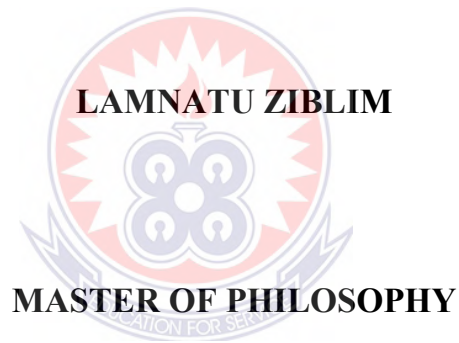


UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

**PARENTING IN STEP-FAMILIES IN ZONGO COMMUNITIES
IN ACCRA**



2022

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

PARENTING IN STEP-FAMILIES IN ZONGO COMMUNITIES IN ACCRA



**A thesis in the Department of Family Life Management,
Faculty of Home Economics Education, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies, in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Home Economics Education)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

JANUARY, 2022

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Lamnatu Ziblim, declare that this Thesis, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

Name of Supervisor: Prof. Kolawole O. Soyibo

Signature: 

Date:

DEDICATION

To my loving husband, Alhaji Rex Sumani, for his continuous understanding and support throughout this difficult and challenging moment.



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Many people have been involved in the process of this research. First, I would like to thank the Almighty God for his blessings and guidance throughout this academic journey.

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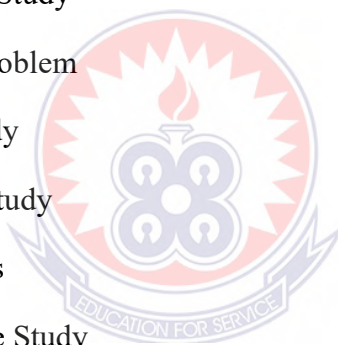
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I appreciate my family's continued support in my academic journey up till these specially my husband who has continually given courage and support in my academic endeavours and my children as well for their obedience and support.

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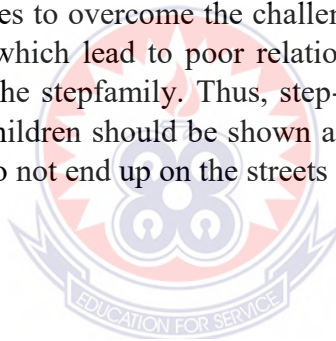
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ABSTRACT

This study explored parenting in step-families in selected Zongo communities in Accra. The qualitative research methodology was employed using the phenomenology approach. An in-depth interview was used to collect data from twenty participants (ten step-parents and ten step-children) selected using the snow-ball technique from purposively selected three Zongo communities. The demographic data were analysed to generate percentages for discussion. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist using QSRNVIVO 9. The study revealed that the stepfamily brought challenges and a range of benefits to the participants' life experiences. The key difficulties pertained to issues regarding poor-quality relationships, ineffective communication, financial challenges, interferences from biological non-resident parents and outsiders, emotional challenges, abuse and neglect, step-siblings rivalry leading to conflicts and stress in step-parenting. Benefits include having an adult person in the life of step-children, step-parents having children, and other new family members in their lives among others. The findings also revealed separating wives and children in polygamous step-families to different houses, dialogue with a biological non-resident parent for collaborative parenting of step-children and step-parents accepting that step-children already know their biological parents and would not regard them were measures to overcome the challenges. Step-parenting comes with a whole lot of challenges which lead to poor relationships among members affecting healthy family living in the stepfamily. Thus, step-children should be submissive to their step-parents. Step-children should be shown affection by step-parents, relatives, and society so that they do not end up on the streets as junkies and criminals.

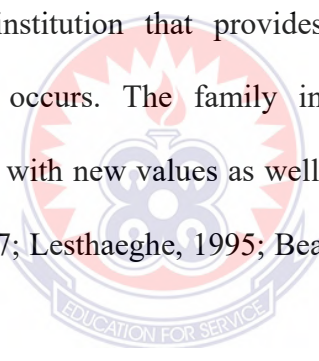


CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Despite the historic centrality of the nuclear family unit (mother, father, first-born), there are several definitions of family. According to the Population Reference Bureau (2000, p. 12), “Family can be a group of people held together by birth, marriage, or adoption or by common residence or close emotional attachment. Families may include persons who claim descent from common ancestors in a lineage, a tribe or a clan”. Although marriage often signifies the creation of a family, unofficial joining together endorsed neither by church nor state, are quite common. The family is a universal and enduring institution that provides the context within which the socialisation of children occurs. The family in developed countries has been transformed in accordance with new values as well as social, political, and economic changes (Van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe, 1995; Beaujot, 2000; Reher, 2007; Sobotka, 2000 in Adjiwanou, 2017).

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central shield with a sunburst at the top and a book at the bottom. The shield is surrounded by a wreath. Below the shield, the motto 'EDUCATION FOR SERVICE' is written in a banner. The entire emblem is set against a background of a sunburst pattern.

Aspects of these changes include non-marital childbearing, cohabiting unions, divorce, re-partnering and remarriage, and increases in voluntary childlessness, with its consequences on children and young people (Bignami-Van Assche & Adjiwanou, 2009). Family transition is also under way in sub-Saharan Africa including Ghana, but occurs at a different pace, in its own directions, and with distinctive consequences. Since many remarriages with children from previous relationships and polygamous marriages exist, stepfamilies are more common than ever. Over the past two decades, the traditional family of mother, father, and shared biological children as the dominant structure of a family has been replaced by the modern family, the blended family (George & Fernandez, 2014). Njoroge and Kirori (2018) say blended families are

called by several other names including stepfamilies, reconstituted families, patchwork families, non-traditional families, new families and many others.

The term stepfamily originated from the Anglo-Saxon word 'Steop' meaning to bereave or to make orphan (Bray & Berger, 1992 in McGee (2012). The term was applied to children whose parents had died. Contemporary stepfamilies differ from traditional stepfamilies as they are more commonly formed subsequent to a divorce, separation or unmarried motherhood (Hetherington, 1999; Sage, 2007). Pryor and Rodgers (2001) suggest that one characteristic of stepfamilies that is particularly variable, is the configuration of siblings both within and outside the household. A stepfamily might involve two remarried partners, both with children or even additional children from other relationships (Fitzpatrick & Vangelisti, 1995). These same partners might have their own biological child, resulting in a "yours, mine and ours" situation (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993, p.59).

Parenting is universal in its orientation towards the well-being and best interests of children (Daly, Bray, Bruckauf, Byrne, Margaria, Pecnik, & Samms-Vaughan, 2015 in Adjiwanou, 2017). However, it varies across cultural contexts with respect to criteria and goals for adolescent well-being and the transition to adulthood. Parental roles need to be seen within broader socio-cultural understandings of who should be involved in the various aspects of raising adolescents, and what these provisions or processes entail. Historically, fathers and mothers are allocated specific roles alongside other members of the family and community (Bray & Dawes, 2016). The term 'parent-child relationships' is being used by Stephen and Scott (2007) rather than 'parenting' because the latter term implies, for some, the notion that the effects of parents on their children are a 'top-down', unidirectional process and that parenting

is a trait-like phenomenon; neither of these assumptions is correct. The term ‘parent–child relationship’, although more cumbersome, connotes a more mutual, dynamic, interactive process that describes the processes of mechanisms of influence. Rowntree (2007) notes that the quality of parent-child relationships shows considerable stability over time. Some dimensions of parenting are important in children’s lives irrespective of age, especially whether relationships are warm and supportive or marked by conflict.

Jensen, Shafer and Larson (2014) posited that stepfamilies play an important role in American family life, as nearly one third of children will live in a stepfamily before they turn 18 (Sweeney, 2010; Teachman & Tedrow, 2008). Many children live in a stepfamily because of premarital childbearing, divorce, remarriage, and parental cohabitation (Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2007; Bumpass, Raley & Sweet, 1995). Thus, the common notion that stepfamilies are only formed after remarriage has been supplanted by several family structures in which a non-biological and biological parent rear a child.

Deacon and Firebaugh (1988) stipulated that a family life cycle for step families helps conceptualize the many changes and adjustment that take place in the process of establishing new relationships and roles. In blending two families throughout the life cycle, it is possible to adapt to and to accommodate the new stepparents and the energy that person brings from another family system. A step-parent and stepchild relationship takes time to build because there are no blood ties or shared history. Cartwright (2014) remarks that children in stepfamilies have been found to be less warm and communicative, and more negative towards their mothers and view their families as less warm and more conflicted. While parenting by mothers tends to

recover after two years of remarriage, greater difficulties can be experienced again compared to first-marriage families when children in stepfamilies reach adolescence (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Bray, 1999). In one longitudinal study, one third of adolescent boys and one quarter of adolescent girls in stepfamilies disengaged from their families and spent little time at home (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Possibly due to these increased difficulties in relationships with adults' parents and stepparents, adolescents and young adults in stepfamilies leave home earlier. This has been found in Australia (Young, 1987), New Zealand (Hillcoat-Nattemamby, Dharmalingam, Koopman-Boyden, & Pool, 1999), and Great Britain (Kiernan, 1992).

Moreover, young adults from stepfamilies, compared to those from first-marriage families, have been found to live further away from their parents, see them less frequently, give them less support, and receive less support from them (White, 1994). Stepfamilies, while possessing many strength, also have a number of unique challenges that may help account for their higher dissolution and dysfunction rates compared with intact biological families (Amato, 2010; Sweeney, 2010). Thus, research suggests that parents in stepfamilies can experience considerable difficulty in their relationships with children from previous marriages and that children and adolescents experience problems in adjusting to the changes in their family situation. Children and adolescents who are experiencing adjustment difficulties can then place greater stress on their parents' abilities to care for and discipline them (Cartwright, 2014).

According to Rowntree (2007) in terms of sibling relationships in step families, identification theory might suggest a process for the ways in which step-siblings in particular may disassociate themselves from each other in order to establish their own

identity. This could be particularly true for young adolescents who are actively undergoing identity formation during early adolescence. When families “blend,” though, it rarely progresses smoothly, some children may resist changes, relationship as a couple will be less relaxed. While parents can become frustrated when new family do not function in the same way as the previous one and the step-children in polygamous marriage make things difficult for the step-mother. Jensen et al. (2014) believe that, step-families require adjustment for everyone involved. Family life is full of challenges. On top of all the normal challenges, there are extra challenges for step families. That is one of the reasons that the divorce rate for remarried couples is higher than for first-time marriages. Step families can be happy and effective, but the extra challenges require extra effort and extra wisdom to make the family strong. Along with thousands of other step-parents challenges may be experienced in this role for many reasons including kids who test you, the territory is unknown, and possibly having a partner who does not realise your challenges (Jensen et al., 2014).

