:440). Divorce mediation is beneficial as it minimises the conflict and emotional effects of divorce, reduces an adversarial atmosphere, and prevents children being used as pawns in the divorce situation (Benokraitis, 2011:441).

In South African law, the best interests of children are of paramount importance, as embodied in Section 28 of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and in Section 7 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. Since the circumstances of each child in each family unit will vary according to a number of factors, the best interests of the child standard is a relative concept (Gould & Martindale, 2009:33; Strous, 2007:223). The circumstances and context of each case will determine which factors need to be considered, but generally the child's interests include his or her physical, economic, emotional, intellectual, cultural, spiritual, social, moral, and religious well-being (Gould & Martindale, 2009:33).

In divorce cases concerning couples with minor children, the couple must first seek a mediation process which is usually facilitated by a social worker or a suitably qualified person, as stipulated in Section 33(5)(2)(b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. It gives each parent an opportunity to contribute to decisions regarding the health, education and welfare of the child, and physical contact between the child and divorced parents who live in separate places of residence. Section 10 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 stipulates the following:

> …[e]very child that is of such an age, maturity and stage of development as to be able to participate in any matter concerning that child has the right to participate in an appropriate way and views expressed by the child must be given due consideration.

Participation of children in divorce proceedings ensure that their views are heard and thus promote the best interests of the child (Timms, Bailey & Thorburn, 2007:12). In Section 33(5)(b) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 it is indicated that divorce mediation

usually occurs in preparation of parenting plans. A brief overview of parenting plans is provided in the next section.

2.4.1.2 Parenting plans

As divorce is likely to be an emotional process and decisions pertaining to children could easily be compromised when family situations are complicated, it is often necessary to formalise a strategy that clarifies in detail the responsibility of each parent in order to prevent further disagreement (Pretorius, 2008:15; Robinson, 2009:79). Parenting plans can serve as such a formalised strategy.

A parenting plan is a written document signed by the parties involved in the divorce, is registered with a family advocate, and made an order of the court (Children's Act 38 of 2005, Section 34(1)(a)(b); Robinson, 2009:79). A parenting plan, according to Section 33(3) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, is an agreement between parents on aspects such as where and with whom the child will live, contact between the child and parents, arrangement for maintenance, and the educational and religious upbringing of the child.

A parenting plan is therefore more than only a schedule for visitation, communication and other arrangements, as it can help to maintain the relationship between children and their parents (Hartson & Payne, 2006:125; Stahl & Drozd, 2006:133). Section 33(3)(c)(d) of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for arrangements in terms of the child's contact with the different parties involved, as well as in terms of the schooling and religious upbringing of the child. Such arrangements can enhance the stability of care and contribute positively towards the development of the growing child (Department of Health, 2000:19). In this way, legislation allows the court to exercise its powers and discretion as upper guardian of all minor children and promote the best interests of the child, rather than focus on the rights and the privileges of the parents during a divorce (Strous, 2007:223). However, marital breakdown does not always end in a legal divorce as parents often opt for marital separation. Marital separation often results in informal arrangements in terms of the children.

2.4.2 Marital separation

Marital separation is defined as a temporary period of separation which allows marital partners in a highly stressful marriage with time during which to decide whether to continue their marriage or not (Benokraitis, 2011:416). It is an informal transitional process whereby the parties involved begin the separation process without necessarily knowing the outcome of the process (Tumin, Han & Qian, 2015:312-313). However, for some partners marital separation could be a permanent arrangement and an alternative to divorce, often due to religious beliefs of other factors that do not allow for divorce (Benokraitis, 2011:416; Tumin et al., 2015:312). Marital separation is therefore an alternative for people who are trapped in untenable marriage (McIntosh & Long, 2006:3).

Marital separation generally involves the breakdown of the marriage by separating informally, without engaging in legal divorce processes (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2007:285; Benokraitis, 2005:425). Kunz (2011:237) defines marital separation as the ending of marital cohabitation and identifies four types of marital separation: a trial separation, in which the couple live apart on a trial basis in order to decide about the future of their marriage; the couple living apart; permanent separation, where the couple live apart on a permanent basis; and legal separation, where legal agreements on aspects such as assets, child custody and the payment of support are made. In this study, the focus was on permanent marital separation, where the parents decided to live apart on a permanent basis, and where no legal agreements have been made.

Separation of parents is usually preceded by conflict and unresolved issues between the parents (Osarenren, Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2013:320). Such conflict and issues could be related to problems such as spouse battering, sexual abuse, irresponsibility, incest, rape, a struggle for power and control between partners, childlessness, a communication gap, interference by the in-laws, disagreement regarding finances, and infidelity.

Marital separation does not happen overnight and may take months and even years to be concluded (Benokraitis, 2011:416). It is characterised by a culmination of lengthy processes of changing family relationships and a high degree of uncertainty and instability (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Emery, 2012:40; Liu, 2007:2; Warren,

2005:29). Couples gradually become estranged from one another and fathers usually leave the family home, while mothers remain behind and care for the children (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lansky, 2005:1; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111, Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy: 2008:124). This means that the family is no longer intact (Lamb, 2010:177; Weatherall & Duffy, 2008:59).

Marital separation commonly occurs in a series of stages and transitions, and is regarded as a process rather than an event (Benokraitis, 2011:416-417; Lansky, 2005:1). Benokraits (2011:416-417) describes four stages in the process of marital separation. During the *pre-separation phase*, partners consider to separate, and drift apart emotionally, but remain together for the sake of public image. The *early separation phase* starts the actual separation and requires that the newly separated couple adapt to their changed circumstances. The *mid-separation phase* involves heightened stress as the couple is confronted with the harsh realities of their separation. This is often a time when they move back to live together again. However, the reunion is usually short-term in nature. This stage is highly stressful due to the confusion about who is part of the family or not; and is described as a state of boundary ambiguity (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294). The children in the family experience confusion as to whether both parents are still part of their lives. The *late-separation stage* involves that the couple adapts to living separately again which leads to new stresses, amongst others related to decisions about material possessions and child support (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:295). According to Benokraitis (2011:416) each partner must now deal with his/her own household tasks, challenges related to mutual friends, as well as with helping their children to handle the stresses caused by the separation of their parents.

Although many parents may effectively adjust after marital separation (Benokraitis, 2011:417), the separation does not does not necessarily bring an end to the conflict that caused the split between the parents (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lucas, Nicholson & Erbas, 2013:57). Due to continuous fighting between parents, a major challenge for parents is to communicate politely with one another (Croley, 2013:43). Children are frequently exposed to verbal conflict between their parents, whether deliberate or not, which can be very traumatic and stressful for the children (Croley, 2013:43).

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Parents who have separated, especially mothers, tend to use children as a medium of communication to gain information about the other; a process referred to as triangulation (Collins, Jordan & Coleman, 2013:92). This situation can be stressful for the child as he/she becomes caught up between the parents (Collins et al., 2013:92; Kelly & Emery, 2003:352; Usdansky, 2009:216).

Fathers who have left the home may form a relationship with a new partner who might not be willing to accept the children from his previous marriage (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Saracho & Spodek, 2008:821). The nurturing role of the father then usually falls away and the mourning of the departed parent becomes a painful process for the children (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111; Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy: 2008:124; Wolfinger, 2005:12). Adolescent males are likely to experience a significant sense of loss, as fathers play an important role in the lives of their sons (Saracho & Spodek, 2008:1). Being of the same gender, the male children also lose their preferred attachment figure and role model, and may have no one else to fulfil this role outside the home environment (Wolfinger, 2005:12).

Marital separation brings about a high degree of uncertainty, disequilibrium and emotional distress to all those involved (Afifi et al., 2006:2; Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294-295; Ball & Hiebert, 2006:72; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001:16; Liu, 2007:02; Warren, 2005:294). As a result children, irrespective of their age, find the outcome of marital separation very agonising (Benokratis, 2011:417).

Divorce, similar to marital separation, also occurs over a number of stages (Benokraitis, 2011:418). While divorce is a legal dissolution of a marriage and involves the legal system in the process (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:295; Benokraitis, 2011:417), marital separation implies that many parents who are faced with marital conflict and perceive their marriage to be irreparable, do not approach divorce courts but instead informally terminate the relationship. Therefore, marital separation does not involve the formal requirements in terms of the best interests of the children in the situation, as stipulated in Section 6 of the Mediation of Certain Divorce Matters Act (Act No. 24 of 1987). Louw and Louw (2014a:395) emphasise that many couples who marry through customary law and

are unhappily married, never seek a formal divorce. This view is supported by Pieterse (2007:58) who states that many parents who terminate their customary marriages make their own "traditional custody arrangements despite provisions in Section 6 of the Divorce Act (Act 70 of 1979)."

The final stage of marital separation involves a permanent dissolution of the marital relationship, the ending of marital cohabitation, and often results in moving to another home (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:295). Marital separation thus shows similar trends and patterns to those found in the divorce process, with the central concept in both being marital breakdown (Osarenren et al., 2013:320). Marital separation, similar to divorce, lead to emotional distress in children, such as anxiety, anger, confusion, and sadness (Benokraitis, 2011:417). The effects of marital separation and divorce on children can thus be very similar and will be discussed with in the next section. The terms *marital separation*, *divorce* and *marital breakdown* will be used interchangeably.

2.5 THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL BREAKDOWN ON CHILDREN

It is recognised that divorce and marital separation have significant effects on the children involved (Benokraitis, 2011:417; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). However it appears that approximately 80% of children do not suffer from major psychological problems as a result of parental divorce or separation (Benokraitis, 2011:437). Wolfinger (2005:13) is of the opinion that it is not parental separation or divorce that is problematic, but rather the continuous exposure to parental conflict after separation or divorce that causes adverse effects for children. Divorce could even provide some children with a sense of relief if there has been intense conflict between the parents prior to the divorce or separation (Benokraitis, 2011:436). In agreement, Coltrane and Adams (2003:369) state: "Understanding this allows us to see divorce not as the universal moral evil depicted by divorce reformers, but as a highly individualized process that engenders different experiences and reactions among various family members."

However, children generally experience negative effects following the divorce or separation of their parents. Emery (2012:40) argues that the first year of separation tends

to be the hardest for the children due to many transitions within a short space of time. For some children the effects of divorce may last much longer (Benokraitis, 2011:436). In their research, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (2003 in Henderson & Thompson, 2011:270) found that many persons still experienced the effects of parental divorce twenty years after the divorce, concluding that these effects were "much more pervasive and longer lasting" than previously thought.

2.5.1 Factors influencing the effects of marital breakdown on children

It is known that some children adjust better to their parents' separation than others (Benokraitis, 2011:436). Children's reaction to the parents' marital separation or divorce can be influenced by several factors including their age, gender, personality, temperament, as well as the degree of conflict before and after the divorce, information given to the child, quality and stability of care, and the level of social support the child receives (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Louw et al., 2014a:396-397).

The **age of the child** can determine the influence of marital breakdown on children. Marital separation or divorce that that occurs in the early childhood years of the child, lead to instability early in a child's life and can negatively affect the child's future development (Benokraitis, 2011:436). Children in early childhood might, due to egocentric thinking, believe that they contributed to the conflict and separation of the parents, while children in middle childhood can experience intense sadness, anger, and a divided loyalty towards the parents. Adolescents may experience anger, anxiety, depression and guilt, and may miss the support of their parents to help them deal with the challenges related to their developmental stage (Berk, 2013:591; Louw & Louw, 2014a:396).

In terms of **gender**, it appears that marital separation or divorce generally has a greater effect on boys in the family and that boys experience separation from the father more intensely in the case where the mother is the custodial parent (Louw & Louw, 2014a:397; Wolfinger, 2005:12). Boys are more likely to present with negative and non-compliant behaviours, academic problems, and a higher probability of conflict with the mother,

whereas girls are more likely to present with internalising behaviours such as sadness and withdrawal (Berk, 2013:592; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397).

The **level of parental conflict** before and during the marital separation and the **stability** of the child's circumstances afterwards will also influence the effect of the marital breakdown on the child. High levels of conflict, children being used as pawns by the parents, financial difficulties, and frequent changes of home and school, are all factors that can negatively affect the child's adjustment after the parent's separation (Allen, 2013:120-122; Louw & Louw, 2014a:396).

Parental conflict and the instability of their circumstances following marital separation may negatively affect the **capacity of parents** to be emotionally and/or physically available for their children. Continued tension between parents may lead to one parent, often the father, withdrawing from contact with the children, while living separately may pose challenges for both parents to have regular contact with the children (Emery, 2013:10; Pilliteri, 2014:38; Smyth et al., 2008:29). Parents may be so occupied with their own issues and their need to address "first things first" that they focus less on their parenting role and are not emotionally available for their children (Bezuidenhout, 2006:2, 262).

Social support can significantly moderate the effects of divorce and marital separation on children, especially on adolescent children. Social support can be provided by grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers and other significant people, and is seen as a critical factor in children's adjustment as well as on their coping and feelings of security and belonging (Esmaeli & Yacoob, 2011:34; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397).

Parents, especially mothers who have custody of the children, wish to protect their children from emotional harm and often do so by **withholding information** about the marital separation from the children (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Eapen, Graham & Srinath, 2012:149). This aspect adds to children's confusion, uncertainty, and emotional distress (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008:191). For children in such situations, parental separation can be more difficult to deal with than bereavement. With bereavement sorrow is experienced and shared by everyone, while with marital

separation the children are excluded from what is happening between the parents (Kelly & Emery, 2003:353). Further, children tend to have little emotional power in any decisions and may not know how to ask for information about the situation (Ball & Hiebert, 2006:80; Robinson, Butler, Scanlan, Douglas & Murch, 2003:78).

It has been found that children who do not get sufficient information about the divorce or marital separation of their parents tend to develop a distorted perception of the situation, while children who do receive relevant information seem to be able to make better sense of and adjust better to their changing circumstances (Cartwright, 2006:132; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397). It appears the majority of fathers do not inform their children and do not properly greet them following marital separation, so that the children become aware of the situation by observing that the home is headed by the mother and that the father is absent from the home (Eapen et al., 2012:149).

2.5.2 The impact of parents' marital breakdown on children

Although the majority of children seem to cope reasonably well with the parents' marital breakdown, a significant number of children experience negative consequences such as psychological, behavioural, academic, health, and interpersonal problems (Benokraitis, 2011:435; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395, 398). It has to be kept in mind that many of these problems already began before the parents' divorce or separation as a result of the children's exposure to marital conflict (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667). The consequences of marital breakdown will also depend on whether the children have been exposed to an adverse or supportive family environment prior to the divorce or marital separation (Amato, 2010:657). An overview of the potential effects of marital separation and divorce on children is subsequently provided.

- **Change in lifestyle**

Parental divorce and separation often lead to a decline in income and in the standard of living of the family, and is usually associated with increased financial problems, especially for mothers (Benokraitis, 2011:437; Berk, 2013:591; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:168; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625). The family may have to sell the family home and move to smaller, lower-quality, rented, and/or multi-family homes

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(Baxter et al., 2011:88; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625). Often, mothers who used to take care of her children on a full-time basis, need to seek employment to make up for the drop in income (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667). As a result, the children lose their familiar surroundings and have to adapt to a change in lifestyle (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:168; Eysenck, 2009:386; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669). These factors add to the conflict and stress experienced in the family (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:295).

The financial problems that result from marital breakdown can intensify the social and psychological problems experienced by children (Mooney, Oliver & Smith, 2009:2). The drop in the standard of living may affect their well-being and these effects may be long lasting (Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625). As a result, the children may lose trust and confidence in the family as a secure environment (Gilmore & Bell, 2006:291).

- **Parenting and relationship with parents**

The conflict between parents tend to increase during marital separation or divorce, while the relationship of non-custodial fathers with their children tend to change following the separation of the parents (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Saracho & Spodek, 2008:82; Weatherall & Duffy, 2008:59).

There is an increased likelihood that mothers experience economic pressure and emotional distress, which will negatively affect the quality of their parenting and may have a negative impact on the children's socio-emotional well-being (Baxter et al., 2011:87; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669). Mothers are likely to experience emotional pain, especially in the first year following separation or divorce, which surfaces and burdens them most of the time (Chung & Emery, 2010:867). Their emotional pain negatively affects their ability to be warm towards their children, to meet their children's emotional needs, and to provide support to their children (Bezuidenhout, 2006:2; Henning, 2005:56).

After divorce or marital separation, children mostly remain in the care of the mother, while regular contact with the father often falls away, which increases the likelihood of a distant

and declining father-child relationship (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111; Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy, 2008:124). As a result, boys in the father-absent families have few male role models in and outside the home environment, and are exposed to more female gender role models (Risch, Jodl & Eccles, 2004:57). The father's role often becomes one of mere contact and spending good times with the child, while their role in the child's overall development declines (Benokraitis, 2011:437). The child's relationship with the father usually becomes more indulgent and permissive, which may complicate the mother's task of disciplining the child (Berk, 2013:591-592).

In a situation where children are not formally informed of the marital separation of their parents and learn about the situation through observing the changes in the home (Burns & Dunlop, 2002:60), separation anxiety may become a challenge, especially for boys, and children may find it more difficult to adjust to their changed circumstances (Nevid & Rathus, 2010:493). They develop feelings of rejection, sadness, guilt and regret, and become overwhelmed with worry as they recognise the reality of the situation between their parents (Ambert, 2009:19; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2004:17, 25).

In the case where fathers get involved with new partners, the children could be overwhelmed with feelings of intense hurt, especially if they perceive their fathers as enjoying life without them and/or with someone else's children (Emery, 2013:18; Lippman & Lewis, 2008:130). Where the parent with whom the child lives remarries, children may experience anger, panic, depression, and a deep sense of loss (Ward, Spitze & Deane, 2009:163, 169).