Njoroge and Kirori (2018) posited that the transition into step parenting role is neither immediate nor a smooth transition, this process is clouded by lack of positive role models for the role of stepparent, relegating each family to re-imagine and enact this function of step parenting within the ongoing family relationship. For the stepparents who do not have biological children of their own in the blended family, their step parenting role becomes more challenging. After having survived a painful divorce or separation and then managed to find a new loving relationship, the temptation can often be to rush into remarriage and start a blended family without first laying solid foundations. Children hear many fairy tales about wicked and evil stepmothers such as Cinderella, Snow White and Hansel and Gretel (Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, 2014). This point tag’s the woman a wicked step-mother. Many

stepfamilies encounter difficulties such as bounding problems, cohesiveness and conflicting loyalties that biological families do not face, but we rarely hear about well-adjusted and happy stepfamilies. Forging a civil relationship with an ex-spouse or new spouse and raising stepchildren are daunting tasks, but they can be achieved, (Benokraitis, 2011).

According to Benokraitis (2011), successful remarried couples say that they try harder, are tolerant of minor irritations, and tend to be more considerate of each other's feelings than they were in their first marriages. They also report enjoying the new interest and new friends that a remarriage brings. Bellows (2015) hints that past surveys have found that many kids are able to see positives in one or both of their parents remarrying such as additional grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, more gifts for birthdays, new siblings to play with, enjoy seeing their parents happy again, vacations and other extras due to higher combined households income and enjoy being part of a two-parent home. There are also long-term benefits to growing up in a blended home. Changes may cause initial conflict, but eventually leave children with the ability to be more flexible and with a lesson of how to adapt in new circumstances. Children have the chance to positive role models in their life with additional life experiences, preference and skills allow for children to have access to different types of information and learning. It also gives them more people to go to in times of trouble. According to Molgaard (1993), researchers have found that most stepfamilies go through predictable stages as they learn to live together. Knowing how other stepfamilies adjust can assist to understand what is being experienced now and what to expect in the future. Papernow (1984) found that average stepfamilies required about seven years to complete the cycle, while others did it in four and some took as long as ten to twelve years.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Accra is a cosmopolitan city with different tribes with different religions and social backgrounds. The city has different suburbs which include Zongos. Zongos are (Muslim dominated communities in Ghana). Families are the smallest unit of these communities and, therefore, critical to its development and maintenance. As the smallest social unit of society, the family has been instrumental to the development of cultures and nations. Family is recognized to vary in composition and the nature of the relational tie between members, and is not understood exclusively as the nuclear family or connection by kinship. Parent' and 'parenting' are used to refer to the main caregiver of the child; they are not limited to biological or legal parents, or, indeed, even to parents. Significant number of children are brought up by people other than their parents. Parents are important personalities and have great influence in child's life, they play active role in child's life.

Previous studies have discussed various aspects of the family all over the world. There has been studies on parenting style and practices in stepfamilies including its specificity with regard to fosterage and polygyny, increases in premarital childbearing. Step-family impacts and issues, step-family advantages and disadvantages, blended family discipline, disagreement in perceptions of stepfamily communications and functioning: implications for mental health and influence of step-parenting cognitions on step-parenting issues and relationship satisfaction among others.

Globally, step-parenting results from natural either through death to manmade causes such as divorce, separation or polygamy. In the Zongo communities, due to polygamous (polygyny) marriages, high divorce rate, death of a parent and many more, the formation of step-families is high, hence step-parenting. Parenting, and for that matter step-parenting is a task that does not come with ease. Though step-parenting may be beneficial to a certain extent, the general belief is that step-parenting is rocked by myriad of issues experienced by both the step-parents and step-children. Often times, such issues lead to disharmony and consequently escalate into major conflicts among or between step-parents and step-children. In fact, some researchers argued that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is the most problematic and stressful relationship in stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1994 in Kison, 2011). In contrast, others view the stepparent-stepchild relationship as containing both positive and negative characteristics. Consistently, stepchildren often hold conflicting attitudes about their stepparents that consist of both positive and negative feelings that dominate each other intermittently (Baxter, Braithwaite, Bryant, & Wagner, 2004; Golish, 2003 in Kison 2011)). In Ghana, however, there is insufficient of research report on step-parenting especially on the Zongo communities which experience more of this myriad of problems because of the nature of step-families in these communities. Hence, this study seeks to explore parenting in step-families in the Zongo communities.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore parenting in step-families in selected Zongo communities in Accra.

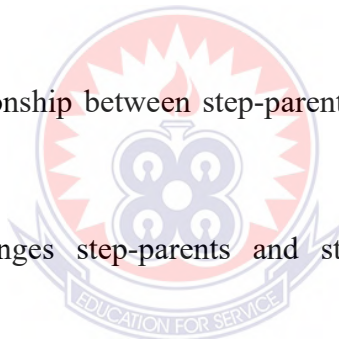
1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

1. determine the quality of relationship that exists between step-children and step-parents in the Zongo communities.
2. identify the challenges step-parents and step-children face in Zongo communities
3. investigate the implications of the challenges on step- parents and step-children in Zongo communities.
4. assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in the Zongo communities.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How is the relationship between step-parents and step-children in the Zongo communities?
2. Are there challenges step-parents and step-children face in the Zongo communities?
3. What are the implications of the challenges on step-parents and step-children?
4. Which measures can be adopted by step-parents and step- children to overcome the challenges?



1.6 Significances of the Study

A study of step-parenting will benefit many individuals, particularly step-parents and step-children to work on their relationships that is either to maintain the good quality relationships or improve on poor quality relationships when people learn about others who have similar in the society to live in harmony.

Step-parenting is becoming more increasingly in our society today; this does not come without challenges as well as benefits. This study will bring into limelight the challenges and benefits that come with step-parenting. This will assist step-parents to adapt the best measures to deal with step-children's behaviours. Different step-parenting styles highlighted in this study, this will assist step-parents identify styles best suited for their individual parenting situations, and those who are yet to go into the blended families to have a fair idea as to how to be step-parents. Also, it will help organizations and institutions such as Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Domestic Violence and Victims Supports Units (DVVSU) and some non-governmental organizations involved in family and parenting issues to plan counselling session for step-families who may need it. Again institutes like schools can use these to identify and help students who have problems in step-families. It will serve as a research material for other researchers in similar studies.

1.7 Delimitation

The study is delimited to parenting in step families in the Zongo communities in Accra. Three Zongo communities which are among the biggest Zongos in Accra with step-families are the focal point for the study. Accordingly, findings, analysis and conclusions of this study will be based on the three Zongo communities. But can be applied to solve similar problems or situations elsewhere.

1.8 Limitations to the Study

The study was limited to the three Zongo Communities due to the numbers in the Zongo communities. This was so because of limited available resources such as finance and time. Also, participants' work schedules made the one on one interview a bit cumbersome for the researcher. Some of the participants did not want to grant the

face interview because COVID-19 pandemic which posed a little difficulty for the data collection.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Step-parenting: This is rearing children who are either the biological children of the mother and not father or the biological children of the father and not the mother.

Simple step-families: This refers to families in which only one of the adults has children from a previous partnership.

Complex stepfamilies: This refers to families in which both adults have children from previous relationships.

Step-father families: These are simple step-families with a mother, her children, and her partner.

Step-mother families: Are simple step-families with a father, his children, and his partner.

Step- families: These are types of family where the father or mother or both remarry with children.

Zongo: This is a settlement area in West African towns populated mostly by settlers from Northern Sahel areas. A common feature of the Zongo community is their predominant use of Hausa language

Step-children: These are children from either the mother or the father where the father or mother has remarried. The new father or new mother considers these children as step.

Step-parent: This is a parent who is not biologically related to the children his wife have or her husband have.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The study was divided into five chapters. Chapter One encompasses the background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study. Chapter Two which dwells on Literature Review examines the relevant studies that have earlier been undertaken in step-parenting. This was done in the following areas as family and family structure, changes in the family types, parenting and parenting styles, blended families or step-families, structure of step-families, challenges of step-parenting and prospects of step-parenting

Chapter Three focuses on the study area, research design, study population, sample and sampling techniques, procedures for collecting data and data analysis. Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study vis-à-vis characteristics of the respondents, the relationship between step-children and step-parents, the challenges step-parent face in parenting in Zongo communities, the effects of the challenges of step-parenting on the step-child and step parents in Zongo communities and the prospects of step parenting in the Zongo communities. Chapter Five presents summary, conclusions and the recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter, situates the key concepts that feature in the study and within the context of the subject, as well as identify the potential linkages between them by way of defining those concepts. It is also relevant to explore previous studies that have been undertaken on the subjects so as to serve as a guide to establish the missing links that the current study seeks to complete.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

According to Abend (2008) and Swanson (2013), theories are formulated to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. According to Swanson (2013), the theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. The theoretical framework introduces and describes the theory that explains why the research problem under study exists. The theoretical framework connects the researcher to existing knowledge. Guided by a relevant theory, the researcher is given a basis for hypotheses and choice of research methods. The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic under study and relate to the broader areas of knowledge being considered.

An overview of the literature reveals the extent to which step-families have existed from generations the world over including Ghana. Some well-known theories on family and parenting among others include Social learning theory, attachment theory, Symbolic interactionism, family systems theory, social exchange theory, conflict

theory, and developmental theory. For the sake of this work the attachment and family systems theories was paramount because it considers the interactions and relationships that exist in these theories and how family members adapt to one another. It will also offer a better explanation of the complexity of parenting in the step-family.

2.1.1 Attachment theory

Early childhood experiences shape an individual's beliefs about the responsiveness and trustworthiness of others through interactions with primary caregivers (Fraley, Roisman, Booth-LaForce, Owen, & Holland, 2013). "Research has demonstrated that adult attachment styles have broad consequences for interpersonal functioning, emotion regulation, and well-being" (Fraley et al., 2013, p. 1). Given this research, an individual's actions and behaviours are influenced by the attachment relationships formed with parents and peers (Hellmenn, 2014).

Relationships with significant others, including parents, who display emotional and physical availability to an individual's needs provide the individual with a sense of security (Ketterson & Blustein, 1997). In addition, research indicates that secure attachment to parental figures, as well as peers, has a positive influence on the development and adjustment of adolescents (Vignoli, 2009). The sense of security and support from attachment figures promotes active environmental exploration, as well as mastery of the environment and developmental tasks (Vignoli, 2009). A sense of security from parental support should enable a young adult to actively explore with the knowledge there is a safe place to return to for restoration (Feeney & Monin, 2008).

Previous research has successfully applied the attachment theory to adolescent exploration and decision-making. Ketterson and Blustein (1997) found a positive correlation between parental attachment and environmental exploration. Attachment anxiety resulted in less independent exploration (Petegem, Beyers, Brenning, & Vansteenkiste, 2012). Similarly, results from Vignoli (2009) indicated a positive correlation between parental attachment and adolescent exploration.

The relationship of this theory to the study show that, when there is a healthy relationship between the step child and the caregivers (parents, step parents and other relatives) is likely to influence the child's development positively. This gives the child confidence to explore his environment and develop a good sense of self-esteem. This will help the child grow up to be a happy and functioning adult.

2.1.2 Family systems theory

To better understand the influence of parents, the family systems perspective places emphasis on the interactional patterns and interdependence of the individual's family system (Zingaro, as cited in Lopez & Andrews, 1987). Lopez and Andrews (1987) theorized that an individual's experience with one another could be linked to the person's interactions with his or her family unit, rather than a result of an individual personality trait. Moreover, the authors believed the interactional patterns could enhance or hinder an individual's behaviour; a negative family interaction pattern will create and possibly maintain misbehaviour (Lopez & Andrews, 1987). Pryor and Rodgers (2001) present the view that Family Systems Theory has been widely used as a framework for thinking about stepfamily relationships, as it offers a means of conceptualizing the relationship dynamics found in stepfamilies, compared to those in original families. The family systems perspective advocates that each relationship

between individuals in the family unit affects and is affected by all other relationships in the family.

For this study, the family systems theory was to assist in the assessment of how the step parental unit, in terms of relationship, affects step children. This perspective implies that an individual is one part of an entire system of interactions. Family systems theory added to the perception that relationships may not be solely a result of an individual trait, but may stem from a series of interactions within an entire family system (Hellmenn, 2014).

2.1.3 Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model of Stepfamily

Adjustment (MCDM)

Fine and Kurdeck's (1994) Multidimensional Cognitive-Developmental Model examines the stepfamily as a tiered system, in which there is a continuum of adjustment to the stepfamily system. This theory has four dimensions, the first of which considers the relations between four units of the stepfather family system; the mother, father, child or stepfather. The two person unit refers to the mother and stepfather marital system. The third unit refers to the mother, stepfather and non-residential father and the fourth tier system refers to all three persons in the three person unit and the non-residential father. The second dimension outlines the dominant cognitions, which are particularly relevant to the stepfamily; perceptions, attributions, expectancies, assumptions and standards. The issue is, to what extent are the perceptions of the family members' cognitions compatible with the cognitions of others in the unit, for example do family members have likeminded expectations of the stepfather's role? That is a balanced sub-system. The third dimension describes the adjustment to a stepfamily along a continuum, from maladaptation to adaption.

The issue here is the relation between the cognitions and the adjustment. The final level of analysis views the adjustment to a stepfamily process, in terms of four distinct stages; early remarriage that is the dating and courtship stages; cohabitation, middle remarriage and late remarriage. The theory proposes that within the developmental stages of stepfamily adjustment, cognitions and adjustment to the stepfamily can change over the life span. Sage (2007) suggests that one significant contribution that this theory offers is that it highlights the multidimensionality of stepfamily life.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an assemblage set of research concepts cum (combined with) variables together with their logical relationships often represented in the form of diagrams, charts, pictographs, flow-charts, organ gram or mathematical equations. Conceptual research framework unveils studies phenomenon of concepts cum variables into simple set of relations that can be easily understood, modeled and studied (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Further a conceptual framework is a set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure a subsequent presentation (Seidu, 2006). In order to investigate the research problem of this study which is to explore parenting in step-families in Zongo communities in Accra, the following variables were examined in the model below; step parents, step child, step family and parenting.

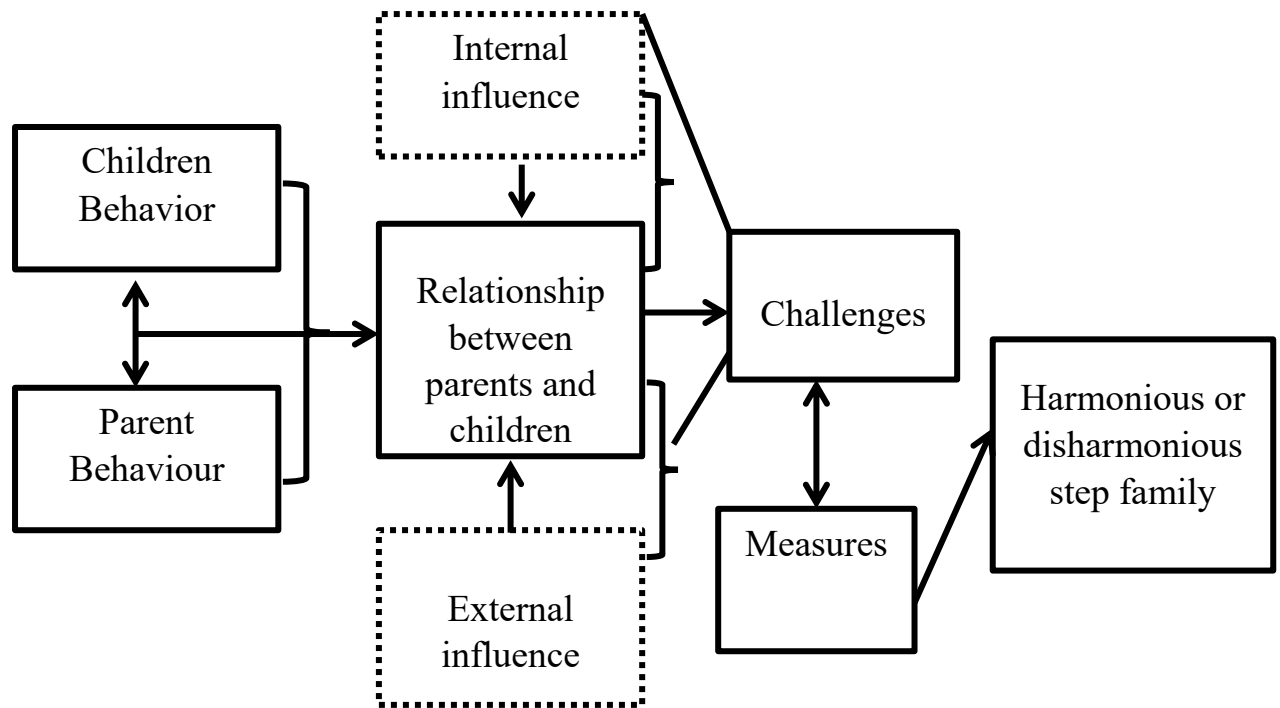


Figure 1: An illustration of parenting in step-family model

Source: Researcher's construct, (2020)

The illustration in figure one have arrows which show the relationship between the variables. The arrows between step-parents and step-children points to both variables meaning there is interaction among step-parents and step-children behaviour which is antecedence, that is inert. Behaviour is something that exist in human so the way we behaviour is from within that bring agreement or disagreement. But there are influences that are both external and internal that can influence the behaviour. The double headed arrow pointing from the behaviour of step-children to step-parents means there is interaction that shows relationship that exists in the stepfamily. From the step-family, an arrow pointing from step-parents and step-children relationship may bring about challenges. The external influence in the broken lines such as interference of outsiders like neighbours in the step-family brings challenges to step-family even though they are not part of the study. They can interfere and bring challenges. Internal influence from blood relations like the biological mother of the step-child also in the broken lines interferences can bring also lead to challenges.

The interaction between step-parents and step-children leads to relationship between them. The relationship can bring about challenges. The double headed arrow between challenges and measures shows that measures need to be put in place to cope with the challenges. The arrow from measures leads to harmony or disharmony depending on how the challenges are handled.

The diagram depicts that, parenting outcomes hinges on relationship between step parents in step family behaviour. The conceptual framework builds on Hellmenn's (2014), assertion that an individual's actions and behaviours are influenced by the attachment relationships formed with parents and peers, the author asserts that a healthy relationship should enhance child's behaviour. Effective parenting or relationship, is a strong construct for step parents to enhance their step child's growth; this is because effective parenting or relationship can provide assistance to step parents for understanding and attain particular skills and to develop values, attitudes and interests for achieving parental objectives.

Stepfamily form when you and your partner make a life together with the children from one or both of your previous relationships (Segal & Robinson, 2019). Therefore, a broad review of literature from different fields of study is required to grasp this phenomenon.

Literature for this was therefore be reviewed under the sub topics such as the concept of family and family structure, parenting and parenting styles, the concept of blended families or step-families structure, relationship in Step-families, challenges of step-parenting, implications of the challenges on step-families and measures step-families adopt to overcome the challenges

2.2 The Concept of Family and Family Structure

Family is a contested concept, with different cultural traditions and understandings of family prevailing within and across countries. This makes for complexity and variation (Daly, et al., 2015). Howk and Huitt (2007) say despite the historic centrality of the nuclear family unit (mother, father, first-born), there are several definitions of family. Benokraitis (2011) defines family as an intimate group of two or more people who live together in a committed relationship, care for one another and any children and share activities and close emotional ties. According to Ooms and Preister (1988) in Robert (1992), the definitions of family are as diverse as families themselves and the situations they are found in. Viewed simply, the definitions can be categorized in two way as structural definitions that specify who is in the family and who is out according to certain characteristics of family members, and functional definitions that specify the functions family members perform. Structural definitions of the family characteristically define the characteristics of family members such as those who share a place of residence, or who are related through blood ties or legal contracts. Other definitions move away from blood relationships or a legal definition and focus instead on the functions families perform.

According to most functional definitions, a family is any unit in which there exists sharing of resources and economic property, a caring and supportive relationship, commitment to or identification with other family members, preparation of children born to or raised by the members to become adult members of the society (Robert, 1992).