Effective parenting is seen as the most important aspect in supporting children through parental divorce (Berk, 2013:592). However, marital breakdown leads to a change in parental roles and responsibilities, and negatively impacts parents' capacity to be effective parents (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Benokraitis, 2011:436). The parents are often immersed in their own problems, which affects their capacity to be fully involved in their role as parents (Bezuidenhout, 2006:2; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667). Divorced or separated parents also tend to spend less time talking to their children about every-day matters such as school activities and friends (Benokraitis, 2011:437). When

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there is a high level of conflict between the parents, the parents may experience greater difficulty in being consistent in meeting their children's needs and to monitor, supervise, and discipline them (Lucas et al., 2013:60). As a result, children may lose trust in their parents and family (Bosch, 2005:33; King, 2002:645). Many children therefore persist with a wish for their parents to reunite, even after remarriage of one or both parents (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669).

Children's relationships with both parents need to be redefined after the marital breakdown. They may also have to adjust to the remarriage of the mother or the father, and may even be required to take over some of the functions of the parents (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667). The latter is especially the case with older children, and more specifically the eldest child, taking over household tasks and the care of younger siblings, and even providing emotional support for the mother (Berk, 2013:593).

After marital breakdown, regular paternal contact and a positive father-child relationship is associated with less emotional and behavioural problems in the children (Berk, 2013:591-592). Generally children adjust better to parental separation or divorce when they can maintain a close and supportive relationship with both parents, when conflict between the parents is limited, and when children are informed in an age-appropriate way of the reasons for the separation or divorce (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:297-298, 302).

- **Emotional and behavioural effects**

The emotional effects of marital breakdown on children are often related to changes in their lifestyle. Children may be anxious as they are uncertain who will provide in their needs for food, clothing and shelter. Their anxiety may manifest in mood swings, acting out behaviour, changes in eating patterns, an inability to concentrate, low self-esteem, sleeplessness, and nightmares (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667, 669-670). Where parents do not provide children with sufficient information on the marital separation or divorce, children my experience higher levels of uncertainty and emotional distress (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008:191; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:668; Robinson et al., 2003:78).

Emotional insecurity is commonly found among children of separated or divorced parents (O'Brien, 2009:209; Wu et al., 2008:1618-1620). These children may feel unwanted, unloved, and may experience a sense of rejection (Bosch, 2005:33; Weintraub & Hillman, 2005:243). The emotional effects will differ according to the child's age and are observable in their affect and behaviour (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667-668). Young children who are not able to understand the changes in the family, will feel scared and may show regressive behaviours, while children in the early childhood years will experience loss, guilt, rejection, and conflicting loyalty towards their parents. Children in middle childhood tend to worry about their parents and may present with psychosomatic symptoms, problematic behaviour, and poor school performance. Adolescents strive for independence, thus a lack of structure and guidance by their parents may negatively affect their age-related development. School-age and adolescent children may engage in negative behaviours and early sexual activity (Berk, 2013:591).

The problems experienced by children after the parents' marital breakdown commonly manifest as externalising or internalising behaviours. Externalising behaviour such as aggression, poor self-regulation, non-compliance and antisocial acts tend to be more prevalent than internalising behaviour, which includes depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and social isolation (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:301). It seems that adolescents who live in a mother-only household after the divorce or separation of their parents are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviours, with boys being at a higher risk of engaging in antisocial and aggressive behaviours compared to girls (Berk, 2013:592; Kelly & Emery, 2003:8; Kunz, 2011:247; Neale, 2002:45). Wu et al. (2008:1618, 1620) concur with the above and argue that boys whose parents separated tend to display active non-compliant and aggressive behaviour, which leads to a high-risk lifestyle.

- **Academic problems**

Children of divorced or separated parents show an increase in academic problems, including poor academic performance and failing their school grades (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2; O'Brien, 2009:209; Kunz, 2011:247). A study by Kelly (2003 in Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:301) found that children from divorced families are more likely to drop out of school or be expelled from school. Academic problems do

not only affect the child's immediate school performance, but can have a lifelong effect on the child's future employment and income opportunities (Benokraitis, 2011:437).

- **Effects on friendships and interpersonal relationships**

Marital separation often results in moving to a new home, which may require children to attend a new school. The children then need to adjust to a new school environment, they lose their current friends, and they need to form new friendships (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667). Leaving the family home also results in the loss of supportive relationships with familiar friends and neighbours (Berk, 2013:591). The reaction of the wider family, the friendship group and the neighbours to the marital breakdown may be supportive, however it could also add to the stresses experienced by the family and children (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294-295).

Children of divorce are more likely to experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including relationships with their parents, siblings, peers and teachers (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:301). These children have been reported to develop a poor self-concept following the parental separation and, as they tend to perceive themselves as different, they withdraw from peer interactions and are more likely to develop poor relationships with peers (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2).

For adolescents, the divorce or marital separation of their parents may affect their perception of future romantic relationships. Due to witnessing the conflict between their parents and the resulting parental separation, adolescents are more likely to be fearful and anxious to get married as they think that their marriage might not last (Amato & De Boer, 2001:1044; Cartwright, 2006:138; Dennison & Koerner, 2008:93).

- **Health problems**

Children from divorced or separated parents tend to be more susceptible to health problems (Cloete, 2005:2). They are also more likely to develop mental health problems such as chronic depression (Lucas et al., 2013:53).

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This study focused on adolescent boys in a Xhosa community. In the following section, relevant aspects of adolescence as a developmental phase will be discussed.

2.6 THE ADOLESCENT LIFE STAGE

In this section an overview of adolescent development will be provided, followed by a discussion of aspects that can influence the development of the Xhosa adolescent male.

2.6.1 Developmental characteristics of the adolescent

Adolescence is the life stage that starts around the age of 11 to 13 years and ends around the age of 17 or 18 years (Berk, 2013:6; Louw & Louw, 2014b:304; Miller, 2010:7, 163). It marks the transition between childhood and adulthood, and is also a period of great differentiation in the social context of the person (Louw & Louw, 2014b:303; Miller, 2010:163; Rose, 2005:177; Waylen & Walker, 2004:151, 159).

Adolescence is divided into three stages, namely early adolescence (11 to 14 years), middle adolescence (14 to 16 years) and late adolescence (17 to 18 years) (Gouws, Kruger & Burger, 2008:2). The life stage generally starts with the onset of puberty, ends with the adoption of the adult role, and is characterised by significant changes in the physical, cognitive, emotional, personality, social, and moral developmental domains (Berk, 2013:6; Louw & Louw, 2014b:304). The developmental characteristics during adolescence will subsequently be discussed, with a focus on adolescent males.

2.6.1.1 Physical development

Adolescence is a period of considerable physical growth and pubertal changes (Santrock, 2009:356). Boys between the age of 10 and 16, most probably around 12 years of age, start to experience a growth spurt, which refers to a rapid increase in their height, weight, and muscle and bone growth, and signifies the onset of puberty (Berk, 2013:204; Papalia et al., 2008:423). Adolescents experience a disproportionate growth in the different body parts - boys' shoulders become wider, their legs become longer relative to their trunk, and their forearms get longer relative to their arms (Louw & Louw, 2014b:306; Papalia et al., 2008:424). Sexual maturation (or puberty) has its onset during the adolescent life stage (Louw & Louw, 2014b:306). Boys begin to develop primary sex

characteristics such as growth of the testes, scrotum and penis, and the occurrence of spermache and of secondary sex characteristics such as pubic, underarm and facial hair, and the deepening of the voice (Berk, 2013:203-204; Louw & Louw, 2014b:309; Papalia et al., 2008:423).

There are individual and group differences in pubertal growth. The timing of pubertal changes have an impact on the psychological adjustment of the adolescent (Berk, 2013:204-205, 208). In boys, early maturation seems to be to their advantage (Louw & Louw, 2014b:311). Early maturing boys generally have higher self-esteem, are well-adjusted, self-confident and more popular, tend to do well in sport, and are more likely to assume leadership roles. On the other hand, boys who experience late maturation tend to be tense and anxious, are less popular, and tend to have a lower self-esteem (Berk, 2013:208; Louw & Louw, 2014b:311). The physical changes during adolescence thus have psychological implications (Louw & Louw, 2014b:310).

As a result of the physical changes, body image becomes important and adolescents become preoccupied with their bodies and body image (Santrock, 2009:38). An important task for adolescents is to adapt to these changes and accept their physical appearance (Berk, 2013:211). Adolescents also become more aware of their sexuality and their sexual orientation, which places a responsibility on them to satisfy their sexual needs in a socially acceptable way (Louw & Louw, 2014b:313; Santrock, 2009:361).

2.6.1.2 Cognitive development

Adolescents from the age of 11 to 12 years enter the formal operational stage described in Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Papalia et al., 2008:445). In the formal operational stage adolescents become more systematic and scientific in their thinking ability and develop the capacity for abstract thought, which enable them to develop and test out hypotheses (Berk, 2013:253-254, Papalia et al., 2008:445). These cognitive abilities enable adolescents to engage in effective problem-solving and they can anticipate the consequences of their decisions (Louw & Louw, 2014b:327; Papalia et al., 2008:445). However, their capacity for abstract hypothetical-deductive reasoning tend to result in argumentativeness, which can negatively affect parent-child relationships during

the adolescent years (Papalia et al., 2008:445). Based on their advanced cognitive abilities they become capable of mutual perspective taking, allowing them to understand that others may have views that differ from their own views (Louw & Louw, 2014b:334).

Their advanced thinking skills enable adolescents to think about their own thoughts. They can therefore speculate about situations, resulting in the idealism which is characteristic of the adolescent years (Santrock, 2009:372). They also tend to think more about themselves, which can be seen in the development of adolescent egocentrism, or a heightened self-consciousness and self-focus (Louw & Louw, 2014b:335). Adolescent egocentrism has two components: the imaginary audience and the personal fable (Elkind, 1976 in Santrock, 2009:373).

Based on the imaginary audience, adolescents believe that they are the focus of attention of others (Louw & Louw, 2014b:335; Papalia et al., 2008:448). They tend to think that they are always 'on stage' and that everybody is looking at them. Adolescents may therefore become extremely self-conscious about their appearance and actions, while at the same time they engage in attention-seeking behaviours in order to be noticed (Berk, 2013:255; Louw & Louw, 2014b:335; Santrock, 2009:373).

The personal fable manifests in adolescents' beliefs that there is something unique and special about them (Louw & Louw, 2014b:336). This belief leads to an inflated opinion of the self and an idea of the self as being invincible. As a result, adolescents may engage in high-risk and sensation-seeking behaviours with the belief that nothing can happen to them (Berk, 2013:256; Louw & Louw, 2014b:336). The personal fable may further lead to emotional distress as adolescents may reason that their thoughts and feelings are so unique that no one else understands them (Louw & Louw, 2014b:336; Papalia et al., 2008:448; Santrock, 2009:373).

Adolescents' ability to engage in formal operational thought is related to brain development. Children at the onset of the adolescent years, between 11 and 13 years, are reported to process information differently than older adolescents. During the early adolescent years reasoning is based more on emotional and instinctual reactions. The development of the frontal lobe of the brain allows children in the late adolescence years

to engage in more advanced reasoning, planning and judgement, leading to better emotional control, impulse control, and reasoned judgement (Papalia et al., 2008:427).

2.6.1.3 Emotional and identity development

Emotional development that enable children to regulate and appropriately express their emotions and show empathy with others, develop to a large extent during the early and middle childhood years (refer Berk, 2013:419). By the age of 10 most children are able to use problem-centered and emotion-centered coping strategies to manage their emotions (Berk, 2013:412). As children proceed through the adolescent life stage, their brain development enable them to increasingly control and regulate their emotions (Papalia et al., 2008:427).

Despite these developmental gains, adolescents are often seen as moody and emotional, and the life stage is often described as a "stormy period" (Louw & Louw, 2014b:304). Although some authors are of the opinion that the emotionality of adolescents is exaggerated, it is acknowledged that adolescents' emotions can fluctuate between positive and negative several times a day (Berk, 2013:207). Younger adolescents are more inclined to moodiness, while older adolescents' emotions tend to be more stable.

It appears that negative emotions or moodiness in adolescents are mostly related to their development and their environment. Higher pubertal hormone levels were found to play a limited role in adolescent moodiness, while personal and situational factors such as poor body image and problems at school, with friends, in romantic relationships and in the home, were often the cause of negative emotions in adolescents (Berk, 2013:207; Santrock, 2009:359).

According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the **formation of the identity** is a key developmental task during adolescence and forms the basis for becoming a productive and happy adult (Berk, 2013:468-469; Louw & Louw, 2014b:342). People's identity centers on questions of who they are, what they value, and what they want to do with their life, and involves the achievement of a clear and consistent

definition of the self (Berk, 2013:469; Santrock, 2009:385; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:321). The term *identity crisis* refers to a period during which adolescents develop their identity by experimenting with, exploring, and questioning existing values and roles (Louw & Louw, 2014b:342). In doing so, adolescents may question their religion, change relationships, experiment with drugs, and put irresponsible postings on Facebook (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:322). Society allows the adolescent this period of time to explore and experiment; a period which is referred to as the psychosocial moratorium (Louw & Louw, 2014b:342).

Successful mastery of the task of identity formation will help the adolescent to obtain an integrated and continuous image of the self (ego-synthesis) and form a socio-cultural, a gender-role, and a career identity as well as a personal value system (Louw & Louw, 2014b:342-343). On the other hand, failure to master this developmental task will lead to identity confusion, where adolescents will be uncertain about themselves, their roles and their value systems, which result in anxiety (Louw & Louw, 2014b:343).

Parents are important role players in the identity formation of children. A positive family atmosphere and positive family relationships are beneficial for the adolescent's identity formation (Santrock, 2009:387-388). The formation of identity is also influenced by factors outside of the family home. Interactions within the peer group, in the school and in the community as well as socio-political circumstances contribute to adolescents' identity formation (Berk, 2013:473-474; Louw & Louw, 2014b:346).

Parents, peers and members of the same ethnic group as the family play a significant role in the development of a person's ethnic identity (Sigelman & Rider, 2009:323). Ethnic identity is defined as "a sense of ethnic group membership and attitudes and feelings associated with that membership" and is seen as a central part of the development of identity in a cultural group, especially a minority group (Berk, 2013:475). Santrock (2009:388) is of the opinion that most children are aware of ethnic and cultural differences, however it is during the adolescent years that they consciously confront their ethnicity for the first time. The formation of an ethnic identity could be more difficult in a culturally diverse country like South Africa, and children who manage to form a secure cultural identity tend to have higher self-esteem and a sense of mastery over the

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environment, are more optimistic, and have a more positive view of their ethnicity (Louw & Louw, 2014b:346). In research studies by Norris et al. (2008) and Thom and Coetzee (2004) (in Louw & Louw, 2014a:347) it was found that black South African adolescents generally showed a high connection to their ethnic identity.

2.6.1.4 Social development

The social context of the adolescent consists mainly of their interactions with parents and peers (Louw & Louw, 2014b:361). Due to adolescents' strive towards autonomy, adolescence is related to a change in the parent-child relationship and a more prominent role of the peer group (Santrock, 2009:391-395).

Autonomy, or the sense of oneself as an independent individual, is a significant developmental task during adolescence (Berk, 2013:577). Autonomy implies that adolescents increasingly make their own decisions and take responsibility for these; make choices related to aspects such as friendships and finances; become self-reliant and exert self-control; and form an own value system to guide their behaviour (Louw & Louw, 2014b:362-264). Adolescents develop a wish to break away from parental authority and tend to assert themselves more (Ajidahun 2011:399; Berk, 2013:578; Killen & Koplan, 2011:458; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:449). However, due to their immaturity and limited life experience, they still need guidance from their parents and still need the attachment bond with their parents to support them in mastering new social demands (Louw & Louw, 2014b:34; Santrock, 2009:391).

Trying to balance autonomy and dependence can cause stress, ambivalence, and frustration for both parents and adolescents, which can lead to intense parent-child conflict (Berk, 2013:579; Killen & Coplan 2011:458; Louw & Louw, 2014b:364; Santrock, 2009:391). It is thus important that parents understand the adolescent's strive for autonomy as a normal and important developmental task (Louw & Louw, 2014b:363).

Belonging to the **peer group** and forming **friendships** is a significant part of the social development of the adolescent (Louw & Louw, 2014b:367). The peer group offers several advantages, such as the satisfaction of emotional needs, providing opportunities for

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socialisation, and being an important source of information. Friendship offers adolescents the benefits of companionship, social acceptance, loyalty, and intimacy or psychological closeness (Berk, 2013:614; Santrock, 2009:394). Within the friendship group adolescents can provide emotional support to others, learn to handle differences, develop interpersonal skills, explore their own values, and find relief of emotional distress such as loneliness or sadness (Berk, 2013:614; 619; McElhaney, Antonishak & Allen, 2008:720; Miller, 2010:164). Adolescents also start to focus more on romantic relationships and dating (Santrock, 2009:396).

The emphasis on conformity with the group in order to fit in with the group is characteristic of peer group relations (Louw & Louw, 2014b:370). Adolescents will to a more or lesser extent change their attitudes and behaviour to fit in with the peer group, as is often evident in their choice of clothes, music, and hobbies as well as their use of language. Peer acceptance, or likability within the peer group, plays an important role in the adolescent's socio-emotional well-being (Berk, 2013:618). Belonging to the peer group can enhance the adolescent's social identity and self-esteem, foster positive behaviour, prevent loneliness, and serve as a context that can enhance autonomy (Louw & Louw, 2014b:370; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:427).