According to the Population Reference Bureau (2000), “Family can be a group of people held together by birth, marriage, or adoption or by common residence or close

emotional attachment. Families may include persons who claim descent from common ancestors in a lineage, a tribe or a clan” (p. 12). According to Dinisman, Montserrat, Strózik and Strózik (2017) the Preamble of the Convention on the Rights of the Child considered the family as the “natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members and particularly children” and declared that “the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” (The United Nations, 1989). Baham, Weimer, Braver, and Fabricius (2008) refer to the traditional family as the intact family, also popularly referred to as the nuclear family where the family has remained together for the duration of the child’s life. The UNESCO report stated that a family is a kinship unit and that even when its members do not share a common household, the unit may exist as a social reality. From the authors definitions, it is seen that Benokraitis considers family as a group of people who live together in a committed relationship with close emotional ties, Population Reference Bureau asserts “Family as a group of people held together by birth, marriage, or adoption or by common residence or close emotional attachment and Robert also thinks that a family is the unit of sharing of resources and economic property, a caring and supportive relationship and so on.

These authors view on the concept of family is about a group of people who are together have a common thing that make the one and share close emotional ties. Base on the definitions of the authors, a family can be described as a group of people with close emotional ties that cares and supports each other, share common interest and resources for identification and preparation of children born to the family for adult members of the society.

2.3 The Structure of the Family

As family structures begin to take new forms, modern conceptions of family relationships continue to change. Consistently, during the last decades of the twentieth century, family structures have become more complicated as a result of family formations that lack clear beginning and ending points (Cherlin, 2010). Dinisman et al. (2017) stipulates that family structure has undergone considerable changes over the last century; the notion of 'family' has become more and more fluid and there is no such thing as a standard family. New forms of partnerships, such as unmarried cohabitation and living-apart-together; an increase in the divorce rate and separations as well as single-parent households, and the extended family no longer live under the same roof as the nuclear family (Mortelmans, Matthijs, Alofs & Segaert, 2016).

From the 1960s onwards, these changes have gathered pace due to socioeconomic, technological and cultural factors. Authors like Cliquet (2003) in Dinisman et al., have singled out three major groups of family characteristics: those pertaining to relational behaviour which is partnership, to reproductive behaviour as parenthood and to intergenerational behaviour which focused on the living conditions of elderly people. As the concept of family is becoming more fluid and changeable the challenges in defining different family structures is also raised. The definition of the family structure is based on living arrangements rather than on the parents' marital status (Bumpass & Raley, 1995). Based on this approach, and similar to previous research (Bjarnason, Benstsen, Arnarsson, Borup, Iannotti, Lofstedt,.... 2012; Dinisman, Montserrat, & Casas, 2012), two-parent family is family in which two parents share the same household, a single-parent family, is where only one parent is alive and a separated family is a family in which the living arrangement of the child and consequently other aspect of the care is shared between two homes and adults.

However, as mentioned above, the reality can be very diverse. For example, some children living in separated family may share their time equally between the two homes, while others may visit the other house less frequently (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1988 in Dinisman et al., 2017).

According to Blessing (2020), there are six specific types of family structures identified today. The following types of families exist today, with some families naturally falling into multiple categories. These include nuclear family which is the traditional type of family structure which consists of two parents and children, single parent family where one parent is raising one or more children on his or her own, extended family structure which consists of two or more adults who are related, either by blood or marriage, living in the same home. This family includes many relatives living together and working toward common goals, such as raising the children and keeping up with the household duties. The childless family where the couples either cannot or choose not to have children. This type of family is sometimes the “forgotten family” as it does not meet the traditional standards set by society. Step family is one of the families in which Blessing observes that the family involves two separate families merging into one new unit which consists of new husband, wife, or spouse and their children from previous marriages or relationships. The other types of families according to Blessing are grandparent family, for Blessing there is no right or wrong when it comes to the best type of family structure. As long as a family is filled with love and support for one another, it tends to be successful and thrives.

Benokraitis (2011) says remarriages often result in myriad new relationships and a dramatic change in family composition. Children may suddenly find themselves with stepsiblings—brothers or sisters who share a biological or adoptive parent and a step

parent. Others have half siblings-brothers or sisters who share only one biological or adoptive parent. Children may also gain stepgrandparents, stepaunts, and a host of other steprelatives. As a result, the children's experiences may change dramatically. For example, they may have to share their biological parent's time, as well as their physical space, with stepsiblings. The authors have raised different forms in which the structure of the family can be, Blessing stated the six specific types of family structures as nuclear family, extended family, single-parent, grandparent family, childless family and the step family. The two-parent family as stated by another above as a family in which two parents share the same household, Benokraitis says remarriages often result in myriad of new relationships and a dramatic change in family composition. That children may suddenly find themselves with stepsiblings-brothers or sisters who share a biological or adoptive parent and a step parent, step-grandparents, step-aunts, and a host of other step-relatives. Considering what has been said by the authors about the structure of the family, the structure of the polygamous family has not been mentioned. The polygamous (polygynous) family structure is a bit complex as several wives with their children and relations make up the family. There can be the nuclear polygynous family where the man and the two or more women with their children only as the household. The extended polygynous family consist of the man with his two or wives and children with other relatives. Polygynous families are considered as step-families because different women marrying one may all have children. These children consider the other women married to man as step-mothers. In cases where there is remarriages with children within these types of families make it a complicated step-family.

2.4 Family Functions

According to Ooms (as cited in Patterson, 2002), families serve several important functions for society. Some of these functions are family formation and membership, economic support, nurturance and socialization, and protection of vulnerable members. However, Levine (as cited in Shaffer, 2000) states that the three basic goals that families have for their children are survival, economic self-sufficiency, and self-actualization. These three goals are symbolic of various cultures. This shows that although there are several differences in the types of families in the world, they have certain things in common. It is the job of educators to examine the characteristics of families in order to foster most advantageous development in the children they serve (Christian, 2006). Family is a contested concept, with different cultural traditions and understandings of family prevailing within and across countries. This makes for complexity and variation (Daly, et al., 2015). Families vary considerably in the United States and globally but must fulfil at least five important functions to ensure a society's survival (Parsons & Bales, 1995).

1. Regulation of Sexual Activity: Every society has norms, or culturally defined rules for behaviour, regarding who may engage in sexual relations, with whom and under what circumstances
2. Procreation and Socialization: Procreation is an essential function of the family because it replenishes a country's population. Some married couples choose to remain child free, but most plan to raise children. Some go to great lengths to conceive children through reproductive technologies. Once a couple becomes parents, the family embarks on socialization, another critical function
3. Economic Security: The family is also an important economic unit that provides financial security and stability. Families supply food, shelter,

clothing, and other material resources that ensure the family's physical survival. Especially during the economic turndown beginning in 2008, many families have relied on their kin for loans to pay off credit debts or rent; help in caring for children while searching for a job after being laid off; and a place to live, such as with parents or grandparents, after a home foreclosure

4. **Emotional Support:** A fourth function of the family is to give its members emotional support. American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) proposed the concept of primary groups, those characterized by close, long-lasting, intimate, and face-to-face interaction. The family is a critical primary group because it provides the nurturance, love, and emotional sustenance that its members need to be happy, healthy and secure.
5. **Social Class Placement:** A social class is a category of people who have a similar standing or rank in society based on their wealth, education, power, 41Gprestige, and other valued resources. People in the same social class tend to have similar attitudes, values, and leisure interests. We inherit a social position based on our parents' social class. Family resources affect children's ability to pursue opportunities such as higher education, but we can move up or down the social hierarchy in adulthood depending on our own motivations, hard work, connections, or even luck by being at the right place at the right time (Parsons & Bales, 1995).

2.5 Parenting and Parenting Styles

Parenting started the day Adam and Eve gave birth to their first child. It is an old concept needed in every human society to mould and raise the young ones, whenever parenting is mentioned, certainly a mother or father or both or guardian and a child or children are involved. Virasiri, Yunibhand and Chaiyawat (2015) believes that

parenting refers to the rearing of a child or children, in particular the care, love, and guidance given by a parent. It consists of the methods, techniques and other activities that are used or required in the rearing of children. Parenting is a process of raising and educating a child from birth until adulthood, which is carried out in a child's family by the mother and father or biological parents.

Amoakohene (2013) states that parenting is the skills and task responsibilities of raising child or children. In this case the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual developments are being promoted and supported by the parent. Parenting is usually done by the biological or adopted parent of the child in question, although in Ghana the extended family, community and the society at large play a role in rearing children. Most of the times the social class, wealth and income of the parent have the strongest impact on what methods of child rearing are used by parents. Bibi, Ghafoor Chaudhry, Awan and Tariq (2013) stipulates that parents basically mold and shape their children into adults through their world of influence. Brooks (2012) defines parenting as the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Brooks again maintains that parenting refers to the intricacies of raising a child and not exclusively for a biological relationship. Lau (2004) states that parenting can be simply defined as the process or the state of being a parent. Once you have a child, you are involved in the process of parenting.

Amoakohene (2013) states parenting as the skills and task responsibilities of the development the child's physical, emotional, social and intellect. Brooks also says parenting is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. In these two

definitions, the authors are all considering the physical, emotional as well as intellectual development of children as parenting. From their definitions, parenting can be the task or responsibility a person has taken to mold emotionally, physically and intellectually of a child to fit into the society.

According to Utting in Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007), policy-makers and commentators often blame 'bad parenting' for children's and young people's troublesome behaviour. Some dimensions of parenting are important in children's lives irrespective of age, especially whether relationships are warm and supportive or marked by conflict.

A way of reflection between parent and child relationships is parenting and it is a complex activity that includes many specific attitudes and behaviours that work separately and collectively to influence child outcomes and generate an emotional bond in which the parent's behaviors are expressed (Bibi et. al. 2013). Parenting can be explained in terms of two components such as parental responsiveness and demandingness (Fletcher, Walls, Cook, Madison, & Bridges, 2008). Parental demandingness is the extent to which parents set guidelines for their children, and how their discipline based on these guidelines. Parental responsiveness is the emotional characteristic of parenting. Responsiveness passes on to the degree to which parents support their children and attend their children's needs. Both parenting responsive and demanding has been linked to secure attachment in children (Karavasilis, Doyle & Markiewicz, 2003 in Bibi et al. 2013).

Brooks (2012) states that the most common caretaker in parenting is the father or mother, or both biological parents of the child, although a surrogate may be an older sibling, a grandparent, a legal guardian, aunt, uncle or other family friends.