However, excessive conformity can have a negative influence on the adolescent. Peer pressure is greater during adolescence and may put the child at risk of engaging in negative behaviour such as stealing or substance use (Berk, 2013:625-626; Louw & Louw, 2014b:370; Santrock, 2009:395).

2.6.1.5 Moral development

Adolescents have the cognitive capacity for abstract and hypothetical thought and are thus able to reflect on values and moral standards (Sigelman & Rider 2009:392). Lawrence Kohlberg, in his theory of moral development, divided moral development into six stages (Santrock, 2009:324). Most adolescents are seen to function according to Stage 3 of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, however early adolescents tend to function according to Stage 2 while late adolescents may function according to Stage 4 (Santrock, 2009:325; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:393).

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Children who function according to Stage 2 conform to rules out of self-interest, based on the attainment of some reward (Louw & Louw, 2014e:291-292; Papalia et al., 2008:451-452). Children in Stage 3 want to please others and 'good' behaviour is motivated by the wish to gain the approval of others (Louw & Louw, 2014b:381; Papalia et al., 2008:451-452). They want to obey rules in order to promote social harmony and place emphasis on being trustworthy, loyal, respectful, and helpful (Berk, 2013:501). In Stage 4, moral behaviour is based on social conscience, where the primary concern is about doing one's duty, respecting higher authority, and maintaining social order (Louw & Louw, 2014b:328; Papalia et al., 2008:453).

Moral development is closely related to a person's cognitive and perspective-taking skills (Berk, 2013:503). In their internalisation and understanding of moral norms, adolescents tend to focus on reciprocity in interpersonal interactions, while their behaviour is increasingly linked to moral reasoning (Berk, 2013:513).

2.6.2 The adolescent male in the Xhosa culture

The Xhosa people are one of the South African ethnic groups, composed of related groups of Bantu-speaking people who live in the South Eastern region of South Africa up to the border of the area that is called Kwa-Zulu Natal (The Diagram Group, 2000:243; Joyce, 2010:38; Magubane 1998:12). More than three quarter of the population in the Eastern Cape speak IsiXhosa and IsiXhosa is the second most spoken language in South Africa (Cekiso & Meyiwa, 2014:75; Statistics South Africa, 2012:24-25).

2.6.2.1 The influence of culture on the adolescent

The Xhosa is part of the three main cultural-linguistic groups that form part of the larger Nguni language group in South Africa. As the Nguni group conforms to a collectivist culture, the self is seen in terms of the person's social relations and roles, and related to his/her functioning in the social context (Valchev et al., 2011:3-4, 28). The norms and practices in collectivist cultures will have an influence on the development of adolescents (Ntombana, 2009:73).

For adolescents who grow up in collectivist cultures, the *self* is to a large extent defined as it relates to others, and is understood in terms of the person's social roles and commitments (Louw & Louw, 2014b:354). The formation of the adolescent's identity will therefore include the value orientation of his culture. Ethnic identity development is an aspect of identity formation and is linked to feelings of ethnic pride, a sense of belonging to the ethnic group, and positive feelings towards the ethnic group (Gushue & Whitson, 2006:115). The Xhosa people emphasise the importance of initiation rituals to provide young people with the opportunity to establish their cultural identity according to their gender (Tseng, 2003:33).

The development of adolescent males who grow up in the Xhosa culture, is thus significantly influenced by the cultural norms and practices of the community. The Xhosa people are committed to preserving their cultural customs as a way to define and identify themselves, which for males also apply to their masculinity (Ntombana, 2009:73). For the Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape, circumcision is a rite that is practiced as part of the initiation process to prepare adolescent males for their roles in adulthood (Louw & Louw, 2014b:309).

2.6.2.2 The male initiation ritual

The circumcision ritual is regarded as the main definer of the Xhosa male (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). The circumcision ritual is a rite of passage between childhood and adulthood, after which adolescents are then regarded as men, symbolically leaving behind their boyhood (Mtumane, 2004:36, Mtuze, 2004:41, Mwanmenda, 2004:410; Nkosi 2013:119; Wilcken, Keil & Dick, 2010:907). Venter (2011:89) describes this transition as follows:

> For the Xhosa male, initiation serves as a transfer from boyhood (ubukhwenkwe) to manhood (ubudoda). Through initiation a boy attains his position as a respected member of the community, as well as his personal independence. It bestows on him private and public authority as a man …

Initiation rites as a traditional practice have been observed by many cultural groups worldwide, amongst others in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, Australia, Asia and in other parts of the world (Silverman, 2004:425). In South Africa the

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Nguni group, which includes the AmaXhosa, practices this tradition as well (Hammond-Tooke, 1974:229). The Xhosa started circumcision as far back as 1789 (Meel, 2005:58). It is estimated that 80% of Xhosa males still practice this custom to date, with no evidence of its discontinuation (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtumane, 2004:36; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). It was only chief Faku of the Pondo clan who banished the circumcision ritual in 1867 (Papu & Verster, 2006:179). As a result, among the Pondo people within Xhosa speaking communities, this ritual is not as widely practiced as in the rest of the Xhosa speaking communities.

It is evident that the initiation custom still has significant value for the Xhosa speaking people as it is reported that in recent years, annually approximately 10 000 males undergo this ritual among Xhosa speaking communities in the Eastern Cape (Vincent, 2008:434). The Xhosa tribe is committed to preserving circumcision as their cultural customs so as to define themselves as males and as a tribal group (Ntombana, 2009:73). The eligibility criteria for male circumcision in the Xhosa speaking communities, is only the age factor, which is determined as 15 to 25 years (Meintjies, 1998:7). For Xhosa adolescents, circumcision is done based on the father's personal identity as linked to his family lineage, clan and ethnic heritage (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). This link in respect to family, tribe, clan, and ethnicity makes the circumcision ritual the main definer for adolescent males in Xhosa speaking communities (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410).

2.6.2.3 The importance of initiation

Initiation has important implications for the Xhosa adolescent male. Meissner and Buso (2007:372) indicate that among most of the traditional communities, such as the Xhosa, a man cannot marry or inherit until he had been initiated. Initiation results in a socially approved adult status, gaining full membership in the community, and assuming greater rights and responsibilities related to it. These authors indicate that the community looks down on uninitiated males. Initiation is thus important for the personal and ethnic identity of the Xhosa male.

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For Xhosa speaking communities, the circumcision ritual is not just the removal of the foreskin of the penis, but a holistic cultural concept with religious, spiritual, social, and biomedical components (Peltzer, Nqeketho, Petros & Kanta, 2008:64; Wilcken et al., 2010:907). In these communities the circumcision ritual has been accepted as a principal form of initiation for boys (Magubane, 1998:33; Mavundla, Netswera, Toth, Bottoman & Tenge, 2010:931; Wilcken et al., 2010:907). Boys are made to feel uncomfortable about not undergoing this ritual (Meintjies, 1998:103) and they cannot marry or inherit until they have completed the circumcision process (Meissner & Buso, 2007:372).

Proper execution of the initiation ritual according to tradition is of paramount importance among the Xhosa speaking communities and is of significant psychological value to males who underwent the ritual (Bottoman, Mavundla & Toth, 2009:28). The process involves procedures with symbols and meanings attached to it, and the traditional practice thereof remains very important among the Xhosa people (Papu & Verster, 2006:178). The circumcision ritual is composed of different phases:

- **The separation phase**

As the initiation ritual among Xhosa males is secretive, initiates have to undergo the process away from their familiar environment, with a different routine to which they have to adjust (Ntombana, 2009:75; Vincent, 2008:434). Grass huts, referred to as a circumcision school, are usually built and the initiates generally stay there for four weeks, until properly healed (Bottoman et al., 2009:29). A traditional surgeon or "ingcibi" customarily performs the actual physical removal of the foreskin, while traditional nurses ("amakhankatha") who are the experienced men, are responsible for care of the wounds by applying ointments made of herbs (Bottoman et al., 2009:29; Mavundla, Netswera, Bottoman & Toth, 2009:931). Louw and Louw (2014b:310) note that "circumcision performed by medical practitioners is believed to be inferior to the traditional way." Elders in the community further teach the initiates to preserve their manhood (Mavundla et al., 2009:931).

- **The transition phase**

During the transition phase the initiates are taught appropriate behaviours for the new life stage they are entering into, namely manhood (Ntombana, 2009:75). Different strategies are implemented to make the initiation a tough experience and a relatively long journey which will prepare the initiates to withstand difficult and challenging times as men and future leaders of their households (Ntombana, 2009:75).

- **The incorporation phase**

This phase is signified by the burning of the hut where the initiates were staying, where after they bath in the river, discard the old clothes they were wearing at the time they came for the initiation ritual, and return to their respective homes, wearing new blankets that symbolise the break with the past (Vincent, 2008:435). Adolescents are then regarded as men, symbolically leaving behind their boyhood (Mtuze, 2004:41; Mtumane 2004:36; Mwammenda, 2004:410; Nkosi 2013:119). Initiates are now formally admitted into their new roles of graduates to manhood (Ntombana, 2009:75). A celebration ceremony is held where all initiates gather together to celebrate their change in status and where the elders give them words of wisdom concerning different life issues so as to prepare them for adult life (Ntombana, 2009:75).

2.6.2.4 The role of the father

Among the Xhosa communities, it has been a deep rooted tradition for boys in the adolescent stage to form their identity and belonging in relation to gender and family (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). Fathers are seen as the carriers of the family lineage and determine the structural system and beliefs of the family (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410; Saracho & Spodek, 2008:821). The development of personal identity of the Xhosa adolescent male is therefore closely linked with the father, as personal identity is based on the family lineage, clan and ethnic heritage of the father (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). The circumcision ritual is a marker for the identity of young males and is linked to the father's personal identity, which in turn is based on his family lineage, clan, and ethnic heritage (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). The father thus plays a significant role in the initiation of the Xhosa

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adolescent male, who will define his own identity according to his father's family, tribe, clan, and ethnicity (Momoti, 2002:50; Mtuze, 2004:41; Mwamwenda, 2004:410).

Venter (2011:568) asserts that women's role in the circumcision ritual is one of "no access and no input" due to the fear that the ancestors may bring bad luck onto the adolescent child. The mother of the child is therefore not involved in the initiation ritual.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter the researcher presented literature on marital separation and divorce, the effects thereof on the children in the family, the adolescent development phase, and the adolescent male in the context of the Xhosa culture. This information serves as a background for the presentation of the research findings of this study, which focused on the experience of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. The research findings will be presented in Chapter 3, after a description of the research methodology and the ethical considerations of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Similar to divorce, marital separation that leads to the permanent breakdown of the parents' marriage can have a substantial effect on the children. However, marital separation does not involve legal processes where consideration of the best interests of the child forms a critical part of the proceedings. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. The research findings are presented in this chapter. First, the research methodology and the ethical considerations for the study will be discussed.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology are discussed according to the research approach, type of research, research design, study population and sampling, data collection, data analysis as well as the pilot study.

3.2.1 Research approach

The study was based on a qualitative research approach (Babbie & Mouton, 2005:81; Bless et al., 2013:38), as the goal of the research was to gain an understanding of how Xhosa adolescent males experienced the marital separation of their parents. Information was collected about different dimensions of the participants' experiences, such as experiences related to their developmental needs and participation in cultural practices. The researcher intended to gain a comprehensive view of the problem being investigated (Creswell, 2009:37). The purpose of the research was exploratory and descriptive, as the researcher wished to gain insight into the research topic, and present a picture of the phenomenon based on the views of the participants (Bless et al., 2013:57; Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96).

3.2.2 Type of research

The type of research in this study was applied research, as the study focused on a social issue in practice (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Neuman, 2006:27). In her work as social worker in a Xhosa speaking community, the researcher became aware of many Xhosa adolescent males whose parents' marriages were informally terminated by marital separation. Through this research the researcher attempted to gain an understanding of how Xhosa adolescent males experienced the marital separation of their parents, with the intention that the information could be used to consider social work services to these adolescents.

3.2.3 Research design

The researcher explored the lived experiences or the life-world of a group of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents and therefore a phenomenological research design was followed (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:317; Welman et al., 2012:191). The researcher explored how the participants experienced their parent's marital separation and the meaning they ascribed to the phenomenon. As phenomenology emphasises the personal experiences of research participants (Bless et al., 2013:394), the phenomenological design helped the researcher to better understand the experiences of the participants within the context of the Xhosa culture. This aspect was important for the researcher, as she could find no research that specifically explored the experiences of marital separation by children in the Xhosa communities.

3.2.4 Research methods

In this section the study population and sampling, data collection, and data analysis will be described. The aspect of trustworthiness will also be discussed.

3.2.4.1 Study population and sampling

Sampling in this study entailed the process of selecting a number of Xhosa adolescent males who experienced the marital separation of their parents, as participants in the study (Kumar, 2005:164). The population from which the sample was selected (Welman et al., 2012:52) consisted of all Xhosa adolescent males who experienced the marital

separation of their parents and who were known to the Umtshinga Community Drop-in Organisation in Port Shepstone near the border of Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the research from the organisation (the letter of permission is attached as Appendix A). Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the local authorities (Strydom, 2011:118). The Nsimbini Traditional Council in Port Shepstone provided permission for the research to be conducted (the letter of permission is attached as Appendix B).

As the researcher was interested in cases that were most relevant to the study, non-probability sampling was used, which is sampling without equal opportunities for participants to be selected (Strydom & Delport, 2011:391). The sample was selected according to certain sampling criteria, thus purposive sampling was utilised (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392; Welman et al., 2012:69). The researcher obtained the assistance of the social workers at the Umtshinga Community Drop-in Organisation to identify participants for the research. The following sampling criteria applied to the study:

- Adolescent males between the age of 14 and 18 years
- Adolescent males who belong to the Xhosa population group
- Adolescent males whose parents separated by marital separation instead of a legal divorce
- Adolescent males who reside with their mothers
- The marital separation should have lasted for at least one year
- Participants should be able to converse in Xhosa or English
- Participants should not be on the caseload of the researcher.

During the sampling process, the researcher became aware that the marital separation of parents appeared to be a sensitive issue in the community, with the result that it presented a challenge to find adolescent males who were willing to participate in the study, although they complied with the sampling criteria. Sampling therefore took longer than expected. Data was collected from a sample of 10 participants and data saturation was obtained (Greeff, 2011:350). Based on the quality of information obtained during the pilot interviews, the apparent hesitance of adolescent males to talk about the phenomenon, and the lack of research on the topic, the researcher decided to add the

two participants in the pilot study to the sample. These participants complied with the all the sampling criteria, and they and their mothers provided their consent for participation in the study. The final sample of the study thus consisted of 12 participants.

3.2.4.2 Data collection and pilot study

The researcher used interviewing as a data collection method. The interview is regarded as a social relationship intended to exchange information between the researcher and the participants who possess the knowledge that the researcher seeks (De Poy & Gilson, 2008:108; Punch, 2005:168). Interviewing is an appropriate method for collecting data on complex and sensitive issues (Kumar, 2005:131) and was therefore suitable for exploring the participants' experiences of the marital separation of their parents, which seemed to be a sensitive issue in the community where the research was conducted.

The in-depth interview is usually suggested for exploration of the lived experiences of participants (Greeff, 2011:348). However, the researcher made use of semi-structured one-to-one interviews (Greeff, 2011:351-352; Welman et al., 2012:166) as she was interested in exploring specific aspects of the participants' experiences. The researcher constructed an interview schedule to allow her to focus on the aspects she wanted to explore (Monette et al., 2005:178). The interview schedule guided the interviews, while also allowing for flexibility in conducting the interviews and for observation of the non-verbal cues of the participants while exploring the phenomenon (Kumar, 2005:131). To capture data effectively, the interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants (Creswell, 2009:183; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:143). The interviews were conducted in Xhosa, which was the home language of the participants. The researcher is fluent in the language. The interview schedule in Xhosa as well as in English is attached as Appendix C.

A pilot study was conducted with two adolescents who complied with the sampling criteria for the study. The pilot study helped the researcher to determine whether the interview schedule was clear and whether appropriate information could be collected during the interviews (Welman et al., 2012:148). As indicated above, these two adolescents were included in the final research sample.

3.2.4.3 Data analysis

Having collected qualitative data, the researcher used non-numeric analysis to discover underlying themes that would aid the understanding of the phenomenon that was studied (Babbie, 2011:397). The researcher implemented the following steps in the analysis of qualitative data, as outlined by Schurink et al. (2011:404-419):

- **Preparing and organising the data**

The researcher planned for the recording of data and arranged a suitable setting in which the interviews could be conducted (Schurink et al., 2011:404-405). She also obtained informed consent and assent for the research prior to the interviews, and prepared to make field notes to keep an account of what she observed during the interviews.

- **Data collection and preliminary analysis**

Data analysis started in the field during the interviews and was followed by further analysis after the interviews were conducted (Schurink et al., 2011:405). The researcher was able to identify preliminary themes in the data while conducting the interviews, and explored these themes (Bless et al., 2013:22). After the interviews, the researcher organised and stored the data for further analysis.

- **Managing the data**

The researcher converted the recorded data into text by transcribing the recordings of the interviews (Schurink et al., 2011:408). Interviews were conducted in the Xhosa language and were for the purpose of the research translated into English. With the transcription of the interviews, the researcher started to become acquainted with the data. The researcher ensured that all transcripts and field notes were complete and cleared of any information that could identify the participants (Bless et al., 2013:341). She made a master copy of all the files, as well as a document which was used for data analysis.

- **Reading and writing memos**

The researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to ensure that she became thoroughly acquainted with the data (Schurink et al., 2011:409-410). Bless et al. (2013:342) describe

this as the "foundational step in qualitative data analysis" as it helps the researcher to get an idea of the total data set. Short notes or phrases were used to highlight key concepts or ideas. This process assisted the researcher to critically reflect on the data to identify possible themes and deeper meanings in the data.

- **Generating categories and coding the data**

Through reading the transcripts, the researcher identified recurring themes, ideas and patterns related to the participants' experiences of the marital separation of their parents (Schurink et al., 2011:410). The process involved that data themes were categorised and coded (Bless et al., 2013:342). Similar themes were grouped together into categories and were labeled with text codes (Schurink et al., 2011:411-412).

- **Testing emergent understandings**

The researcher looked for connections between the data categories (Schurinck et al., 2011:415-416). She further considered the relationship between these categories, the usefulness of the data to portray the findings of the research, and how information that was not in the data might be important for the data analysis (Neuman, 2006:452; Schurinck et al., 2011:415).

- **Interpreting data and developing typologies**

In this step, the researcher looked for lessons that had been learnt from the data analysis (Schurink et al., 2011:416-417). This step involved that the researcher compared the data with existing literature on the topic. In the interpretation of the data the researcher also took the objectives of the research and the research question into consideration (Bless et al., 2013:347).

- **Presenting the data**

The findings of the research were organised according to themes and sub-themes that was obtained in the data, and are presented in this research report (Schurink et al., 2011:418).

3.2.4.4 Assessing the quality of the research

The researcher endeavored to enhance the trustworthiness of the research, thus the level of trust one can assign to the research process and findings (Bless et al., 2013:236). Firstly, the researcher ensured that she followed the research process as indicated in this report in order to enhance the dependability and the credibility of the research (Bless et al., 2013:236-237; Schurink et al., 2011:420). The researcher further used specific strategies to ensure that the research undertaken would be trustworthy, namely member checking, reflexivity, and peer debriefing (Lietz et al., 2006:447-451).

By means of member checking, the researcher clarified information with the participants during the interviews to ensure that she accurately understood the information obtained from them (Lietz et al., 2006:454). The clarification of the information with the participants helped the researcher to accurately report on the experiences of the participants regarding the marital separation of their parents.

Researchers need to be aware of the possibility that their personal bias could affect objective analysis of the data. In order to reduce the chances of personal bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity (Lietz et al., 2006:447-448; Schurink et al., 2011:422). The researcher was aware that her personal perceptions on marital separation could influence her objectivity and therefore consciously guarded against subjectivity during the interpretation of the data.

The researcher further engaged in peer debriefing in order to counteract possible personal bias and to enrich the researcher's understanding of the data (Lietz et al., 2006:451). The researcher involved a social work colleague to review the data transcripts and engaged in a consensus discussion with her, in which agreement was reached regarding the themes and sub-themes the researcher identified. Schurinck et al. (2011:419-421) indicate that the outcome of the research has to be credible, dependable and transferable to improve its trustworthiness. Based on the small study sample, transferability could not be ensured.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting the research, the researcher was guided by ethical considerations which are regarded as a set of moral principles for researchers (Strydom, 2011:114). The consideration of ethical principles helped the researcher to find a balance between seeking scientific knowledge and protecting the research participants (Bless et al., 2013:27; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:140; Neuman, 2006:129). The following ethical principles were considered to be most appropriate for the current study:

3.3.1   Avoidance of harm

Due to the hesitance that was found among adolescents who were approached to participate in the research, the researcher was fully aware of the fact that the marital separation of their parents could be a sensitive issue for the adolescent participants. She was therefore aware of the possibility of emotional harm (Strydom, 2011:115). Additionally, children and young people are regarded as vulnerable research populations (Bless et al., 2013:34) and the researcher kept this in mind throughout the research. The researcher attempted to avoid harm to the participants by informing them beforehand about the nature of the research and the potential impact of investigation, and also of their right to withdraw from the study at any time they felt like it (Strydom, 2011:116).

Participants were selected with the help of social workers who were familiar with the adolescents on their case loads. Adolescents who were regarded as being too vulnerable were not approached for the study (Strydom, 2011:115). The researcher made provision that any participant who displayed emotional distress during the course of the research could be referred for counselling to the social worker who was responsible for the child and family at the organisation. No participants had to be referred for counselling. In fact, five participants emphasised the value of the research interview for them, as they did not have any opportunity to discuss the matter prior to the research interview. This is an indication that research could also contribute to the well-being of participants, which Bless et al. (2013:29) describe as beneficence.

3.3.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

The researcher made participants aware of the goal of the study (Kumar, 2005:212), namely that the research could contribute to a better understanding of the experiences Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. The research procedures, as well as the possible advantages and disadvantages of their participation in the study were explained to the participants in an informed assent letter (Strydom, 2011:117-118). The participants signed the informed assent letter so as to indicate that they were willing to participate in the study and that their participation was voluntary. Thus, the researcher also respected the decisions of a number of adolescents who wished not to take part in the study. The fact that participants could withdraw from the research at any time, with no negative consequences for them, was stated in the letter of informed assent (Bless et al., 2006:143-144). Permission was also asked to digitally record the interviews. The opportunity for counselling in case participants experienced emotional distress due to the research, was explained (Bless et al., 2013:33; Kumar, 2005:212). The participants' views regarding the research process were determined before the interviews were conducted and they were encouraged to raise questions and concerns before, during and after the study (Strydom, 2011:117-118).

As the participants were minors, written consent from the parent in whose care they were, was also obtained (Kumar, 2005:212). The written consent letter contained detailed information about their child's participation in the research.

The researcher translated the informed consent and assent letters into Xhosa for parents or participants who were less familiar with the English language. The researcher requested two Xhosa-speaking colleagues to verify the correctness of the translation. The letter of informed assent for the participants (in English and in Xhosa) is attached as Appendix D. The written consent letter for the parents, also in English and Xhosa, is attached as Appendix E.

3.3.3 Deception of respondents

The researcher ensured that no deception occurred during the study. She provided the research participants with detailed and accurate information on the research and did not

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mislead the participants in any way (Strydom, 2011:119). In the unforeseen case where information was unintentionally misinterpreted, the researcher would rectify it immediately (Bless et al., 2013:34). However, this did not occur during the research.

3.3.4 Violation of confidentiality and anonymity and privacy

The researcher was aware of the sensitive nature of the research and therefore regarded confidentiality and privacy as important (Babbie, 2011:40). Anonymity could not be ensured as the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants.

The researcher respected privacy (Strydom, 2011:119) by allowing each participant to decide to what extent he was willing to discuss information about his experiences of the marital separation of his parents. Confidentiality was upheld by handling all information, including the identity of the participants and the information shared during the interviews, in a confidential manner (Bless et al., 2006:143; Strydom, 2011:120). Therefore the transcripts of the interviews were coded, so that no-one but the researcher would be able to link information with a particular participant. Also, no participant would be identifiable in the research report. The raw data are securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, according to the stipulations of the University of Pretoria.

3.3.5 Actions and competence of the researcher

The researcher ensured that she is competent to conduct the research (Bless et al., 2006:140; Punch, 2006:277). She completed a theoretical module in research methodology as part of her Master's degree and, being aware of the sensitivity of the topic, utilised the interviewing skills and principles of the Social Work profession during the data collection interviews. The research results were accurately presented and plagiarism avoided by acknowledging the work of others in the research report (Bless et al., 2006:145).

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (refer Appendix F). The researcher ensured that she adhered to the ethical requirements throughout the research study (Strydom, 2011:123). She did not enforce her values on the participants, maintained a neutral

stance and refrained from judging participants either by her values or other values. The customs of the Xhosa speaking community were respected at all times by the researcher as it encouraged full participation by the participants (Strydom, 2011:123). The researcher is fluent in English and Xhosa and could conduct the interviews in the home language of the participants.

3.3.6 Debriefing

Participants were provided with an opportunity for debriefing after the completion of the interviews. Debriefing gave them the opportunity to talk about their experiences of the research process in a supportive environment as well as the opportunity to reflect on and work through these experiences (Welman et al., 2012:118). On completion of the research, the researcher made sure that the participants had no misconceptions that stemmed from their participation in the study (Strydom, 2011:122). The sensitive nature of the research topic made debriefing a critical step in the research. During debriefing some of the participants, as mentioned under point 3.3.1, highlighted the value of the research in providing an opportunity to talk about their experiences of the marital separation of their parents.

3.3.7 Release or publication of findings

As research is intended to be of value to the wider reading public (Strydom, 2011:126), the findings of the study are presented in this research report. The research findings are accurately presented (Bless et al., 2013:35; Kumar, 2005:215) and the research report is available at University of Pretoria in the format of a mini-dissertation. A feedback session on the research findings was presented to the social workers at the organisation where the research participants were recruited.

3.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The empirical findings of the study are presented in this section. Firstly, the researcher provides the biographical information of the participants. Thereafter the empirical findings of the study are presented according to themes and sub-themes.

3.4.1 Section A: Biographical profile of the participants

The sample of the study consisted of 12 participants who were Xhosa adolescent males between ages of 14 and 18 years. Most of the participants were between 16 and 18 years of age. Their age distribution is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Age distribution of the participants

Age	Number of participants
14	1
15	1
16	4
17	3
18	3
Total	**12**

All the participants spoke Xhosa. Eight (8) participants were in high school, one (1) participant had just completed his schooling, and three (3) participants reported that they dropped out of school because they could not deal with the emotional impact of the separation of their parents. One of the participants who dropped out of school was considering going back to school as he felt that he has learnt to more effectively handle the marital separation of his parents, who had been separated for two years at the time of the research. The other two participants indicated that they were still not able to concentrate in school as a result of their parents' separation. Both these participants' parents had been separated for almost two years.

All the participants' parents had been separated for longer than 18 months. The length of parental separation in years is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Number of years the parents had been separated

Number of years parents have been separated	Number of participants
1 – 2 years	3
2 – 3 years	3
3 – 4 years	4
4 – 5 years	2
Total:	**12**

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All of the participants lived with their mothers after the marital separation of their parents. All the mothers worked full time; six (6) in professional fields and six (6) in non-professional fields. In all cases, the participants' parents had been separated for a period of between one and five years. Two (2) participants were only children, while ten participants had siblings living in the home. Of the latter, three (3) were first born children and had younger siblings, while seven (7) participants were middle children and had both older and younger siblings living in the home.

3.4.2 Section B: Qualitative research findings

Data for the study was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in Xhosa as it was the home language of the participants. The findings of the study are presented in this section and are discussed according to themes and sub-themes identified from the data. For the purpose of the study, the direct quotes from the interviews that are used to support the discussion of the findings are presented in English. The themes and sub-themes are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Themes and sub-themes in qualitative findings

Main themes	Sub-themes
1. Marital separation not openly dealt with	1.1 Participants not formally informed about marital separation 1.2 Participants found out about marital separation in indirect ways 1.3 Topic of marital separation not addressed over the longer term
2. Relationships with the parents and extended family	2.1 Relationship with the father 2.2 Relationship with the mother 2.3 Relationship with members of the extended family
3. The effects of parents' marital separation on the participants	3.1 Material needs and physical care 3.2 Emotional impact of parental separation 3.3 Effects on schooling and education 3.4 Effects on the participant's self-perception and self-esteem 3.5 Involvement with the peer group 3.6 Cultural practices
4. Coping strategies	4.1 Positive self-talk 4.2 Taking control and responsibility for self 4.3 Support from others
5. Advice for parents who separate	5.1 Participants' views on marital separation 5.2 Informing children about parental separation 5.3 Continued care and contact 5.4 Prevent continued parental conflict

The above themes and sub-themes are subsequently discussed.

3.4.2.1 Theme 1: Marital separation not openly dealt with

The research findings indicated that the parents' marital separation was a topic that was not openly dealt with within the nuclear family. Most of the participants mentioned that their parents did not inform them about their marital separation, while it seems that the

topic was not addressed for quite some time after the participants' parents separated. These aspects are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 1.1: Participants not formally informed about the marital separation**

Eleven of the 12 participants indicated that they were not informed by their parents about the marital separation. The following quotes by participants highlight this situation:

> "I saw (the separation) through the problems that were taking place (in the home) … We then moved to stay in (another city). It was then that I found out (about the parents' separation)." (Participant 2)

> "My mom said let us go and stay with my brother. I love my brother and I wanted to stay with him. I went under the impression that I will stay with him … I then discovered that my parents have separated. … I saw that we were staying (with the brother) and not going anywhere and my mom was not visiting my dad." (Participant 9)

> "I was not aware that they separated … Nobody told me what was happening. I saw, observed and concluded that they have separated. … I did not ask anything but I observed that they split up." (Participant 11)

The findings of the study indicate that only one out of 12 participants was formally informed of the marital separation of his parents. The other participants became aware of the parental separation by observing changes within the household, for example that they moved to another house, that the father left the home, or that they moved in with the extended family. The fact that parents withhold information about their marital separation from their children, is highlighted in the literature. Parents often withhold information from the children in an attempt to protect their children from emotional distress (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Glasser, 2002:74; Kelly & Emery, 2003:353; Robinson et al., 2003:78). It is estimated that only about five percent (5 %) of children of parents who separate are informed about the situation (Dunne, Davies, O'Connor & Sturgess, 2001 as cited in Kelly & Emery, 2003:353). The literature indicates that the majority of fathers leave the family home without formally greeting their children (Burns & Dunlop, 2002:60) which appeared to happen to most of the participants in this study.

The findings of the study further support literature that, in contrast to parental divorce, parents who separate often do not make formal arrangements for the care of their

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children (Pieterse, 2007:58). This could add to the high degree of instability and uncertainty that is characteristic of marital separation (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294).

- **Sub-theme 1.2: Participants found out about marital separation in indirect ways**

Some participants' suspicions regarding the separation of the parents were later confirmed by relatives or by their mothers. Two participants mentioned that they were only informed about the separation of their parents after they specifically asked their mothers about the situation at home:

> "I was told by my mother … because I asked her as to where my father was, as I hear in the township (that they separated). My mother then told me." (Participant 4)

> "My mother (told me) when I asked her as to where my father really is. She then told me what happened between them that led to their separation." (Participant 5)

Another participant overheard his mother speaking to the neighbours about the marital separation:

> "Nobody told me … I heard my mother talking with our neighbour, saying that she has separated from my dad." (Participant 7)

Three participants were informed about their parents' marital separation by members of the family:

> "I did not know that they were not close anymore until my sister told me … About a year later, she (the mother) came and told me." (Participant 3)

> "No, I heard that (parental separation) from a close relative." (Participant 2)

> "One day, my dad fought with my mother and left us, and never came back to stay with us. As I was growing up I was hoping that he was going to come back. … My sister told me that I do not have a father anymore (that the parents separated)." (Participant 6)

Participant 3 expressed that he would have preferred that his parents personally informed him of their separation, instead of having to hear it from others. He mentioned:

> "I wanted the explanation to come from my parents. … I wish when parents separate they could get back to the child, at least one of them, and tell you your mother or father has done this, and that is why you don't see him and

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you see only me staying with you. … so children will grow knowing clearly what happened." (Participant 3)

Parents who are in conflict with one another are often so involved in their own issues that they overlook the needs of the children in the household (Basson, 2003:1; Bezuidenhout, 2006:2). Withholding information about parental separation usually increases the children's emotional distress (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Robinson et al., 2003:78). Anderson and Sabatelli (2011:295) point out that parental separation tend to cause confusion for children, as they are not sure whether or not both parents are still part of their lives. As mentioned by Participant 3, children need information so that they can make sense of the parents' separation and cope better with their changing circumstances (Cartwright, 2006:132; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397). It seems that for some participants there was no discussion of the parents' marital separation over an extended period of time.

- **Sub-theme 1.3: Topic of marital separation not addressed over the longer term**

It appears that the topic of the marital separation of the parents was not spoken about, even some time after the parents split up. The participants mentioned the following in this regard:

> "There has never been a time we discussed this." (Participant 5)

> "Until today … nothing has been said." (Participant 9)

> "Since you are talking about Xhosa speaking people … one will be encouraged to be strong as you are a male person." (Participant 1)

> "I do not get into details. I'm just normal just like other people. I don't want to share information. I keep it simple like everybody. I don't like to share such information." (Participant 8)

> "When it happened, I would entertain this pain for long as I was not able to share it with anyone at home." (Participant 12)

It seems that for some participants, the topic of the parents' marital separation was never discussed, while other participants chose not to discuss the situation. One participant was of the opinion that cultural norms would require of him to "act like a man" and not discuss painful issues with others.

Some participants felt that it would have helped them to talk about their parents' separation and mentioned the consequences of not openly discussing the topic:

> "I do not know the reasons why my mother and father separated. So I get anxious." (Participant 4)

> "I looked, thought and could not understand (the situation)." (Participant 1)

> "Maybe it can make me understand more and feel right if my father could come and talk to me about what happened." (Participant 5)

When parents separate, children become voiceless members of the family with no one to listen to them or help them to make sense of the life changes they experience (Cartwright, 2006:132). Their situation is reported to be to be worse than bereavement, where the loss is usually discussed and the pain is shared (Lleras, 2008:1270). With parental separation, many children therefore do not have the opportunity to openly deal with their loss and the changes in their lives. Some of the changes the participants had to deal with, related to the relationships with their parents, as will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.2.2 Theme 2: Relationships with the parents and extended family

The research findings indicate that the marital separation of the parents affected the participants' relationships within the family system, especially the relationship with the father.