Parenthood has been called the world's most difficult job thus offering no pay, no fringe benefits, no vacation, and no precious little thanks. Olson (2003), further states that a parent's job is to give a child both "roots and wings". This is no easy task. Rearing children may indeed be life's greatest mixed blessing. It is full of good times and bad times, frustrating, challenging and elating successes. A baby's first stumbling steps and first words, a teenager's first love, a grown child's first baby thus all are important transitions that parents remember.

2.5.1 Parenting styles

Parenting style describes multidimensional processes involved in raising children who should become useful members of the society (Adeyemo & Onongha, 2008). According to Cassoni and Caldana (2012) parenting style is a result of a set of parenting practices that can, depending on frequency and intensity, shape prosocial or antisocial behaviour. That the study of parenting style approaches child rearing objectively, investigating the range of parental behaviours that create the emotional milieu in which parent-child interactions are expressed, based on the influence of parents on behavioural, emotional, and intellectual aspects of childhood development. The most common parenting styles include the authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. According to Bibi et al. (2013) authoritative parent is combination of demandingness and responsiveness. They make logical demands, set limits and insist on children's compliance, whereas at the same time, they are warm, accept the children's points of view, and encourage the children's participation in decision making and often seek their children's views in family considerations and decisions (Berg, 2011). This type of parent monitors and disciplines their children fairly, while being very supportive at the same time (Bibi et al., 2013).

Bibi et al. (2013) states that the authoritarian parenting style of parents is demanding and unresponsive. They engage in little mutual interaction with the children and expect them to accept adult's demands without any questions. Power-assertive techniques of socialization that is threats, commands, physical force and love withdrawal use by authoritarian parents and restrain children's self-expression and independence. Authoritarian parents are inclined to set high standards and guidelines and obedience is required. Authoritarian parents connect love with success and are not as nurturing as the other two styles of parenting (Berg, 2011). The permissive parenting as explain by Bibi et al. comprises few clear and predictable rules because follow-through is not constant and misconduct is ignored, neutral or positive affective tone. They give children a high level of freedom and do not restrain their behaviours unless physical harm is involved. Permissive parenting exposes an overly tolerant approach for socialization with responsive and undemanding parenting behaviour. These parents are nurturing and accepting, but at the same time they avoid imposing demands and controls over child's behaviour. They have little or no expectations for their children and often view their children as friends and have few limits imposed (Berg, 2011). Utting (2007) states that warm, authoritative and responsive parenting is usually crucial in building resilience. Parents who develop open, participative communication, problem centred coping, confidence and flexibility tend to manage stress well and help their families to do the same. Parents, or alternative caregivers, play a pivotal role in promoting the knowledge, skills and environment that can help children cope with adversity (Utting, 2007).

Parenting is a functional term for the processes involved in promoting and supporting the development and socialization of the child (Richter & Naicker, 2013). Two dimensional model of parenting: warmth-hostility and restrictiveness- permissiveness

was presented by Becker, high in warmth and restrictiveness parents produce complaint, well-behaved children, whereas those high in warmth and permissiveness promote socially outgoing, independent, and creative children (as cited in Khalid, 2004 in Cassoni & Caldana, 2012). There are several characteristics of parenting. First of all, with the advance of medical knowledge and technology, parenting becomes a choice in life. Secondly, being a parent is a life-long commitment. Thirdly, it involves responsibilities as parents are responsible to take good care of their children physically as well as psychologically. Lastly, parenting involves not just the couple but all the family members since the birth of a child affects the whole family. This is to say that even apart from the entire family, the step-parent after remarriage also have the responsibility or a role to parent a child or children in the family. Some researchers have found that stepfathers can exceed expectations with regard to the parenting practices considered to be essential for promoting self-esteem, autonomy, and social skills in children, such as those related to setting limits, communication, teaching of responsibility, and expression of affection (Cassoni & Caldana, 2012).

2.6 The Concept of Step-Families

According to Njoroge and Kirori (2018), over the past two decades, the traditional family of mother, father, and shared biological children as the dominant structure of a family has been replaced by the modern family, the blended family (Cindy & Fernandez, 2014). Blended families are called by several other names including stepfamilies, reconstituted families, patchwork families, non-traditional families, new families. Initially, formation of a blended family depended on the death of a spouse. This has been preceded, since 1960s by divorce and remarriages of one or both partners from previous spouses (Cindy & Fernandez, 2014).

Charlein (2009) contends that the concept of step-family has evolved from the embracing of two contradictory cultural ideals, marriage and individualism. Marriage is formal commitment to share one's life with another placing a strong value in the institution of marriage. Individualism emphasizes personal choice and self-development. High value is placed on personal freedom, fulfilment, and growth as well as spiritual fulfilment, reflecting individualism. Between 1900 and 1960, marriage changed from an institutional and practical arrangement to a companionate one, meaning that individuals looked to marriage not just for help in raising a family and sharing a home but also for personal growth and fulfilment (Charlein, 2009).

Meiklejohn, Yeager and Koch (1990) states that the term step family is a relatively new one associated with the high risk of divorce and remarriage in our own time. In some cultures, and religious sects, it is related to polygamous marriages as well. Segal and Robinson (2019) posited that, a stepfamily forms when you and your partner make a life together with the children from one or both of your previous relationships. Stepfamilies occur from the unionization of two individuals, where at least one of these individuals has a child from a previous relationship (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). According to McGee (2012), a stepfamily exists when two adults, one or both of whom already has a child, have formed a new relationship, where the new partner becomes a significant adult and parental figure to their partner's child. Such stepfamilies may arise through cohabitation, marriage or remarriage. The author went further to state the forms of stepfamily as the, De-facto stepfamily: is applied to a situation where a parent acquires a new live-in partner. De-jure stepfamily: is formed after remarriage.

From the literature reviewed above, the authors definitions of stepfamily, it is realised that stepfamily is formed when there is a remarriage with a child or children. In my own view stepfamily can be formed from another angle where there is polygamy (polygyny), this is where two or several women have children for one man. In this type of family, the two or more women form the same household or stay in separate homes but the children share the same father which makes the children step to their mother's rivals.

2.6.1 The dynamics of stepfamilies

While definitions are important in guiding research, they can imply that stepfamilies are a homogeneous entity. However, research illustrates that stepfamilies are diverse in their organisation and come in many different forms (Coleman et al., 2000; De'Ath 1992; Dunn, 2002; Stewart, 2008 in Graham 2010). This diversity is reflected at two levels; firstly, there are a multitude of types of stepfamilies (Burgoyne & Clark, 1984; Clingempeel, Brand & Segal, 1987; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001 in Graham 2010) and secondly, there is great variability within stepfamilies themselves. Stepfamilies differ both in the adjustment of family members and the functioning of relationships, depending on factors such as the characteristics of children, for example their gender and age and the level of involvement and closeness between non-resident parents and children (Graham, 2010).

According to Cartwright (2014), a number of different terms have been used to describe step-families, including repartnered families, remarried families, and blended families. A number of terms are also used to describe different step-family types. Stepfamilies can be distinguished between simple and complex step families (Jozsa & Balassa, 2014). According to Cartwright (2014), "simple step-families" refers to

families in which only one of the adults has children from a previous partnership. “Complex stepfamilies” refers to families in which both adults have children from previous partnerships. “Step-father families” are simple step-families with a mother, her children, and her partner. Similarly, “step-mother families” are simple step-families with a father, his children, and his partner. Step-families can be cohabiting or remarried.

The literature further states that children of either parent may be living in the household, all or part of the time. In complex step-families, children have stepsiblings. A complex stepfamily may also include the presence of a half-sibling: a child that is the result of a genetic union between both parents in the family, and would be a half-sibling to a child of the mother’s or a child of the father’s. Some repartnered couples, also referred to as step-couples, go on to have a “mutual” child of their own (referred to in the Australian Census as “blended” families; ABS, 2003). The children in these families then gain a half-brother or half-sister. Hence, while there is evidence that the “step-” terms have some negative connotations, they allow us to talk about step-family relationships and provide step-family members with names for their step-relationships (Cartwright, 2014). The step family can be more complex and complicated in respect to the polygynous homes. These is so because the different children by different women born for the same man may still have other step siblings from previous marriages of their step mothers. In sub-saharan Africa, although women are more likely to become single mothers as a result of bearing children outside a formalised union, or of family disruption, social norms in the region may prevent women to stay longer in this state (de Walque and Kline 2012). As a result, many children would find themselves living in a stepfamily arrangement. The process of forming a new, stepfamily can be both a rewarding and challenging

experience. While you as parents are likely to approach remarriage and a new family with great joy and expectation, your kids or your new spouse's kids may not be nearly as excited.

According to Cartwright (2014), many Australian children spend part of their childhood living in a step-family and many will grow up to be the step-parents of tomorrow. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2007), approximately one in ten couple families contain resident stepchildren. In Wave 3 of the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, 13% of households had either residential or non-residential step-children, or both (Qu & Weston, 2005). Early research, both in Australia and overseas, has found that children often experience difficulty adjusting to the changes associated with their parents' repartnering, especially in regard to developing a relationship with a parent's new partner, the step-parent.

According to Sage (2007), arriving at an estimate of the number of stepfamilies is a complex task, as it is contingent upon how the stepfamily is defined. She adds that most figures pertaining to stepfamilies are gross underestimates of the extent to which stepfamily living has permeated society. She suggests that limiting the stepfamily to marriage underestimates the representation of stepfamilies, since cohabitation has become increasingly common across most western societies and this includes the cohabitating stepfamily (Dunn, 2003; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Smock, 2000). Furthermore, writers in many contexts suggest that it is difficult to ascertain an accurate representation of stepfamilies, due to complications with defining the stepfamily, and measuring stepfamilies across households (Teachman & Tedrow, 2008).

Research in the US, Europe and Australia demonstrates an increase in the rise of the stepfamily system (Sweeney, 2010). In the US, forty-two per cent of adults are found to have a step relationship (Parker, 2011). In Australia it is reported that ten per cent of couple families with children, are stepfamilies (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). It is estimated that one in three individuals are involved in some sort of stepfamily in the UK (Hayman, 2005). In Ireland, Lunn and Fahey (2011), estimate that 2.5 per cent of children live in stepfamilies. In the US the rate of family breakdown is more than 50% and children born to married parents experience family breakdown prior to the age of 16 years (Lazar, Guttman & Abas, 2009). Majority of these adolescents become part of a remarried family prior to turning the age of 18 years causing a change in the family structure of these adolescents that result in relational issues in their life (Carranza, Kilmann & Vendemia, 2009).

In SubSaharan Africa (SSA), the institution of traditional family is resilient but steadily responding to global changes (Dube, 2015). For instance in Kenya, Chacha (2015) reported details of a complex and almost dysfunctional blended family where the stepmother and the stepfather had one child of their own while she brought a son into the marriage and he brought two daughters. The authors in the step family above have stated clearly how step family is becoming one the fast spreading types of family due to so many factors such as remarriages, re-partnering and cohabitation. To support these, Sage (2007) suggests that limiting the stepfamily to marriage underestimates the representation of stepfamilies, since cohabitation has become increasingly common across most western societies and this includes the cohabitating stepfamily. In Ghana step family system is across all the regions and among the various ethnic groups as well as in the different religious sects. It does not come only in the simple form, but the complex step family also exists in Ghana in the

polygynous homes and even those re-partnering after second or third marriage with children.

2.6.2 Parenting in step-families

Cartwright, (2010) posits that parenting in a step-family is not the same as parenting when the children's birth parents are together. A step-parent and stepchild relationship takes time to build because there are no blood ties or shared history. And step-parents will have different roles in different families. They may feel that they have many responsibilities, but no 'rights'. Cartwright maintains that building a relationship with a child takes time, just like any other relationship. You need to earn each other's trust, do this in stages and do not expect things to be perfect all the time. Sometimes it will be difficult to build that bond, or it may not happen at all, be sincere with the child, pretending and bribing with gifts can backfire. Stepmothers are reported to be more authoritarian in their parenting style than were others in first-marriage families and commonly use control without explanations of reasons for discipline and do not promote independent decision making on the part of stepchildren (Pasley, Dallhite, & IhingerTallman, 2017). Being a stepmother is believed to be more difficult than being a stepfather, primarily because stepmothers often are expected to assume primary responsibility for child care.

Cartwright believes that to achieve in parenting step children, discuss role expectations with your partner. Your partner may not know how far to stick his or her hand out. Be inclusive and involve them around big and small decisions in your child's life. If not, your partner may feel isolated in the process, do not take rejection personally. Children do not understand the dynamics behind the step-parenting issues, and most times they will show more favour toward their natural parent than to you,

especially if the child is older or has experienced their parents in a relationship like post-divorce. Understand that the child may not be old enough to make sense of things and may need time to adjust. Try not to take everything personally although this may be testing at first (Cartwright, 2010). Cartwright (2014) observes that there is variability in the roles that step-parents adopt. As mentioned previously, it is common for step-parents both step-mothers and step-fathers to take on a parenting role and attempt to build a “normal” family in which the step-parent engages in the care and discipline activities of parenting (Coleman, Ganong, & Weaver, 2002; Svare, Jay, and Mason, 2004). Other step-parents try to become friends with their step-children and do not take on a disciplinary role, but rather maintain a supportive role (Kinniburgh-White, Cartwright, and Seymour, 2010). Some step-parents focus primarily on the relationship with their partner and have less involvement with the children. Still others disengage from the children, which can occur after initial attempts to relate to the children are rejected (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Base on the assertions of the authors on the literature on step-parenting, it is a whole lots of confusion when it comes to parenting the step-family because the step-parents do not actually know the exact parenting skills and responsibilities to take. As mentioned above, some step-parents take the normal parenting responsibility, others tend to behave like friends to the step-children, and some disengage while others focus on their partners making it a difficult situation about parenting in step-families.

According to Cartwright (2010) it takes a whole lot of patience. You will most likely have more patience and tolerance for your own child than for somebody else’s. If you are raising someone else’s child, the disciplining process becomes complicated and it is easier to lose your temper easier than you would with your own child. Cartwright

further states that once you have built the trust, it will be easier to be firm with the child when the situation calls for it. Know when to speak up. Step parents or foster parents often struggle with communicating with feelings openly, at the fear of offending the other parent or child or being misinterpreted. An open and upfront discussion as issues arise should help you clear the air and avoid the build-up of resentment. Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that the needs of the children involved are prioritised.

2.6.3 Role of the stepparent in parenting

The transition into step parenting role is neither immediate nor a smooth transition (Pasley et al., 2017) This process is clouded by lack of positive role models for the role of stepparent, relegating each family to re-imagine and enact this function of step parenting within the ongoing family relationship. For the stepparents who do not have biological children of their own in the blended family, their step parenting role becomes more challenging (Pasley et al., 2017). Fogarty, Ferrer and McCrea (n.d.) states that the role of a stepparent is not necessarily to be the household disciplinarian. As a stepparent, it may be better to avoid making decisions regarding your stepchild's behaviour. This does depend on the circumstances involved. Instead of trying to parent your stepchild, it may be better to try to be a mentor or supporter to the child. Should you have concerns about a child's behaviour, be sensitive to the fact that the child is trying to adjust to a new lifestyle. Keep a positive attitude; focus on the child's positive qualities. As time passes, your role as a stepparent may change. You may choose to be more involved with the child. Remember, though, you cannot force a close relationship. Take cues from the child about how involved they want you to be. Fogarty et. al. maintain that parenting your own children can often feel exhausting; being a stepparent is sometimes even more challenging. It can be

frustrating and discouraging if the relationship with your stepchild is not what you would like it to be. With patience, consistency, forbearance, and time things will improve.

Graham (2010) stipulates that the stepparent role has rarely been measured in a uniform way, making it difficult to compare findings across research studies. In the United States, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) measured the stepparent role by examining the degree to which family members viewed a parental role to be appropriate for stepparents. They also examined perceptions of whether close relationships between stepparents and stepchildren were considered to be appropriate and the extent to which each spouse assumed responsibility for child-rearing and housekeeping tasks, although the individual child rearing tasks were not defined.

However, Njoroge and Kirori (2018) state that empirical evidence shows that stepfathers feel inadequate in their role and do not perceive mutual love or mutual respect between themselves and their stepchildren, for instance, they are less warm, less supportive, less controlling, and more permissive, and less consistent in their discipline with their stepchildren than were fathers with their biological children. On the contrary, Marsiglio (1992) examined stepfathers' perceptions of their role by measuring the degree to which they agreed with general statements regarding the nature of their role in their stepchildren's lives.

In a study of Australian stepfather families, Funder (1996) in Graham (2010) measured the extent to which the stepparent was perceived to be functioning as a co-parent in the child's life. In Cartwright (2010) a British study suggests that stepparents may engage in regular childcare activities. The step-parenting in the 1990s study in Great Britain investigated the sharing of childcare and other domestic work by first-

marriage and stepfamily couples. They found that stepfathers were actively involved in caring for and bringing up children, and in some cases, more so than biological fathers in first-marriage families. According to the reports of both mothers and stepfathers, six out of ten stepfathers shared equally in the care of the stepchildren compared to half the men in first-marriage families. From the author, it can be agreed that stepfathers even take care of their stepchildren more than first family father does.

Graham (2010) posts that measurement of a variety of behaviours is important since there are an array of parenting behaviours and child rearing responsibilities in which stepparents might be differentially involved. Furthermore, children's views may differ depending on the parenting behaviours that are examined. While children may not want stepparents to be involved in disciplinary behaviours, they may be happy for them to be involved in supportive behaviours, such as providing financial and emotional support. In addition, some of these studies only measured one family member's perceptions of the stepparent role and none examined the degree to which roles were discrepant among stepfamily members. Understanding how different components of the stepparent role relate to functioning and how all stepfamily members view this role is important in assisting stepparents in developing roles within their families.

Fine and colleagues (1997, 1998) in Graham (2010) posits that researchers define the stepparent role as consisting of the cognitions and behaviours pertaining to how stepparents should and do act towards their stepchildren. These cognitions are comprised of two dimensions; the actual and ideal stepparent role. While the actual role refers to the actual parenting behaviours performed by the stepparent, the ideal role reflects perceptions regarding how the stepparent should behave.

Fine and colleagues illustrated these dimensions of the stepparent role are in Figure 1 below. The Components of the Stepparent Role

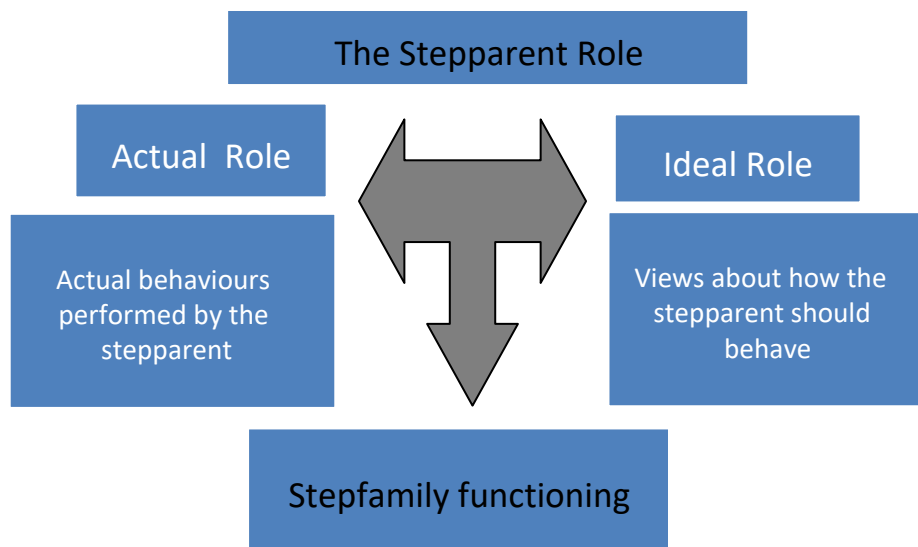


Figure 2: Role of the Stepparent in Parenting

Source: Graham K., R. (2010)

2.7 Relationship in Step-Families

The Cambridge dictionary defines relationship as the way two or more people are connected, or the way they behave toward each other. Thorndike and Barnhart in Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary explain relationship as a state of condition that exist between people or groups that deal with one another such as a business relationship, a social relationship. An interpersonal relationship refers to the association, connection, interaction and bond between two or more people. The two definition above takes about connection between people as relationship. From the definitions, relationship can be seen as the mutual coexistence of a group of people. There are different kinds of relationships such as, friendships, acquaintanceships and romantic relationships, family relationships and many more. Family relationship play a central role in shaping an individual's well-being across the life course.