- **Sub-theme 2.1: Relationship with the father**

Half of the participants experienced that the relationship with their father remained positive after the marital separation of the parents, while the other half experienced it as negative. Participants described the positive relationship with their fathers as follows:

> "We get along very well with my dad. No problem, we talk." (Participant 7)

> "Yes, I visit him during holidays … I feel that he cares and he loves me. … He gives us the love we want as children and also attend to our school matters. … My father is very supportive." (Participant 2)

> "At this moment it (the relationship) is good and improving." (Participant 8)

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> "I realised that both (parents) have personal grudges against each other, so this is not about me." (Participant 1)

It seems that the active involvement of the father, as well as the realisation that their father still loved them and that the problem was between the parents and not with the children, helped some of the participants to maintain a good relationship with their fathers. The above quotes indicate that children seem to cope better with their parents' separation when the parents regularly demonstrate their love to the children (Pedro-Carrol, 2011:4).

Other participants had a negative relationship with their fathers after the marital separation of their parents. Two participants mentioned that the relationship with their fathers were strained even before their parents separated:

> "There was never a relationship between my father and me." (Participant 11)

> "It is very difficult. My father is the kind of person who has his own way of believing and doing things. He does not need anybody's input because he does what he believes is right and does not care how uncomfortable you are." (Participant 3).

Marital separation is generally a lengthy process and family relationships are often strained long before the actual separation of the parents (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2911:294). This was evident in the quotes above.

Some participants expressed the wish to maintain contact with their father, however for some this contact was hampered by the mother or by the father's neglect to make contact. Other participants wished not to have contact with their fathers. These aspects are highlighted in the following examples:

> "The fact that I visited my cousins … (It is because) I wanted to be closer to my father." (Participant 2)

> "Even though my mother was doing everything for me, there were things she could not do especially pertaining to giving guidance and advice as my father would do." (Participant 5)

> "My mother sometimes does not allow me to see my dad. I do not know why." (Participant 9)

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"I wish he would contact me or visit me, but nothing happened as he was quiet. … It was boiling inside me and hurting me so much." (Participant 12)

"I do not wish to do so … even if I could see him I would not want to." (Participant 10)

"I do not need anything that will hurt me (referring to contact with the father)." (Participant 3)

As is evident from the above quotes, some participants wished to have contact with their fathers. Fathers play a significant role in the lives of adolescent males (Saracho & Spodek, 2008:1). Adolescents may experience anger, anxiety, depression and guilt after the marital separation of their parents, as they miss the support of both parents to help them with their developmental tasks (Berk, 2013:591; Louw & Louw, 2014a:396). Boys tend to experience the separation from the father more intensely (Louw & Louw, 2014a:397; Wolfinger, 2005:12), which is evident in two of the quotes. As suggested in one of the quotes, it might also be that mothers use children as pawns against the father after the marital separation (Allen, 2013:120-122; Louw & Louw, 2014a:396).

- **Sub-theme 2.2: Relationship with the mother**

Most of the participants saw the relationships with their mother as positive. Some of the participants indicated reasons for this as the support they received from their mother and the fact that they could 'talk' to her. These aspects are illustrated by the following quotes:

"My mother is very supportive to me. As a single parent she is always trying her level best to do best for us." (Participant 2)

"She is able to share things with me … it will be nice. … It is very good." (Participant 3)

"My relationship with my mother is strong. … I can say it's about supporting one another, and having motherly love regardless of what is happening." (Participant 8)

One participant (Participant 9) indicated that he did not have a good relationship with his mother. The reasons for this were expressed as the mother's refusal to allow him to have contact with his father or spend time with the peer group. None of the participants indicated that their relationships with their siblings changed after the parents' separation.

After marital separation, children mostly remain in the care of the mother, while the father leaves the family home (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Dobson, 2002:142; Gill, 2000:226; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lansky, 2005:1; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111, Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy, 2008:124). It could thus be concluded that mothers play a key role in the emotional well-being of their children after marital separation. Parental support can moderate the effects of marital breakdown on the children (Esmaeli & Yacoob, 2011:9; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397). However, the supportive role may be difficult for mothers as they often experience economic pressure and emotional distress after the marital separation, which negatively affects their capacity to provide emotional support to their children (Bezuidenhout, 2006:2; Everett & Lee, 2006:113; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669; Henning, 2005:56).

- **Sub-theme 2.3: Relationship with members of the extended family**

The research findings indicate that most participants maintained positive relationships with members of the extended family on the paternal and maternal side after the marital separation of their parents. With regards to the **paternal family**, the value of positive relationships and contact with the father's family became clear in this study. One participant mentioned the following:

> "It is nice with the paternal family because my father belongs to them … their support was more. … My father was bringing us closer to his parents … they loved us and what happened between our parents did not change our relationship with them." (Participant 2)

Some of the participants mentioned that they did not know the extended family on the father's side, but wished to build a relationship with them. These views are highlighted in the following quotes:

> "I never had a chance to know his family. I don't know his sisters or family and that hurts me as my friends would talk about how they visit both maternal and paternal sides of their family in rural areas. I had no rural areas to visit my paternal family. That left a space in my heart." (Participant 12)

> "From my father's side, I don't talk to any person as I am not acquainted with them. … I don't know where to start in terms of establishing the relationship with them. Maybe as the time goes by, the relationship will build up." (Participant 11)

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Another participant wished to make contact with the father's family, however his mother prevented him from doing so. He mentioned:

> "Because they are a family that is more affluent than us, she tells us … we are coming from a poor background. We are not on that level. That means we will only see our cousins when we are old … that is why I feel bad." (Participant 7)

Literature highlights the importance of the father and the father's family lineage for providing Xhosa adolescent males with a sense of belonging and identity (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). This fact is notable in the words of the participants. Xhosa adolescent males who do not have the opportunity for contact with the father and the father's family might thus miss experiences that contribute to the development of their identity and ethnic identity (Gushue & Whitson, 2006:115). For adolescents who grow up in a collectivist culture such as the Xhosa the self is defined in terms of the person's social roles within the community (Valchev et al., 2011:2-4; Louw & Louw, 2014a:354). These aspects could be linked to some of the participants' wish to have contact with the members of the paternal family.

It appeared that most of the participants also had a positive relationship with the members of the **maternal family** and that they especially valued positive relationships with their cousins. For one participant the extended family on his mother's side seemed to fill the void of not having contact with the father's family. This participant stated the following:

> "From my mother's side, my grandparents are the ones I regard as my grandparents in that my grandfather taught me everything pertaining to a man's work such as taking care of sheep, cattle and goats. I regard my grandmother as my second mother in the way that I relate to her." (Participant 11)

The research findings show the importance of the extended family in the African context, which is a collective rather than an individualistic society (Bertera & Crewe, 2013:233-235). Contact with the extended family is important in cultures where a child's lineage determines his identity.

Parental separation generally has negative effects on the children in the family. The experiences of the participants regarding the personal effects of the marital separation of their parents are discussed in the following theme.

3.4.2.3 Theme 3: The effects of the parents' marital separation on the participants

The participants' responses provided evidence that the marital separation of their parents affected them in different ways. According to the ecological systems theory, what happens within the child's home (the microsystem) can affect the child's functioning in other systems, for example in the school and peer group (Berk, 2013:26). These effects are discussed in the sub-themes in this section.

- **Sub-theme 3.1: Material needs and physical care**

Seven of the 12 participants indicated that the marital separation of their parents had negative consequences in terms of meeting their material needs, while five participants indicated that it did not have an effect on this aspect of their lives. The following quotes are examples of the negative effects mentioned by participants:

> "I had no clothes and when I asked for them, nobody would buy me clothes. Only my grandmother bought me clothes, although she was struggling to do so as she had no money. She was also responsible for feeding me. Things such as school shoes and a uniform I did not have at all." (Participant 3)

> "I am told to wait for a long time before I can get something. Sometimes it does not even come and I forget about it because I see that my mother is not earning much so she cannot afford it. … I can understand that my mother cannot afford it." (Participant 6)

> "After their separation, things changed. My mother was left facing the stress of separation and that of meeting my physical needs as I needed clothes like other teenagers. However, she could not afford that, but I tried to accept the situation and not to let it affect my mind." (Participant 12)

> "It makes me feel bad because sometimes people you grow up with, you see their parents buying them stuff like bicycles and nobody would buy you one. So what I am trying to say is that it affected me a lot." (Participant 4)

Two participants explained how their parents would shift the responsibility of buying basic necessities for the children onto one another. These participants mentioned:

> "It affected me big time because when I wanted something from my mother, she would say 'go to your father and ask for it.' When I go to my father, he would say 'go to your mother and ask for it.' Even clothes … you ask one parent, they refer you to one another and you can see that they do not want to take responsibility as each feels the other should do it." (Participant 1)

> "My father would say 'go and ask your mother to buy for you.' My mother has spent the money on something else and then she would not have money. As a result, we would not have shoes for school and we will wait for months until she has money." (Participant 7)

Marital separation often involves a drop in income for the family and usually leads to financial difficulties, especially for mothers who are mostly the parent responsible for the care of the children after the separation (Basson, 2003:99; Benokraitis, 2011:437; Berk, 2013a:591; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:168; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625). Financial difficulties can contribute to continued conflict between the parents despite the fact that they have physically separated and live in different residences (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Thompson & Henderson, 2007:667). Children often get caught up in the conflict between the parents and become victims of the situation (Kelly & Emery, 2003:352; Marta, 2003:12; Samenow, 2002:31; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 2003:29). Thus, apart from affecting their physical care, parental separation can have a significant emotional impact on the children, as is discussed in the next section.

- **Sub-theme 3.2: Emotional impact of parental separation**

The information gained from the participants indicate that the marital separation of their parents had a substantial effect on their emotional well-being. Some participants explained this as follows:

> "It made me feel hurt in my heart. I had mixed feelings … wishing to prove to them that what they were doing affects you as a person. I was tearful much of the time … I could not control my emotions." (Participant 1)

> "I was deeply hurt by the situation of my parents. I used to keep quiet and at home they would not know what the problem was. … Emotionally, it did not leave me right, until today." (Participant 5)

> "At home I was always in my room crying and my mother was in her room as well. I had difficulty sleeping. I was very cross with everybody and would not talk to them … You feel very angry and feel like beating everything and

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physically hurting everyone so that they feel your pain as well." (Participant 6)

"Sometimes I was happy, sometimes sad, sometimes confused. … I had those questions (about) the fact that we are no longer a complete family." (Participant 8)

Children frequently present with emotional distress after the separation of their parents. This is often related to their anxiety as to who will provide in their needs for food, clothing, and shelter (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667, 669-670). Higher levels of emotional distress and uncertainty is also caused by parents providing insufficient information about the marital separation to their children (Bagshaw, 2007:459; Robinson et al., 2003:78). Literature further indicates that the custodial parent, usually the mother, may become so preoccupied with her own issues related to the marital separation that she may overlook the children's distress (Basson, 2003:1, Bezuidenhout, 2006:2). This fact was clearly indicated by Participants 5 and 6. Some participants indicated that their parents' separation also had an effect on their school work.

- **Sub-theme 3.3: Effect on schooling and education**

A number of participants experienced problems related to their school performance as a result of the marital separation of their parents. Some participants found it difficult to concentrate in school, especially shortly after the parents separated. They mentioned:

"My concentration was wandering. I was busy thinking about this situation (marital separation) while the teacher was talking. … My concentration and listening were affected at first but (later) I could concentrate … As a result there was no bad (school) reports." (Participant 2)

"At first I did not even do my school work … I just kept quiet and was looking at the wall in the classroom. I did not care about my school work." (Participant 6)

"I was always thinking about this problem, even at school. I was not concentrating in the classroom. … I was thinking that when I arrive home from school, my father is not there where he used to be … at home with my mother." (Participant 7)

Three participants dropped out of school after the marital separation of their parents. However, other participants were motivated by their situation to do well at school so that

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they could rise above their circumstances. In this regard Participant 8 mentioned the following:

> "It had an influence in my life in a very critical way. I would say there was a big influence in terms of passion, motivation to study. … this issue between my parents pushed me to achieve what I have achieved today. … I passed very well at school." (Participant 8)

One participant mentioned that for him, the absence of his father at school activities was especially hard to deal with. He stated:

> "At school there were activities that we needed to do which needed both parents to be there, but my father was not there. The worst part, he was not dead but alive. It would have been better if he was dead as it affected me more because he was still alive … he doesn't care about me. So I would end up not doing that task as I felt discouraged and hurt. This pain … I felt it a lot when I was alone." (Participant 12)

The literature indicates that children of parents who are divorced or separated tend to experience academic problems (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2; O'Brian, 2009:209; Kunz, 2011:247). These children are also more likely to drop out of school (Kelly, 2003 in Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:301), as was the case with three participants. In this study, a number of participants mentioned the challenges they experienced to concentrate on their school work as the marital separation of their parents was constantly in their thoughts. One participant felt rejected due to his father's lack of involvement in school activities. Only one participant used the situation as a motivation to rise above his circumstances.

- **Sub-theme 3.4: Effect on the participants' self-perception and self-esteem**

Some of the participants were of the opinion that the marital separation of their parents had a negative effect on their self-esteem, especially because their basic needs were not being met. They mentioned:

> "You look at other children, how they wear uniforms and then you look at yourself, and see that yours are old. … Maybe with the one shirt you have, you can wash it every day and mend it when it is torn. … I did not tell myself that this is the end of my life. But I saw that I am a loser because I was comparing myself with this and that person." (Participant 3)

> "I see myself as different from other children because I see myself lacking more than others. … If my dad was here, maybe he would buy me shoes so that I am like other children." (Participant 4)

Other participants' self-esteem was affected by the fact that they did not have an intact family unit like those of other children in the neighbourhood. They described their experiences as follows:

> "My confidence dropped as I saw that I was left with one parent. … I had low a self-esteem as I was unable to talk to other children as to what happened, as I was hiding it." (Participant 5)

> "I felt bad and that lowered my confidence … My confidence dropped, I chose to stay alone most of the time … I perceived myself as a weak person and my self-esteem was very low." (Participant 11)

> "I used to be extremely quiet and withdrawn, and felt different from other children. I was embarrassed. A lot of things happened at that time, but even with my friends I pretended that everything was right." (Participant 1)

Children often experience poor self-esteem and a poor self-concept after the separation of their parents, often because they feel that they are different to other children (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2). For the participants the feeling of being different to their peers was mainly related to two aspects: the fact that the family was different and the fact that they could not dress like their peers. For adolescents, it is important to fit in with the peer group and to conform to the peer group, for example in their clothes, music and hobbies (Berk, 2013:618; Louw & Louw, 2014b:370). Fitting in with the peer group can enhance an adolescent's self-esteem (Louw & Louw, 2014b:370; Sigelman & Rider, 2009:427). On the other hand, not fitting in with the peer group can have a negative impact on a child's self-esteem.

- **Sub-theme 3.5: Involvement with the peer group**

Some of the participants indicated that their participation in the peer group changed after their parents' separation. For some participants this change was related to the fact that they could not participate in discussions with peers who had both parents living in the home. Other participants indicated that they had to form new friendships because of moving to another area after the parents' separation. These aspects are evident in the following quotes:

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"When we are just talking in general (then I feel fine), but the minute they talk about fathers, I keep quiet, answer here and there but do not want to show that I am hiding something inside." (Participant 5)

"I felt different from other children. They liked to talk about their positive experiences at home like going out together as a family during weekends. I had nothing to say about my parents together. … I felt left behind in the conversations as their conversations were based on both parents living happily and my case was different from theirs." (Participant 11)

"I did not like to leave (my former home). I enjoyed staying there but due to the situation (parental separation) we had to move. I had nice friends in the (previous) neighbourhood." (Participant 2)

Three participants described how the marital separation of their parents made them to withdraw from the peer group. They explained it as follows:

"Even at school I was quiet and withdrawn. Other children ask me if I am happy and I will say I am happy, no problem." (Participant 5)

"Before my parents split I used to come from school and play with my friends in the playground, but I lost interest in that. When they want me to go and play with them I lie and say I am busy working at home … because I constantly think about this problem … I wanted time to be alone." (Participant 7)

"I decided to withdraw myself from my friends as I felt fragile inside. I felt that my situation was too painful and my friends were too young to understand my situation … maybe they would laugh at me. That is why I decided to withdraw from them. … They still needed me … it was me who withdrew from them as I felt fragile inside and didn't want to show that to them." (Participant 11)

Children whose parents have separated or divorced, tend to withdraw from the peer group because they often develop a poor self-concept and perceive themselves as different to their peers (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2; Gilmore & Bell, 2006:296). When parents separate, the family may move to a new home and children lose their old friends (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667), as was the case with Participant 2.

When children withdraw from the peer group, they cannot gain from the benefits that their peers and friends could offer them, such as meeting their emotional needs, companionship, social acceptance, loyalty, and support (Berk, 2013:614; McElhaney et

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al., 2008:720; Miller, 2010:164; Santrock, 2009:394). Social support can play a significant role in helping children, especially adolescents, to cope with parental separation (Esmaeli & Yacoob, 2011:9; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397). Some participants indicated that the marital separation of their parents also affected their participation in cultural practices.

- **Sub-theme 3.6: Cultural practices**

The findings of the study showed that the participants regarded the circumcision ritual as an important cultural practice in the life of the Xhosa adolescent male. Participants emphasised the importance of the initiation ritual being done by the family on the father's side, as is clear in the following examples:

> "Most children do not get much opportunity (for the father's involvement in the initiation ritual) in cases where parents are not married. It usually ends up being done in the mother's side. I wouldn't feel good to see everything pertaining my manhood done on my mother's side. Now (since the father's family is involved) I have (a sense of) belonging. I know where I belong." (Participant 2)

> "In my mother's home, as I am staying that side, they do not do this traditional custom, but in my father's family they do. I am also aware that my father is my father so I feel I should go and ask for something from him, which is the circumcision ritual." (Participant 3)

> "I requested my mother to undergo circumcision and she told me that she has no problem but I must inform my father as he is the custodian of this ritual. So I went to tell my father that I wanted to go for circumcision. He agreed to what I requested. As it was performed by someone from my father's side, it made me accept everything without any problems." (Participant 4)

> "It is two different things to be circumcised in your maternal family and being circumcised in the paternal family. … In my father's family there will be types of regulations; on the mother's side there will be different types of regulations. … I feel proud (to undergo circumcision in the paternal family). I know I am following after the footsteps of my father. I know hardships may happen, but I will be able to overcome those circumstances." (Participant 8)

> "I approached my father and requested to go for circumcision. It made me feel that I am a man … I am another person now. … I belong to my father's side." (Participant 1)

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Due to different circumstances some of the participants could not undergo the circumcision ritual within the paternal family. The following quotes are examples of their experiences:

> "By right, I was supposed to do it in my father's side … I knew nobody there (in the paternal family), so I felt I will arrive there with no dignity and nobody would stand in for me. … To another person it might appear as if I have not completed the ritual. But to me it is complete as my maternal family is what I regard as my family. … I am comfortable with the circumcision rite I got since it is in the Hlubi clan where both my mother and father belong. I know for a fact that if I can go to my father's side and I'm asked about my manhood, I can explain and be accepted because it is similar in the way it is done, as the bottom line is that it was a Hlubi circumcision. I can be easily accepted without any problems." (Participant 11)

> "I did it in my mother's family. Even if I could wish to do it on my father's side, the people who know me are from my mother's side … so I am not known there (in the paternal family) and I do not feel safe to do it where I am not known. … I feel proud because I have done what other men have done." (Participant 10)

> "It was done on my mother's side since my father was far. My maternal uncle is the one I approached expressing my wish to go for circumcision. … I would have preferred my paternal family of course as I belong there traditionally. But doing it under my maternal uncle was fine since he has boys of my age as well and we went there together." (Participant 12)

One participant had a very negative relationship with his father and did not want to discuss the initiation ritual with him. He also preferred not to undergo the initiation ritual. He mentioned:

> "No, I do not want to talk with him about it. … I always question people wanting to go there (the mountain) and ask you to go there as well. To me manhood is determined by the decisions a man takes in life and not the fact that you go to the mountain (for the initiation ritual)." (Participant 6)

Adolescence is an important life stage for the development of personal identity and is often the time in which children consciously explore their identity for the first time (Berk, 2013:469; Louw & Louw, 2014b:342; Santrock, 2009:388). It is a long-standing tradition in Xhosa communities that boys form their identity and sense of belonging based on their father's family lineage (Momoti, 2002:50; Mwamwenda, 2004:410). The circumcision ritual is regarded as the key marker of transition to manhood for Xhosa adolescent males (Mtumane, 2004:36, Mtuze, 2004:41, Mwamwenda, 2004:410; Nkosi 2013:119; Venter,

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2011:89; Wilcken et al., 2010:907). The influence of culture on the child's life is explained by the concept of the macrosystem in the ecological systems perspective (Berk, 2013:28). The information provided by the participants emphasised the importance of having the circumcision ritual done within the father's family. Some participants had this opportunity despite the fact that their fathers and mothers were separated, while others felt that they would not feel safe to undergo the ritual within the father's family as they were not familiar with the family members. One participant's uncle supported him in the ritual. This uncle therefore fulfilled the role of a 'social father' which is common within the Black South African context (Richter et al., 2012:11).

In this theme, the influence of the marital separation on different developmental needs of the participants was evident. During the interviews, the participants often referred to how they attempted to cope with the marital separation of their parents. This aspect is discussed in Theme 4.

3.4.2.4: Theme 4: Coping strategies

The participants used various strategies in an attempt to cope with the marital separation of their parents. They used strategies to regulate their emotions, for example positive self-talk and diverting their attention, while some participants decided to take greater responsibility for their own lives. Some participants received support from others outside the family, such as peers and teachers. These strategies are discussed in the sub-themes in his section.

- **Sub-theme 4.1: Positive self-talk**

Some participants found that positive self-talk helped them to deal with their parents' separation. They explained it as follows:

> "I told myself … it was their (the parents') differences but I must not get involved … let me carry on with my life. I told myself to be independent. I did not lose focus and I refuse to allow their problems to affect me. … I told myself as a person without any influence, let me be a change agent in my family." (Participant 2)

> "I then told myself that I am growing up now. The fact that he is my father will not change, so let me accept the situation as I cannot change it, and let me not hold a grudge against him either." (Participant 4)

> "I learnt that some things you have to let go in life and concentrate on your future because if you entertain the problem, it holds you back and when it has done so you cannot go forward. Just forget about it and look to the future." (Participants 6)

> "I was not looking at it (parental separation) on the negative side but more on the positive side. I was thinking that the things that happened are more of obstacles. God will not give you obstacles you cannot overcome." (Participant 8)

Adolescents have the cognitive ability to think abstractly and to find ways to solve problems (Berk, 2013:253-254; Papalia et al., 2008:455). They are at an age where they are able to think about their challenges and use strategies to manage their emotions (Santrock, 2009:372). The research findings indicate that for some participants, positive self-talk helped them to cope with the marital separation of their parents. This is a form of emotion-centered coping, where people use internal and private strategies to manage distress when they feel that they cannot change the situation that causes the distress (Berk, 2013:412).

- **Sub-theme 4.2: Taking control and responsibility for the self**

Some participants made an effort to take responsibility for their own well-being. They mentioned the following:

> "I never lost hope … I also wanted to prove to him (father) that I could do better even if he was not around. I also wanted to show my mother that I will be a better person in life." (Participant 12)

> "I don't need any person … I can do things on my own. There were times I would not make right decisions, but I have learnt (through my mistakes)." (Participant 11)

Some participants indicated that they would use practical strategies to prevent them from thinking about the situation at home.

> "I go outside, play with friends … to get out of the situation. … There's nothing at home." (Participant 1)

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"I listen to music. I liked it even at school. I was involved in activities at school … we played ball, rugby, sport. I like poetry and it kept me away from problems happening. I interact with people who make me happy." (Participant 8)

"I dress well. When people look at you, you hide your inner feelings. You try to forget, not to show that you are hurting … to portray a good outside. … So I learnt that smiling is the best thing you can do in a bad situation." (Participant 6)

The development of autonomy is a key development task during the adolescent years, during which adolescents start to become more self reliant, make their own choices, and take responsibility for their decisions (Berk, 2013:577; Louw & Louw, 2014b:362-364). The participants appeared to take more responsibility for their own lives after the marital separation of their parents. The strategies that the participants used to cope, can be regarded as problem-centered coping, in which they identified the problem and decided to do something about it (Berk, 2013:412). However, adolescents still need guidance from their parents as they have limited life experience (Santrock, 2009:391), as is clear in the words of Participant 11.

- **Sub-theme 4.3: Support from others**

From the research findings it was evident that participants valued the support they got from others, mostly friends, to cope with the marital separation of their parents. This is indicated in the following quotes:

"I shared my story with a friend I get along well with. … In that way you share the problem so that it does not bother you alone. At least, the second person is sharing it with you. … My friend played a very important role in assisting me to manage my frustrations." (Participant 3)

"He does not laugh at me. … He told me that he is raised by his paternal aunt and not by his mother or father. We then started to share views about our upbringing." (Participant 4)

"We (the participant and two friends) share a similar social standing in the sense that the one has no mother and the other one has a father who is a soldier and rarely comes home. … They understand my situation and I understand theirs." (Participant 11)

> "Some of us experienced similar situations, so that made it easier to discuss our issues … but only with those who were in the same situation." (Participant 12)

From the above quotes it is evident that close friends or friends who experienced similar situations as the participants, were an important source of support for the participants as they were able to understand each other. The participants' views also emphasise the advantages of friendships, such as companionship, loyalty, and psychological closeness (Berk, 2013:614; Santrock, 2009:394). Outside of the family, friends can provide adolescents with emotional support and help them to deal with emotional distress such as loneliness or sadness (Berk, 2013:614; 619; McElhaney et al., 2008:720; Miller, 2010:164).

One participant mentioned the role that a teacher at school played in reaching out to him when she noticed a change in his school work. He explained:

> "One day I did not do my school work as usual … I did not care anymore. My teacher called me and asked me if anything was worrying me. At first I denied, but she saw I was not telling the truth. I admitted …" (Participant 6)

Two participants indicated that they did not accept other people's offers of support due to a lack of trust in others. They explained it as follows:

> "I do not trust them … I keep it to myself." (Participant 6)

> "Another lady teacher noticed and asked if I have a problem. I said no, I do not have a problem. … I did not trust her and thought what if she tells other teachers and they laugh about my situation. … I do not trust them (friends) in case they tell one another and laugh about my problem." (Participant 7)

Participant 7 mentioned that he believed that his parents were aware of his distress, but as they did not ask him about it, he kept quiet. This could be related to the fact that parents are often so immersed in their own problems after marital separation, that they are not fully involved in their parental role and usually spend less time talking to their children (Benokraities, 2011:437; Bezuidenhout, 2006:2; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667).

As evident from the above quotes, children often experience emotional insecurity and anxiety after the marital separation of the parents (O'Brien, 2009:209; Wu, 2008, 1618-1620). The participants tended to distrust others, as they were afraid that their friends and teachers would laugh at them or gossip about their situation. Anderson and Sabatelli (2011:294-295) mention that, although friends and others can be supportive, their reactions could also add to the emotional distress of children whose parents have separated.

In the researcher's opinion, an important aspect in the research findings is the fact that the teachers of two participants noticed their distress. The ecological systems perspective indicates that changes in one system can affect the child's functioning in other systems in the child's life (Berk, 2013:26). It also highlights the role that teachers can play in identifying children who are affected by the separation of their parents, as these children tend to isolate themselves and withdraw from interaction with others (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:30; Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006:108; Cloete, 2005:2).

In the interviews, the participants provided their views on marital separation as well as suggestions on how parents could deal with this issue. These aspects are discussed in the following theme.

3.4.2.5 Theme 5: Advice for parents who separate

In response to the question in the interview schedule on the participants' views on marital separation, a number of participants also provided advice to parents who separate. In this theme, the participants' views on marital separation are discussed as the first sub-theme, while advice that they would like to give parents who separate is discussed as subsequent sub-themes.

- **Sub-theme 5.1: Participants' views on marital separation**

The participants mostly had a negative view of parental separation, which were related to the effects that the marital separation had on the children in the family. The following quotes provide examples of the participants' views on the marital separation of parents:

"It affects children mentally and emotionally, and their well-being for the future gets disturbed. Like, it creates a sense of disorientation. Children want to fix the mistakes of their mothers and fathers so as to improve the situation." (Participant 2)

"It is not a good thing at all because a child needs a mother and a father next to him as it is difficult for a mother to address certain things to a child and only the father is able to do that. So if one of your parents is not around, the child cannot be as be strong as he is supposed to be." (Participant 5)

"In my view it is not right. It hurts the children … some cannot focus on their school work anymore because of this problem at home. They cannot focus even on life in general because only one parent is around in their life, and not both. When you ask about your father, adults do not answer and some children are left in the care of their grandmothers who will say that their fathers are buried." (Participant 6)

"I do not think they should separate because I live a changed life." (Participant 9)

The participants' views are supported by literature that indicates that the marital separation of parents has a significant effect on the lives of children in the family (Benokraitis, 2011:417; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:667; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395). Research indicates that these effects can be longer lasting than thought before (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:270). It also appears that boys experience the absence of the father more intensely (Louw & Louw, 2014a:397; Wolfinger, 2005:12). As stated by Participant 6, adults may withhold the truth from the children in an attempt to protect them from emotional harm (Bagshaw, 2007:459).

Some participants expressed a persisting wish that their parents would reconcile, as is evident in the following quotes:

"I wish they could resolve their issues as I observe that our relatives maintained their marriages and their marriages lasted … so I was hoping that my parents would eventually resolve their issues." (Participant 2)

"As I was a bit younger and did not understand what was going on, I could not ask why were they not discussing their differences and resolve them. I would try in many ways to ensure that they solve their problems." (Participant 9)

"There was always hope that he (the father) was going to come back." (Participant 12)

Children whose parents separate often wish that their parents would reconcile their differences and restore their relationship (Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669). As indicated by Participant 9, children do not have any input in the matter and often do not know how to ask their parents for information about their marital situation (Balls & Hiebert, 2006:80; Robinson et al., 2003:78).

Some participants were of the opinion that parents should first try to solve their problems before deciding on marital separation:

> "I would encourage them to sit down and talk their issues through." (Participant 3)

> "I will encourage them that, when taking a decision to separate, to think about the children first, how they feel, and not to rush into things. Think about the children as to how they will feel and be affected by this, as they feel bad about this. At the end of the day the children will not be able to lead a normal life." (Participant 6)

Despite the fact that the process of marital separation may last for months and is usually characterised by conflict between parents and a high degree of instability (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Benokraitis, 2011:416; Osarenren et al., 2013:320), it seemed that the above participants still wanted their parents to try and resolve their issues for the sake of the children. If parents could not resolve their issues, participants suggested that parents should inform their children about their decision to separate.

- **Sub-theme 5.2: Informing children about parental separation**

Participants were of the opinion that parents should inform the children about their marital separation. One participant suggested how parents should do this:

> "When separating, let the parents come to their children and tell them that they have separated. Let them tell the children as to the way that life is going to be lived thereafter like 'we will live like this and that.' At least one parent must come back to the children and explain to them what is happening. The children do not know what is happening but see the parent carrying bags and never coming back to live as a family." (Participant 3)

One participant mentioned that parents should however not burden the children with too much information. He suggested:

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> "This thing of giving children too much information is not necessary. They must not give children too much information … it is their business only, we are their children." (Participant 8)

Marital separation results in substantial changes in the lifestyle of the family, including financial difficulties and moving to a new home and neighbourhood (Benokraitis, 2011:437; Berk, 2013:591; Feijten & Van Ham, 2007:625; Henderson & Thompson, 2011:669). As marital separation is not a formal legal process, it may happen that parents do not inform their children about the separation nor make formal arrangements for their care (Pieterse, 2007:58). It is important that children be informed about parental separation as this will help them to make sense of the situation and adjust to the changes they experience (Cartwright, 2006:132; Louw & Louw, 2014a:397). Information to children is especially important as marital separation usually involves a high degree of uncertainty and instability (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Benokraits, 2011:416-417).

In the researcher's opinion the advice of Participant 8 about not providing children with too much detail, can be taken note of. Too much information can burden the child involved, instead of providing a sense of security.

Participant 8 as well as Participant 1 further suggested that parents should include their children in the discussions about the marital separation and try to understand that their separation would affect the children. These participants mentioned:

> "I feel they should come together and identify their differences, point out the problem regarding their differences and make sure that it does not affect us as children. … Let them listen to their children and let them allow the child to be calm and be able to express themselves freely. Also, when they see that the children are misbehaving, let the parents not judge, but look at the root causes of the behaviour." (Participant 1)

> "Some people tend to judge children in their ways, but situations are different (after the parents have separated). Parents need to advise children as to what to do in life and give them love." (Participant 8)

Children mostly do not have any input in the parents' decision to separate (Balls & Hiebert, 2006:80). However they do experience negative effects following the marital separation, for example psychological, behavioural, academic, health, and interpersonal problems (Benokraitis, 2011:435; Louw & Louw, 2014a:395, 398). All the participants in

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this study remained in the care of their mothers, as is the case in most instances of parental divorce or separation (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:294; Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15). While effective parenting is regarded as the most important aspect to support children after the separation of their parents (Berk, 2013:592), mothers usually experience their own emotional pain which makes it harder for them to support their children (Bezuidenhout, 2006:2; Everett & Lee, 2006:113; Henning, 2005:56). In the researcher's opinion, parents may also not understand that behavioural and academic problems experience by the children could be a result of the marital separation.

Some participants highlighted the importance of arrangements for the continued care of and contact with the children.

- **Sub-theme 5.3: Continued care and contact**

Where divorce is the legal dissolution of the marriage, marital separation involves the breakdown of the marriage without engaging in a legal process (Benokraitis, 2011:417; Kunz, 2011:5). The Mediation of Certain Divorce Matters Act (Act No. 24 of 1987) stipulates that that a divorce cannot be granted without sufficient provision for the care of minor children involved. In contrast, in marital separation parents tend to make informal arrangements for the children (Pieterse, 2007:58). Based on their experiences, some participants made recommendations for parents who separate:

> "Both parents must care for the children and buy things like school uniforms." (Participant 3)

> "When separating, do not forget to take care of your children. Buy them things, do not wait for reminders. … When they ask for clothes, buy them clothes." (Participant 7)

> "I will advise the mothers to make sure that the child is afforded an opportunity to know his father's home and paternal family. Mothers must not be angry when there is mention of the father. Children must be afforded their rights about their paternal family life." (Participant 4).

The psychosocial problems that children tend to experience after the separation of their parents, can be intensified by financial problems, the change in the roles and responsibilities of the mother and father, as well as when mothers frustrate efforts of contact between children and their fathers (Allen, 2013:120-122; Anderson & Sabatelli,

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2011:294; Benokraitis, 2011:436; Kunz, 2011:246; Smyth et al., 2008:39). When parents do not agree on arrangements for the children, children may become victims who are being caught up in the adult conflict. Participants thus suggested that parents should not continue their conflict after they have separated.