Grevenstein (2019) stipulates that family relationships form very important social relationships. Relationships provide the social context enabling the development for a healthy personality and fostering social competencies and the capacity for social adjustment. Tan and Ley (2020) post that relationship can be a sources of intimacy and closeness, comfort and relief from stress, accountability and that a social relationships to be fundamental to happiness and well-being. Relationships within the family are important for the development of children's well-being, as well as for their overall satisfaction (Andresen, Hurrelmann & Schneekloth, 2012). On the one hand, it seems that there is barely another “institution” so crucially dependent on the social, historical, cultural and religiously conditioned notions. On the other hand, the elementary care for the exceedingly dependent family members is central nearly children who live in different family structures differ in their evaluations of family relationships and family well-being (Dinisman et. al. 2017).

Jana (2020) posits that family relationships is important because our mental growth, well-being and stability all depend on our family. And that families are the basic units that teach children about relationships and children brought up in a healthy family will be able to form better bonds outside their home, and also strong relationship teach us how to build trust in others as family members share both good and bad times together. Jana further states that positive family relationship help children feel secure and loved, which gives them the confidence to explore their world, try new things and learn, which makes it easier for family to solve problems, resolve conflicts and respect differences of opinion.

Connor and Scott in their parenting and outcomes for children in Utting in Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007) observe that the quality of parent-child relationships

shows considerable stability over time. Quality of parent-child relationships is significantly associated with social competence which is about parental warmth, lack of conflict, and control and monitoring appear to play an important role in developing children's social skills. In most circumstances, there is considerable stability in the quality of family relationships over time, especially when there is a secure bond of attachment between children and their parents. The quality of parent-child relationships appears to remain influential into adulthood for social and behavioural outcomes. Some dimensions of parent-child relationships appear important in children's lives irrespective of age, notably whether they are warm and supportive or marked by conflict and hostility. Improving the quality of parent-child relationships can be expected to have positive effects on individual children, families and society as a whole. However, the wide range of outcomes that are linked with the quality of parent-child relationships needs to be reflected in the way that parenting interventions are assessed.

The relationships between each member of a step-family can vary significantly. A wife, for example, will relate separately to her husband, her own children, and her stepchildren. In turn, each one of them will relate separately to her and to each other. Now add in the different relationships there will be between them and a large number of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins ... Yes, it can get complicated (Virasiri et al, 2015).

2.8 Research on Stepparent-Child Relationships

Stepparent-child relationship quality as defined by Jensen and Howard (2015) is including measures of perceived quality, closeness, relational satisfaction, or similar constructs as reported by stepchildren. According to McGee (2012) many researchers

have commented on the significance of stepfamily relationships to stepfamily experiences. Researchers suggest that step kin relationships can be comparatively fragile, less cohesive and highly sensitive to stressors and that the survival of the remarriage is contingent upon workable step relationships and that stepfamily experiences were more related to the quality of stepfamily relationships, rather than any other factor. In Willis and Limb (2017) it is estimated that up to one-third of American children will reside in a stepfamily home before the age of 18 (Papernow, 2013).

Family structure changes as new partners, stepparents and stepsiblings come together. Those changes require the formation of new interactions between caregivers and children. The interactions individuals have with their caregivers influence how they interact in future relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Malekpour, 2007). The remarriage of a parent influences the dynamics of biological parent and child relationships. Boundaries between parents and children have to adjust, and family traditions and rituals change when a new stepparent is introduced, changing pre-existing family dynamics (Papernow, 2013). It is therefore important to explore the implications of stepfamily adjustment on adult relationships and attachment in emerging adults.

According to Fine and Kurdek (1995), in a stepfamily, the biological parent–child relationship precedes the marital relationship and the stepparent–stepchild relationship. When a stepfamily is formed, the biological parent already has an established relationship with the child, whereas the stepparent is in the early stages of developing a relationship with this child. Despite the relative lack of a shared history and a sense of commitment in the stepparent–stepchild relationship, we believe that this dyad should be considered a subsystem of the stepfamily system because of its

central importance to stepfamily functioning (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Fine & Kurdek, 1994a). Because of these differences between the parent–child and the stepparent–child subsystems, it is plausible that the relation between the parent–child subsystem and the marital subsystem for biological parents is different than the relation between the stepparent–stepchild subsystem and the marital subsystem for stepparents (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

According to Kison (2011), although both stepparents and children may develop a bond with the biological parent, the stepparent-child relationship is not one of choice; rather, stepparents and their partners’ children are brought together by circumstance. Due to these circumstances, relationships that vary widely can occur between stepparents and their new stepchildren (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007). In a 10-year follow up of post-divorced families and remarriages done by Wallerstein and Lewis (2007), some stepparents were shown to love their stepchildren as if they were their own, whereas others only chose to develop a relationship with a select stepchild or none at all. Often, positive relationships were contingent on the ease with which stepchildren accepted the new stepfamily structure and rules.

Further, Ganong, Coleman, Fine, and Martin (1999) indicated that, although some stepparents seek to build affinity with their partners’ children, these efforts are often short-lived. Unless stepparents continue to build affinity with their stepchildren past their initial interactions, stepchildren are not likely to reciprocate affinity-seeking behaviours. Due to these inclinations, relationships between stepparents and their stepchildren are considered a salient factor with regard to the many challenges faced by stepfamilies (Fine, Coleman, & Ganong, 1998; Fine & Kurdek, 1995; Shrodt, 2006). In addition to the relationships built with their stepchildren, stepparents exert a

significant level of influence on the relationships between biological parents and their children. It is presumed that this influence is due to the desire of biological parents to sustain stability within their new marriage. In fact, some researchers argued that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is the most problematic and stressful relationship in stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1994). In contrast, others view the stepparent-stepchild relationship as containing both positive and negative characteristics. Consistently, stepchildren often hold conflicting attitudes about their stepparents that consist of both positive and negative feelings that dominate each other intermittently (Kison, 2011).

Corrie (2002) found that, compared with biological parents with adult children, stepparents live further away from their children geographically, see their children less often, and have lower-quality relationships. Other research based on this same dataset suggests that this is the case in both blue-collar and white-collar families (Kulis, 1992). Older stepparents give less advice and household help, provide less companionship to adult stepchildren, and receive less support from them (White, 1994). The difference in support between stepparents and biological parents was especially great for stepmothers. Another study by Pruett, Calsyn, and Jensen (1993) similarly found that college students from stepmother families perceived less social support, greater conflict and less cohesion from their mothers than did students from intact families. Relationship quality was better if the stepparent had no biological children of his or her own, suggesting that biological children compete with stepchildren. Stepparents who come into the family later in life may feel especially competitive with their adult stepchildren. This may be true especially if the two are close in age (De Jong Gierveld & Peeters, 2003). Younger stepparents may even be motivated to have children or additional children so as not to be “upstaged” by the

new babies of their adult stepchildren (Bernstein, 1989). It is difficult to imagine a healthy stepparent-stepchild relationship developing under these circumstances.

2.9 The Special Case of Stepmother-Stepchild Relationships

Corrie (2002) maintains that stepmothers tend to have more difficult and lower-quality relationships with their stepchildren than do stepfathers. College students report much lower levels of attachment to stepmothers than to biological mothers, but the same level of attachment to biological fathers and stepfathers. Similarly, Sauer and Fine (1988) in Corrie (2002) compared 130 college students from intact families and 47 students from stepfamilies and found no differences in perceptions of relationships with stepfathers and biological fathers, but worse relationships with stepmothers than biological mothers. Vinick and Lanspery (2000) interviewed 25 stepmothers about their relationships with their stepchildren from their initial meeting to the time of the interview, a period of time ranging from 10 and 41 years. They found that the majority that is two thirds of stepmother - stepchild relationships were “stable and positive” that is did not change or saw “positive improvement.” The remaining third were “stable negative” or became worse. Stepmothers with adult stepchildren should approach their role in the same manner as stepmothers with younger stepchildren.

The authors of this study saw that positive relationships were more common if the stepmother came onto the scene later in the child’s life after the difficult teen years, when the child’s biological mother is less involved. Positive relationships also seemed more common when the stepfamily resulted from the death of the spouse rather than divorce, in part because the children had better relationships with their widowed than their divorced fathers. Stepmothers who developed positive relationships generally

took the lead to clear the air of past conflicts. Stepmothers who did not develop positive relationships with their stepchildren by the time the stepchildren were adults seemed regretful that they did not do more to improve the relationship. Corrie (2002) stated that many of the stepmothers sampled also noticed a marked improvement in their relationship with their stepchildren once the children moved out of the house. A stepmother remarked that, “They’re great to be with as long as they’re not leaving their wet towels on my floor” (pp. 287–288).

2.9.1 Step- and half-sibling relationships in adulthood

Visher and Visher (2003) in McGee (2012) suggest that the quality of stepsibling relationships is a powerful predictor of stepfamily experiences. That similarly, writers suggest that stepsibling relationships provide scope for personality clashes, conflicts, rivalry, perceived injustices and other sources of family tension and that young stepfamily members can find it difficult to cope with preferential treatment of other siblings in the family, such as a biological child of a stepparent. There is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding step- and half-sibling relationships in adulthood. White (1998) in Corrie (2002) examined the consistency of adult men and women’s reports of their number of siblings over time using the (National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS], 2006) and found significantly more discrepancies among adults who had complex family histories and step- and half-siblings than among adults with only full siblings. One possible reason is that adults have less contact with their step- and half-siblings than with full siblings. The difference in level of contact is substantial. Based on the NSFH, adult full siblings saw each other an average of one to three times a month and saw step and half-siblings only a few times a year. Contact with step- and half-siblings was greater when there were no full siblings, when the stepchildren spent a greater portion of their childhood living with a stepparent, and when the stepparent

was a stepfather rather than a stepmother. Distance had a stronger negative effect on step- and half-sibling contact than on full sibling contact, suggesting that step- and half-siblings were less likely to make the effort to see each other. The more distant relationships between step- and half-siblings might be linked to the large age gaps between them (Bernstein, 1989; Farmer, 2005). Nevertheless, stepsiblings can be important sources of support for young adults. Farmer (2005) found that stepsibling relationships were either “close and positive” or “distant and neutral.”