- **Sub-theme 5.4: Prevent continued parental conflict**

A number of participants had specific advice in terms of parental conflict after marital separation. They made suggestions on how parents should treat one another as well as on the children's exposure to or involvement in the conflict. They mentioned the following in this regard:

> "I would say to parents, no matter what the reason (for their marital separation) they must not involve the children, for example where the mother badmouths the father and the father badmouths the mother … because this affects the children in different ways. … Children end up analysing these things in their own way, which might not be accurate." (Participant 8)

> "Do not talk about your differences as parents in front of the children." (Participant 7)

> Children did not ask to come on earth, they have done nothing, they were not there by the time the parents were meeting, so they must not use them as a bait to pay back their personal revenge. The child did nothing, and is not responsible here." (Participant 1)

Participant 8 even had advice for children who are exposed to continued parental conflict. He mentioned:

> "Do not involve yourselves in your parents' issues. When parents are doing or saying something, you shouldn't put it in your head … just avoid it and concentrate on what you do. Continue with the route you are taking and don't get involved in parental issues." (Participant 8)

Marital separation does not always bring an end to the conflict that caused the parents to separate (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15). Furthermore, the changes in lifestyle following the separation often add to the conflict experienced in the family. Exposure to the continued conflict between the parents can be distressing for the children, especially when they are directly exposed to the conflict. Wolfinger (2005:13) proposes that for many children the exposure to continued conflict after the marital separation may be a greater problem than

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the marital breakdown itself. The degree of conflict after the parents' separation is one of the factors that have a significant effect on children's adjustment to the marital separation (Allen, 2013:120-122; Louw & Louw, 2014a:396).

The research findings highlighted the participants' experiences regarding the marital separation of their parents. The key findings will be summarised in the next chapter.

3.5 SUMMARY

The research focused on the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. In this chapter the researcher discussed the research methodology, the ethical considerations for the study, as well as the research findings. The research findings indicate that the marital separation of their parents had a substantial influence on the lives of the participants. One of the findings that stood out, was that eleven of the twelve participants were not informed about their parents' separation, while there was a lack of discussion of the topic over the longer term. The participants indicated how the marital separation of their parents affected their relationship with their parents and how it affected their lives. They described coping strategies that they used to adjust to the situation, their perception on marital separation and also had advice for parents who separate.

In the next chapter, the key findings of the study as well as conclusions and recommendation will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Marital separation is characterised by disequilibrium, where the family life of togetherness, love and sharing is shattered and changed to a life where the father usually moves to live separately from his family, and often abandons the parental duties he used to perform towards his children (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:15; Lamb, 2010:177; Lomsky-Feder & Liebovitz, 2010:111; Modood, 2005:69; Weatherall & Duffy: 2008:124). As a result of marital separation, children experience numerous changes in their lives (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2011:204-205; Ball & Hiebert, 2006:72; Emery, 2012:40; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001:16; Kunz, 2011:247; Liu, 2007:02; Warren, 2005:29). This study focused on the experiences of adolescent Xhosa males regarding the marital separation of their parents. The key findings of the research are summarised in this chapter, followed by conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents.

The following objectives were stated in order to reach the goal of the study:

- To theoretically contextualise divorce and marital separation.

- To theoretically describe the effects of parental divorce and marital separation on children and highlight the context of the Xhosa adolescent male.

- To explore and describe the experiences of the participants regarding the effects of marital separation of their parents on their developmental needs.

- To explore and describe the views of the participants of the influence of the marital separation of their parents on their cultural identity and participation.

- To make conclusions and recommendations for social work services to Xhosa adolescent males who experience parents' marital separation.

4.3 KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key findings of the study will be discussed focusing on the phenomenon of marital separation, the effects of marital separation on the participants' relationships with parents and members of the extended family, and the effects on the participants. Further, the findings will capture coping strategies used by the participants, as well as their advice to parents who separate.

4.3.1 The phenomenon of parental separation

The following key findings highlight the circumstances around the marital separation of the participants' parents:

- The marital separation of the parents led to a change in the participants' family structure, with the fathers leaving the family home. All the participants lived with their mothers, while their fathers moved out of the family home.

- Most of the participants (11 out of 12) were not informed by their parents about their separation. Some participants became aware that their parents have separated by observing changes in the family, while others were informed by relatives or overhead a conversation by the mother.

- The marital separation of the parents were not discussed in the family, even long after the father has left the home.

- Participants expressed the wish that their parents would personally inform them about their marital separation, as the lack of information created anxiety and prevented them from understanding the family's situation.

4.3.2 The participants' relationship with their parents and family members

The marital separation of their parents had an influence on the participants' relationships in the family context, especially those with the father and the paternal family.

- Half of the participants maintained a good relationship with the father after the parents' separation, while the others had a negative relationship with their fathers.

- A positive relationship was maintained when the father demonstrated continued commitment to the participants, and when participants perceived the marital separation as a problem between the parents and not between the parent and the child.

- Some participants wished to have closer contact with their fathers, however a number of fathers failed to maintain contact with the participants, while one mother tried to prevent the participant from having contact with the father.

- Other participants had no wish to maintain contact with their fathers, mostly because of negative feelings towards the father or strained relationships with their fathers before the parents separated.

- Most of the participants had a positive relationship with their mothers and valued the emotional support they received from their mothers. The marital separation of the parents did not affect the participants' relationships with their siblings.

- After the marital separation of their parents, the participants mostly maintained a positive relationship with members of the extended family on the maternal and the paternal side. However, some of the participants became alienated from the extended family on the paternal side and wished to establish a relationship with them. Some participants were of the opinion that the positive relationship with the mother's extended family filled the void of not having contact with the father's family.

4.3.3 The effects of the parents' marital separation on the participants

The marital separation of their parents affected various aspects of the participants' lives. The ecological systems theory, which formed the theoretical framework of the study, indicate that changes in one system such as the family, can affect a person's functioning in other systems.

- The research findings indicate that the marital separation of their parents affected the participants in terms of their material needs, emotional and social functioning,

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education, and identity. All of these aspects are indicated as developmental needs of children.

- Most of the participants experienced that their parents' marital separation resulted in financial difficulties that negatively affected their material and physical care. In some cases there was continued conflict between the parents over financial matters and over which parent was responsible for providing in the child's material needs. Some participants were expected to get involved in the negotiations, for example to buy clothes or shoes.

- The parents' separation affected the emotional well-being of the participants. The participants indicated that they experienced mixed feelings, anger and sadness, and found it difficult to control their emotions.

- Participants experienced a drop in their school performance, mainly as they were preoccupied with the marital separation of their parents and consequently found it difficult to concentrate on their school work. Three participants dropped out of school. On the other hand, one participant was motivated to do well in his school work in order to escape his circumstances.

- The marital separation of their parents affected the self-esteem of some participants. These participants experienced a lower self-esteem because they felt different to their peers, either because they could not dress as well as their peers or because their family was different to those of peers whose parents lived together.

- The feeling of being different to their friends caused some participants to withdraw from the peer group. Withdrawal from the peer group was further caused by their emotional distress about the parents' marital separation.

- The participants experienced that the marital separation of their parents could affect the cultural practice of male circumcision which is an important ritual in the Xhosa communities. Most of the participants emphasised that the circumcision ritual should be done within the father's side of the family. Some participants took the initiative to request that the ritual had to be conducted in the father's family, while others did not feel free to do so as the have become alienated from the father's family. Participants

who had to complete the ritual within the maternal family, indicated that they would have preferred to have the father's family involved. One participant who did not want his father involved in the circumcision ritual, had a negative relationship with his father prior to his parents' separation. From an ecological systems perspective the strong cultural focus in the research findings is reflected by the concept of the macro system.

4.3.4 Coping strategies employed by the participants

The participants used different strategies to help them cope with the separation of their parents.

- The participants used a number of self-initiated strategies to help them cope with the marital separation of their parents. These strategies included positive self-talk, self-motivation, and practical strategies to divert their thoughts away from the parental separation.

- Support from others, mostly from friends, further helped participants to cope with their emotions relating to the marital separation of their parents. They showed trust in friends who have also experienced parental separation.

- Two participants mentioned that their teachers were the first to notice their distress after the separation of their parents, and offered them support.

- Some participants showed a general distrust in others. The distrust resulted from their fear of being ridiculed because of their parents' separation, while one participant mentioned that in the Xhosa culture males were expected to be "strong" and not to show their feelings.

- As a result of their distrust in others, some participants did not accept support that was offered to them.

4.3.5 Participants' advice to parents who separate

- The participants had a negative view of marital separation. Based on their own experiences, they were of the opinion that children are harmed by the marital separation of their parents. Some participants thus suggested that parents should try

to solve their problems instead of separating, while some also kept on hoping that their parents would reconcile.

- Participants suggested that parents should inform their children about the marital separation. Children should also be included in the discussions about the parents' separation. One participant cautioned against providing children with too much information, as this could add to the distress of the children.

- The participants advised that parents should make arrangements for both parents to be involved in the care of the children after the marital separation. Children should also get the opportunity to have contact with the non-resident parent, which in the case of the study was the father.

- The participants advised parents to prevent conflict from continuing after their marital separation. One participant also advised that children should not get involved in the parents' conflict.

4.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the findings of the study:

- Parents' marital separation leads to changes in the family structure. The father tends to move away from the family home, while the children remain in the care of the mother. In many instances the contact between the father and the family diminishes and the father's involvement in the life of his children decreases.

- Parents often fail to inform their children of their marital separation and children then obtain knowledge about the separation through indirect ways. The lack of clarity about the situation contributes to the emotional distress of the children. Parents need to inform children about the marital separation, however without providing too much information that can add to the children's emotional distress.

- In certain contexts marital separation could be regarded as a hidden phenomenon due to factors such as parents' failure to inform their children and the topic not being discussed within the family. Children may further wish to keep the parents' separation a secret as they fear being ridiculed.

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- Fathers are seen as role models for their male children and play a critical role in the life of the Xhosa adolescent male. In the Xhosa culture the father's lineage is an important social definer, while significant cultural practices are related to adolescence. The male circumcision ritual holds specific meaning for the personal and cultural identity of the Xhosa adolescent male. If marital separation results in the absence of the father in the life of the Xhosa adolescent male, it could have substantial consequences for the adolescent in terms of participation in cultural practices.

- A continued and positive relationship between the Xhosa adolescent males and their father is enhanced when the father demonstrates continued commitment to the adolescent. In some cases however, fathers fail to maintain contact with the adolescent male, while mothers may try to prevent contact between the child and the father.

- Parents who separate without going through the legal process of divorce seem not to make formal arrangements related to the care of the children, which could lead to continued conflict, for example in terms the provision in the material needs of the children and contact with the absent father. Shifting responsibilities between parents can result in children being caught up in the conflict situation.

- The relationship between the adolescent male and the mother tends to remain positive after the parental separation and the mother is often regarded as a source of support. Further, the marital separation of the parents seems to have little negative influence on the relationships among siblings, and relationships with the extended families of the father and the mother. However, less contact with the paternal extended family could result in a degree of alienation from them.

- Marital separation of parents can have widespread effects on children, for example on their physical care, social interactions, school performance, and emotional well-being, and thus shows a strong eco-systemic effect. Marital separation can thus affect adolescents' developmental needs at a critical stage in their life, as adolescence is the life stage for preparation for adult life. The parents' marital separation could have long-term socio-economic effects for their children.

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- Initiation rites are an important part of life in the Xhosa culture. The father and the father's family play a critical role in the cultural practice of male circumcision. For Xhosa adolescent males whose parents have separated, it is important that the father and the father's family are involved in the circumcision ritual. In this regard parental separation could be a dilemma for the Xhosa adolescent male if the parents do not make specific arrangements for the ritual, or if the adolescent male becomes alienated from the father's extended family.

- Being in the adolescent development phase, the participants were able to initiate strategies to help them cope with the marital separation of their parents. Friends, especially those who have also experienced marital separation of their parents, proved to be a valuable support system. However, a wish to fit in with the peer group, characteristic of their life stage, may prevent adolescents whose material and family status differ from those of the peer group from interacting with their peers. A fear to be ridiculed and a distrust in others can also prevent these adolescents from accepting support offered by others. Adolescent boys in certain cultures, such as the Xhosa culture, may be expected to deal with problems by themselves.

- Children experience many harmful consequences due to the marital separation of their parents and many hope that their parents will reconcile. Some children therefore advise parents to try to address their problems rather than separate.

- When parents decide to separate, the parents should inform their children about the matter. Parents should make clear arrangements for both parents to be involved in continued care and contact with their children, as well as for upholding specific social or cultural events. It is important for the children's well-being that parental conflict after the marital separation should be prevented and that children should not be exposed to continued parental conflict.

- Viewing the phenomenon of marital separation from an eco-systemic perspective provides a holistic understanding of children's experience of the marital separation of their parents.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section the researcher presents recommendations that can be considered by social workers. The recommendations apply to those who provide social work services to Xhosa adolescent males, but also to all social workers who work with children who experience the marital separation of their parents.

- Parental separation as a form of marital breakdown with no legal processes involved and often no formal arrangements in terms of care of children, should be fully acknowledged as a phenomenon that is potentially very harmful to children. Social workers and others in the social sciences professions should be informed about the phenomenon and about its effects on children. Publications in professional journals and presentations at professional conferences could be used as platforms to raise awareness of the phenomenon.

- Social workers who work in communities that conform to specific cultural norms and practices, for example the Xhosa community in which the research was conducted, need to acquaint themselves with the norms and practices of the specific culture. Without such knowledge, social workers may not understand the full impact of different social problems on the lives of the families and children. In the context of this study, social workers should for example be aware of the significant role of the father's family lineage and of the circumcision ceremony in the formation of the individual and cultural identity of the Xhosa adolescent male, as well as of the importance of sustained contact between the Xhosa adolescent male and the father's extended family.

- As marital separation is often associated with informal arrangements in terms of the care of the children, social workers who provide services to these children and families should ensure that the different developmental needs of the children are being met. Social workers need to look at the child holistically, as the negative effects of parental separation on one aspect of the child's life could also negatively affect other aspects of the child's life. Developmental aspects that apply to all children, for example the importance of the peer group in the adolescent life stage, need to be taken into account in order to understand the child.

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- Social workers and other professionals need to educate parents on how to minimise the potential harm of marital separation for their children. Parents play a critical role in ensuring that they inform their children in an honest manner about their marital breakdown. The following are examples of the information that the parents may need:

    o Parents need information on how best to inform their children about the marital separation.

    o Children need opportunities to ask questions, raise concerns, and keep the subject open for discussion should they wish to do so.

    o Parents need to acknowledge that both parents have to be involved in the lives of the children so that they can fulfill their parental rights and responsibilities. They need to know of the importance of clear arrangements in terms of care, contact, and providing support for their children.

    o Parents who separate need to provide their children with opportunities for participation in cultural practices that are important for the child's development.

    o Both parents need to acknowledge the needs of the children and prevent children from being caught up in continued parental conflict.

- As parental separation could be a hidden phenomenon in some communities, social workers must take initiative to educate the wider community about the phenomenon. Publications in local newspapers and magazines, as well as awareness campaigns can be implemented for this purpose.

- Children may wish to conceal the fact that their parents have separated, which could deprive them of formal or informal support. As children spend a large part of their lives in the school setting, social workers can implement awareness programmes in schools. These programmes can provide children with information about the phenomenon, the possible effects, and about ways in which to access support. Programmes also need to validate the feelings of children who have experienced the marital separation of their parents. This fact is especially important in certain cultures where young males are expected to suppress their feelings.

- Awareness programmes in schools can also help teachers to better understand and reach out to children who experience distress due to the marital separation of their parents.

- It is recommended that large scale research studies be conducted on the phenomenon of marital separation. Further studies could for example be conducted with children of different age groups and in different socio-cultural contexts. Research could also focus on the experiences of parents who have opted for marital separation instead of divorce.

- It is important that the Families Section in the Department of Social Development draft policy guidelines for social workers in the public and private sector in relation to services provided in the context of parental separation. The guidelines need to include information on the possible influence of culture on social work interventions.

- Social workers need to raise awareness of the phenomenon of marital separation among professionals in other sectors. As an example, they could liaise with legal professionals to identify gaps in the legal system in terms of upholding the best interests of children when parents end their marriages by means of marital separation.

In the next section, the researcher will indicate how the goal and objectives of the study were achieved.

4.6 ACCOMPLISHMENT OF GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents. The goal was achieved by the accomplishment of the objectives of the study, as summarised in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Achievement of the objectives of the study

Objective of the study	Achievement
To theoretically contextualise divorce and marital separation.	The objective was achieved as part of the literature review in Chapter 2.
To theoretically describe the effects of parental divorce and marital separation on children and highlight the context of the Xhosa adolescent male.	The objective was achieved as part of the literature review in Chapter 2.
To explore and describe the experiences of the participants regarding the effects of marital separation of their parents on their developmental needs.	The objective was achieved by means of the empirical findings that were presented in Chapter 3.
To explore and describe the views of the participants of the influence of the marital separation of their parents on their cultural identity and participation.	The objective was achieved by means of the presentation of the empirical findings in chapter 3.
To make conclusions and recommendations for social work services to Xhosa adolescent males who experience parents' marital separation.	The objective was achieved in chapter 4.

Based on the achievement of the goal and objectives of the research, it can be concluded that the research question, namely "What are the experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents?" have been answered.

4.7 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The researcher aimed to acquire knowledge and understanding of experiences of Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated without formal divorce proceedings. The findings of the study indicate that the marital separation of their parents impacted various areas of the participants' lives within different systems that they engaged in. In line with an ecological systems perspective, the influence of norms and practices specifically related to the Xhosa culture on the participants' experiences was a prominent theme in

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the research findings and need to be kept in mind by social workers that deliver social work services within a specific cultural context.

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APPENDIX A

UMTSHINGA COMMUNITY DROP-IN ORGANIZATION

Mshinga Drop in Centre
Port Shepstone
4240

The Head of Department
Social Work &Criminology Department
University of Pretoria
0002

<u>PERMISSION GRANTED</u>

This letter serves to inform you that Mrs Nokwanda Mhlawuli has been granted permission to undertake her research at Mshinga Drop in Centre on this topic-:

Influence of parental Separation adolescent children within Xhosa Speaking communities

Thanking You

Mrs Lindiwe Sibisi

UMTSHINGA DROP - IN CENTRE
P.O. BOX 308
SHELLY BEACH
4265

APPENDIX B

NSIMBINI TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

BETANIA MISSION - WARD 3 - MATHUNZINI COMMUNITY HALL

PO BOX 1142 -PORT SHESPTONE 4240

Email:Zibuyile.Ndwalane@gmail.com - Cell No.: 079 626 6137

02/04/2015

The Department of Social Development

P/Bag 1724

Portshepstone

4240

Dear Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

A permission has been granted to Mhlawuli Nokwanda to undertake research on Influence of parental separation on adolescent Children within Xhosa speaking households at Umtshinga Drop in Centre as a student at University of Pretoria.

The above-named Traditional Council has no objection to her to conduct research.

Yours in service

Secretary

P.O BOX 11742

2015 -04- 0 2

PORT SHEPSTONE 4240

Inkosi S.N Ndwalane
Mrs ZR Dlomo - Traditional Council Secretary

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APPENDIX C

Title of the study: The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents

Interview schedule

Participant's biographical details:

Age:	….. years	
Number and ages of siblings living in the home:	Please describe.	
Year in which parents separated:	20…	
Educational status:	Attend school	Grade: …
	Not attending school	
	Other: please describe	

Interview schedule:

I would like to find out how you experience the marital separation of your parents.

1. What are your views on marital separation of parents?

2. I am interested to know how the separation of your parents affects certain aspects of your life.
   Themes:
   • Physical care and well-being
   • Education
   • Emotional well-being
   • View of yourself (self-concept); self-esteem
   • Sense of belonging to the peer/friendship group
   • Relationship with your parents
   • Relationship with your siblings
   • Material needs such as clothing and appearance
   • Functioning independently from the family (autonomy)
   • Sense of belonging to the Xhosa culture
   • Participation in practices of the Xhosa culture.

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Isihloko sesifundo: Amava amaxham-xhamana angamakhwenkwe amaXhosa malunga nokwahlukana kwabazali babo ebebetshatile

Imibuzo

Inkcukacha ngobomi bomntu othabatha inxaxheba koluphengululo:

Iminyaka	…..	
Inani labantakwenu neminyaka yabo ohlala nabo ekhaya	Chaza ngokuthe gabalala	
Unyaka abazali bakho abohlukana ngayo	20…	
Ubume bokufunda bakho	Uyafunda	Ibanga
	Awufundi	
	Okunye, chaza	

Inkcukacha zemibuzo:

Bendinqwenela ukwazi ukuba wayithatha kanjani indaba yokwahlukana kwabazali bakho.

1. Oko kukuthi weva kanjani, sakunika owuphi umyalezo esisehlo ebomini bakho?

2. Bendinqwenela ukwazi ukuba ukwahlukana kwabazali bakho kwayichaphazela kanjani le miba ilandelayo yobomi bakho:

   Iingongoma:

   - Ukuzikhathalela emzimbeni wakho nobuwena nje buphela.
   - Imfundo yakho
   - Indlela ova ngayo ngaphakathi emoyeni okanye emphefumlweni wakho.
   - Indlela ozibona nozithatha ngayo, wena.
   - Ubudlellwane bakho nabazali bakho
   - Ubudlelwane bakho nabantakwenu ozalwa nabo
   - Iimfuno zakho ngokwasekuphileni nangokwenkangeleko.
   - Indlela yokuphila ngaphandle kokuxhomekeka kusapho lwakho
   - Indlela yokuzivela Ubuntu bakho ungumXhosa.
   - Ukuthatha inxaxheba kumasiko nezithethe zakwaXhosa.

APPENDIX D

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work & Criminology

Researcher: Mrs Nokwanda Mhlawuli

Contact details: 0840211173

Institution: Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria

INFORMED ASSENT BY PARTICIPANT

1. **Title of the research:** The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents.

2. **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to find out how Xhosa adolescent males experience the marital separation of their parents. It is hoped that information obtained from this study will help social workers to understand these experiences in delivering social work services to Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated.

3. **Procedures:** I will be requested to participate in an interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask me to share how I experience the effects of the marital separation of my parents on different areas in my life. The interview will last about one hour and will be recorded. All information will be treated confidentially and my identity will not be known to anyone but Mrs Mhlawuli.

4. **Risks:** If I experience any emotional distress because of the interview, Mrs Mhlawuli will refer me for counselling to one of the social workers at the Umtshinga Community Drop-in Centre in Port Shepstone.

5. **Benefits:** I understand that I will not directly benefit from the study, but that the study may help social workers to deliver appropriate services to adolescent males whose parents separated.

6. **Participants' rights:** I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time, with no negative consequences for me.

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7. **Financial compensation:** I understand that I will not receive any form of compensation in the form of money or gifts for my participation in the study.

8. **Confidentiality:** The researcher will ensure that all information obtained during the interview will be handled confidentially. Only the researcher will have access to this information and my identity and the identity of my family will not be made known to anyone. The interview will be recorded so that the researcher can get accurate information. A copy of the recording and of this signed letter will be securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the stipulations of the University. Permission to conduct the research has been obtained from the Nsimbini Traditional Council.

9. **Contact details of the researcher**

   If I have any questions, I can contact Mrs Mhlawuli at 0840211173 during office hours.

I, the undersigned, understand my rights as a research participant. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done.

………………………………… ………………………………. ……………
Participant's name   Participant's signature   Date

………………………………… ………………………………. ……………
Researcher's name   Researcher's signature   Date

Umphengululi:	Mrs Nokwanda Mhlawuli
Contact details:	0743047800
Iziko:	Isebe LezeNtlalontle noLwaphulomthetho, Univesithi yase Pitoli

ISIVUMELWANO NOMNTU OZAKUTHABATHA INXAXHEBA KUPHANDO

1. **Isihloko sophando:** Amava amaxham-xhamana amakhwenkwe akwa-Xhosa malunga nokwahlukana kwabazali babo abebetshatile.

2. **Iinjongo zophengululo:** Kukufuna ukuba amaxham-xhamana amakhwenkwe amaXhosa eva kanjani ngokwahlukana kwabazali babo abebetshatile. Ndiyathemba ukuba ulwazi olufumaneke koluphando luzakunceda ooNontlalontle bafikelele ekuqondeni nzulu ngalomba kwaye ibancede ekunikeni iinkonzo zentlalontle kuluntu ngokukodwa kubatwana abazifumene benabazali abohlukeneyo.

3. **Inkqubo:** Uzokucelwa ukuba uthathe inxaxheba koluphando ngokuphendula imibuzo oyibuzwa nguMphandi. Umphandi uzakucela ukuthi wabelane naye ngamava akho ukuba yakuchaphazela kanjani indaba yokwahlukana kwabazali bakho kwimiba eyahlukeneyo yobomi bakho. Uvavanyo ngemibuzo luzokuthatha iyure enye kwaye izokushicilelwa. Lonke ulwazi olufumaneke koluphando luzokugcinwa ngokukhuselekileyo kakhulu, kwaye nenkcukacha ngawe azisayi kuvezwa kone konke ngaphandle kuka Nkosikazi Mhlawuli.

4. **Iingozi:** Ukuba uye wanophazamiseko ngokwasemoyeni ngenxa yoluphengululo, uNkosikazi uMhlawuli uzokuhambisa kululeko lwengqondo komnye uNontlalontle osebenzela eMtshinga eSenteni ePort Shepstone.

5. **Amaqithiqithi:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba andizukuxhamla nto eqondene nam koluphando kodwa luzokunceda ooNontlalontle banikeze iinkonzo ezingqalileyo kumaXhamxhamana amakhwenkwe amaXhosa abazali babo bohlukanayo betshatile.

6. **Amalungelo Akho njengomntu othatha inxaxheba koluphando:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba ukuthatha kwam inxaxheba koluphando lungokuzithandela kwaye ndingaluyeka nanini xa ndifuna ukwenza njalo kwaye alunaziphumo zibi ngakum.

7. **Inzuzo yemali:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba andizukufumana naluphi uhlobo lokuhlawulwa ngemali okanye izipho ngokuthatha inxaxheba koluphando.

8. **Ukugcinwa kolwazi olufumaneke kuphando:** Umphandi uzokwenza yonke imizamo ukuqinisekisa ukuba lonke ulwazi olufunyenweyo ngexesha lophando lubekwa ngokufihlakeleyo kakhulu. Ngumphandi yedwa ozakuba nelungelo kulwazi olo. Inkcukacha ngawe nosapho lwakho azisayi kuvezwa nakubani na. Uphando luzakushicilelwa ukuqiisekisa ukuba sifumana iinkcukacha ezizizo. Ikopi yoshicilelo olo nencwadi usayiniweyo zizakugcinwa khuselekileyo kwisebe lezentlalontle nolwaphulo mthetho eYunivesithi yase Pitoli ngokwemithetho nemigqaliselo yeYunivesithi. Imvume yokwenza oluphando ifumaneke kwiNkundla yoluntu eNsimbini.

Inkcukacha zomphandi ukuba unemibuzo ungafowunela uMrs Mhlawuli kwezinombolo 0743047800 ngamaxesha omsebenzi.

Mna osayine apha ngezantsi ndiyawaqonda amalungelo am malunga noluphando. Ndisayina ngokuzithandela kwam ukuthatha inxaxheba kolupando. Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba oluphando lumalunga nantoni, lwenziwa kanjani kwaye lwenzelwa ntoni.

……………………………………   …………………………………..   …………………

Umthathi nxaxheba kuphando   Ukusayina ngumntu ophandwayo   Usuku

……………………………………   …………………………………..   …………………

Igama lomphandi   Ukusayina ngumntu ophandayo   Usuku

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APPENDIX E

Researcher: Mrs Nokwanda Mhlawuli

Contact details: 0840211173

Institution: Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria

INFORMED CONSENT BY PARENT

1. **Title of the research:** The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents.

2. **Purpose of the study:** The purpose of the study is to find out how Xhosa adolescent males experience the marital separation of their parents. It is hoped that information from this study will help social workers to understand these experiences in delivering services to Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated.

3. **Procedures:** My child will be requested to participate in an interview with the researcher. The researcher will ask him to share how he experiences the effects of the marital separation of his parents on different areas in his life. The interviews will last about one hour and will be tape recorded. All information will be treated confidentially and his identity will not be known to anyone but Mrs Mhlawuli.

4. **Risks:** If my child experiences any emotional distress because of the interview, Mrs Mhlawuli will refer him for counselling to one of the social workers at the Umtshinga Community Drop-in Centre in Port Shepstone.

5. **Benefits:** I understand that my son will not directly benefit from the study, but that the study may help social workers to deliver appropriate services to Xhosa adolescent males whose parents separated.

6. **Participants' rights:** I understand that my child's participation in the study is voluntary and that he can withdraw from the study at any time, with no negative consequences for him.

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7. **Financial compensation:** I understand that I or my child will not receive any form of compensation in the form of money or gifts for his participation in the study.

8. **Confidentiality:** The researcher will ensure that all information obtained during the interview will be handled confidentially. Only the researcher will have access to this information and my child's identity or the identity of my family will not be made known to anyone. The interview will be recorded so that the researcher can get accurate information. A copy of the recording and this signed letter will be securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, according to the stipulations of the University. Permission to conduct the research has been obtained from the Nsimbini Traditional Council.

9. **Contact details of the researcher**

If I have any questions, I can contact Mrs Mhlawuli at 0840211173 during office hours.

I, the undersigned, understand my my child's rights as a research participant. I provide my consent that he can voluntarily participate in the study. I understand what the study is about and how and why it is being done.

………………………………   ………………………………….   …………………
Parent's name   Parent's signature   Date

………………………………   ………………………………….   …………………
Researcher's name   Researcher's signature   Date

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work & Criminology

UMphengululi:	Mrs Nokwanda Mhlawuli
Contact details:	0743047800
Iziko:	Isebe LezeNtlalontle noLwaphulomthetho, Univesithi yase Pitoli

ISIVUMELWANO NOMZALI WOMNTU OTHABATHA INXAXHEBA KUPHANDO

1. **Isihloko sophando:** Amava amaxham-xhamana amakhwenkwe akwa-Xhosa malunga nokwahlukana kwabazali babo abebetshatile.

2. **Iinjongo zophengululo:** Kukufuna ukuba amaxham-xhamana amakhwenkwe amaXhosa eva kanjani ngokwahlukana kwabazali babo abebetshatile. Ndiyathemba ukuba ulwazi olufumaneke koluphando luzakunceda ooNontlalontle bafikelele ekuqondeni nzulu ngalomba kwaye ibancede ekunikeni iinkonzo zentlalontle kuluntu ngokukodwa kubatwana abazifumene benabazali abohlukeneyo.

3. **Inkqubo:** Umntwana wam uzokucelwa ukuba athabathe inxaxheba koluphando ngokuphendula imibuzo oyibuzwa nguMphandi. Umphandi uzokucela ukuthi umntwana wam abelane naye ngamava akhe ukuba yakuchaphazela kanjani indaba yokwahlukana kwabazali bakhe.Uphando ngemibuzo ebhekise kumntwana wam luzokuthabatha iyure enye kwaye luzokushicilelwa. Lonke ulwazi olufumaneke koluphando luzokugcinwa ngokukhuselekileyo kakhulu, kwaye nenkcukacha ngawe azisayi kuvezwa konke konke ngu Nkosikazi Mhlawuli kuphela oya kubanazo.

4. **Iingozi:** Ukuba umntwana wam uye wanophazamiseko ngokwasemoyeni ngenxa yoluphengululo, uNkosikazi uMhlawuli uzokumhambisa kululeko lwengqondo komnye woo-Nontlalontle osebenzela eMtshinga eSenteni ePort Shepstone.

5. **Amaqithiqithi:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba umntwana wam akazukuxhamla nto koluphando kodwa luzokunceda ooNontlalontle banikeze iinkonzo ezingqalileyo kumaXhamxhamana amakhwenkwe amaXhosa abazali babo bohlukanayo betshatile.

6. **Amalungelo Akho njengomntu othatha inxaxheba koluphando:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba ukuthatha komntwana wam inxaxheba koluphando lungokuzithandela kwaye angaluyeka nanini xa efuna ukwenza njalo kwaye alunaziphumo zibi ngakuye.

7. **Inzuzo yemali:** Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba umntwana wam akazukufumana naluphi uhlobo lokuhlawulwa ngemali okanye izipho ngokuthatha inxaxheba koluphando.

8. **Ukugcinwa kolwazi olufumaneke kuphando:** Umphandi uzokwenza yonke imizamo ukuqinisekisa ukuba lonke ulwazi olufunyenweyo ngexesha lophando lubekwa ngokufihlakeleyo kakhulu. Ngumphandi yedwa ozakuba nelungelo kulwazi olo. Inkcukacha ngawe nosapho lwakho azisayi kuvezwa nakubani na.Uphando luzakushicilelwa ukuqiisekisa ukuba sifumana iinkcukacha ezizizo. Ikopi yoshicilelo olo nencwadi usayiniweyo zizakugcinwa khuselekileyo kwisebe lezentlalontle nolwaphulo mthetho eYunivesithi yase Pitoli ngokwemithetho nemigqaliselo yeYunivesithi. Imvume yokwenza oluphando ifumaneke kwiNkundla yoluntu eNsimbini.

Inkcukacha zomphandi ukuba unemibuzo ungafowunela uMrs Mhlawuli kwezinombolo 0743047800 ngamaxesha omsebenzi.

Mna osayine apha ngezantsi ndiyawaqonda amalungelo omntwana wam njengamntu othabatha inxaxheba kuphando.Ndiyavuma ukuba angathabatha inxaxheba kuphando ngokuzithandela. Ndiyayiqonda into yokuba oluphando lumalunga nantoni, lwenziwa kanjani kwaye lwenzelwa ntoni.

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Umthathi nxaxheba kuphando   Ukusayina ngumntu ophandwayo   Usuku

…………………………………   …………………………………   …………………

Igama lomphandi   Ukusayina ngumntu ophandayo   Usuku

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

31-Jul-2015

Dear Nokwanda Mhlawuli,

Project: The experiences of Xhosa adolescent males regarding the marital separation of their parents

Researcher: Nokwanda Mhlawuli

Supervisor (incl. other investigators): Mhlawuli, Nokwanda N~

Department: Social Work and Criminology

Reference number/s: GW20150703HS

Thank you for the application that was submitted for ethical consideration.

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved** by the **Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee** on **31-Jul-2015**. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. However, should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, a new research proposal and application for ethical clearance will have to be submitted for approval.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Karen Harris
Acting Chair: Postgraduate Committee and Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail:Karen.harris@up.ac.za

Kindly note that your original signed approval certificate will be sent to your supervisor via the Head of Department. Please liaise with your supervisor.

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof KL Harris (Acting Chair); Dr L Blokland; Dr JEH Grobler; Prof B Hofmeyr; Ms H Klopper; Dr C Panebianco-Warrens; Dr C Puttergill; Prof GM Spies; Dr Y Spies; Prof E Taljard

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