Conversely De’Ath (1992) in McGee (2012) found that the strength of new relationships formed between kin and stepkin was one of the encouraging factors which emerged from her study of stepfamilies. Newman’s view (1999) in McGee is that despite the fundamental problems that can arise for many stepsiblings, they can adjust very well and bonds and close relationships can develop, especially if there are similarities in age, sex and life experience. It is also consistent with findings by Stoll et al. (2006) that relationships developed over the different phases of stepfamily formation. That stepsiblings often brought a sense of comradeship and a sense of experience for a child’s world and that it was rare to find that young people envied or resented another child born to their biological parent and stepparent.

From the authors’ discussions, stepsibling relationship is full of ups and downs which can either make or unmake cordial relationship in stepfamilies. Stepsiblings’ relationship in stepfamilies most a times brings conflict and eventual ends the family.

2.10 Challenges of Step-Parenting

The mixed and not straight forward relationship in stepfamilies brings challenges onto the smooth and peaceful co-existence of stepfamilies. Due to this, challenges in step

families was discuss to find out the level of challenges faced by this structure of family.

The IGI Global (2020) posted that challenge is a situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical or financial efforts in order to be done successfully. (“Challenge” n. d) Collins English dictionary defines a challenge as something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination. The synonyms of challenges as spelt out by the Collins English dictionary as dare, provocation and summons. Beghetto (2020) posted that a challenge literally means an invitation or call to action which vary in scope and complexity. The authors above states challenges as something that needs great effort, something new and difficult and something which vary in scope and complexity. From these, challenges can be seen as something difficult which needs to be attended to in order to attain a goal. Challenges come in the day to day running of activities in human life. It could be academic challenge, business challenge, social challenge or parenting challenges.

Though raising children can be one of the most joyful, enchanting and rewarding aspects of family life, it has in-built hardships, frustrations and conflicts. This is why parenting is often described as a combination of tough times and tender moments (Adeyemo & Onongha, 2008). Teen (2017) posted that parenting has become a daunting task for most of the parents in the current times. The reason being that parenting has become quite challenging due to the fact that our lifestyle is rapidly changing with newer requirements and demands being instilled into our lives. Maintaining a balance between parenting duties and work has become fairly stressful for today’s parents as a result of which they find parenting quite challenging. Some of the challenges enumerated by the post include scarcity of time, failure in imparting

moral values, imbalanced life, and lack of emotional bonding and so on. Jenkin (2010) posits that challenges in parenting come in themes as personality factors that is dealing with internal characteristics of one or more of their children. According Jenkin being too easily influenced, being defiant, being hypersensitive or disorganized are some of the challenges parents deal with in parenting. Jenkin also stated maturation as in children growing up, parents not having enough time for themselves because of children or hectic work schedule, and dealing with challenges in their careers as some of the challenges.

Other challenges listed by Blustein (n.d) are illness, relationship problems and divorce, aging parents, financial challenges, problems with children and related work issues. Ranjan (2019) states that the common challenges parents face in the 21st century are mobile phone addiction where children get addicted to mobile phone by watching videos, playing games, chatting and being active on the social media which make parents get worried about their studies and later cyber bullying or an app that can end their lives. Obesity cause by eating junk foods is a source of challenge for parents today, as these make children face health issues at very early age and lack stamina as compared to their age. Balancing personal and professional lives is another challenge raised by Ranjan (2019), as well as bad habits by teenagers and adolescents like drinking, smoking and drugs.

Family life is full of challenges, every family is faced with one or more challenges as they manage to stay together as a family. On top of all the normal challenges, there are extra challenges for step families. Adeyemo and Onongha (2008) maintain that without biological link, it can be extremely difficult to tolerate, let alone like stepchild who is being particularly troublesome and coping with recalcitrant teenagers can a

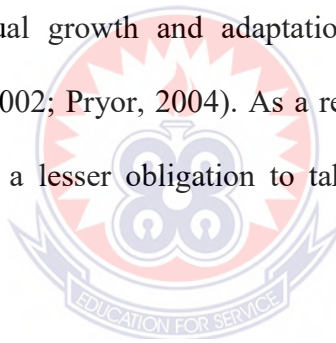
nightmare. That is one of the reasons that the divorce rate for remarried couples is higher than for first-time marriages. Step families can be happy and effective, but the extra challenges require extra effort and extra wisdom to make the family strong.

According to Cartwright (2010) parenting in a step-family is not the same as parenting when the children's birth parents are together. A step-parent and stepchild relationship takes time to build because there are no blood ties or shared history. And step-parents will have different roles in different families. They may feel that they have many responsibilities, but no 'rights'. Nunez (2016) observes that being a step-parent is very sacrificial and requires a thick to roll with the punches that come with the role. Segal and Robinson, (2019) maintain that as you blend two families, differences in parenting, discipline, lifestyle, can create challenges and become a source of frustration for the children.

According to Graham (2010) interest in the parenting role exercised by the stepparent initially stemmed from clinical recommendations that this was crucial to the positive development of the stepfamily. Much of the clinical literature supports the view that stepfamilies may encounter problems when stepparents become prematurely involved in an active parenting role. Stepchildren may not believe that stepparents should act as parents and when stepparents do, this can lead to family conflict and relationship strain. Moore and Cartwright (2005) found that stepchildren expected biological parents to maintain primary responsibility for discipline and the stepparent to play a less involved role. Divided loyalties and feelings of betrayal may become evident when biological parents encourage stepparents to become involved parental figures (Cartwright, 2000). For these reasons, clinicians emphasise the value in stepparent

roles that are not based on the biological parent role and encourage stepfamily members in considering alternative parenting roles.

According to McGee (2012) various writers have suggested that the step-parent and stepchild relationship is pivotal to the stepchild's wellbeing and perhaps the most complex of all the challenges faced by stepfamily members (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Dunn (2002) suggests that young people have more positive relationships with parents, to whom they are biologically related to, than with stepparents, and children usually have a biological parent of the same sex as the stepparent involved in their lives (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). It is suggested that this is due to the fact that there was no chance to develop bonds in early infancy and childhood, no shared history and no opportunity for mutual growth and adaptation between stepparent and child (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Pryor, 2004). As a result some writers have suggested that stepparents reported a lesser obligation to take care of stepchildren (Graham, 2010).



Aquilino (2005) and Killan (2004) found that step parents provide less financial assistance to their stepchildren, than to biological or adoptive children. Olusan and Saloviita (2014) in analyzing the challenges of polygynous stepfamilies stipulates that a researcher found out about a family made of a husband, eight wives and sixty siblings, the researcher found extensive competition, hostility, and jealousy among the wives, lack of communication between the co-wives, or the children of different wives and a variety of behavioural psychosocial problems among the family members.

Segal and Robinson (2019) mentioned a number of common challenges to include age differences, in step families, there may be children with birthdays closer to one another than possible with natural siblings, or the new step-parent may be only a few years older than the eldest child. Aside that parental inexperience where one of step-parent may have never been a parent before, and therefore may have no experience of the different stages children go through. Also changes in family relationships if both parents remarry partners with existing families come together, it can mean children suddenly find themselves with different roles in two step families. For example, one child may be the eldest in one stepfamily, but the youngest in the other.

Blending families may also mean one child loses their uniqueness as the only boy or girl in the family. To top it all difficulty in accepting a new parent if children have spent a long time in a one-parent family, or still nurture hopes of reconciling their parents, they may have difficulty accepting a new person. Coping with demands of others, in blended families, planning family events can get complicated, especially when there are custody considerations to take into account. Children may grow frustrated that vacations, parties, or weekend trips now require complicated arrangements to include their new stepsiblings, couple with changes in family traditions. Most families have very different ideas about how annual events such as holidays, birthdays, and family vacations should be spent. Kids may feel resentful if they are forced to go along with someone else's routine. Parental insecurities is also another challenge where a step-parent may feel anxious about how they compare to a child's natural parent, or may grow resentful if the stepchildren compare them unfavourably to the natural parent (Segal & Robinson, 2019)

Cartwright (2014) states that parent child relationships can be placed under considerable stress following re-partnering. This was demonstrated by Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992), who investigated the adaptation of adults and children in first-marriage families, established sole parent families, and stepfather families during the first 26 months following remarriage. They found that parenting by mothers in stepfather families was disrupted during the two (2) years following remarriage compared to that of other mothers in the study. Mothers in stepfamilies showed more negativity and less positivity towards their children from previous relationships. The pre-adolescent children in the study also demonstrated adjustment difficulties and often responded negatively, sometimes in quite extreme ways, to mothers and stepfathers. Similarly, children in stepfamilies have been found to be less warm and communicative, and more negative towards their mothers (e.g., Hetherington & Jodl, 1994 in Graham 2010) and to view their families as less warm and more conflicted. While parenting by mothers tends to recover after 2 years of remarriage, greater difficulties can be experienced again compared to first-marriage families when children in stepfamilies reach adolescence (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Bray, 1999 in Graham 2010).

Thus, research suggests that parents in stepfamilies can experience considerable difficulty in their relationships with children from previous marriages and that children and adolescents experience problems in adjusting to the changes in their family situation. Children and adolescents who are experiencing adjustment difficulties can then place greater stress on their parents' abilities to care for and discipline them (Cartwright, 2014). McGee (2012) outlined a number of difficulties or challenges associated with the Stepfamily as follows;

Complexity

That there is little that is straightforward about stepfamilies but rather, the modern stepchild arrives into a family form that is inherently complicated (Dupuis, 2010; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). The rearrangement of households, with regards to stepfamilies has the potential to be remarkably complicated, as it forces the establishment of several new relationships along with the renegotiation of existing ones (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Shalay & Brownlee, 2007). And that stepfamilies are more complicated than first-marriage families, due to the multiple and complex kinship relationships, that constitute a remarried family system.

Ambiguity

Hayman (2005) likens stepfamily life to living on a sprawling estate due to the various configurations and merging of individuals from previous families. She suggests that stepfamily members can find it difficult to determine the perimeters of their properties or ascertain who belongs to whom and what individuals might mean to each other. Similarly, Wilkes Karraker & Grochowski, (2006) refer to the complexity of stepfamily maps which make it difficult for members to conceptualise who is part of their family and who is not. McGee (2012) relates that consistently writers refer to the lack of cultural or legal guidelines for the negotiation of children's relationships with more than two living parents. This leads to ambiguity regarding issues such as the appropriate use of kinship terms, roles of stepparents in children's lives, and the rights and obligations associated with stepfamily membership.

Unique Stressors

Again, McGee (2012) states that many researchers concur that unique stressors can be attributed to stepfamily development and maintenance. That critical issues that arise

include conflict resolution, negative alliances, boundary management, loyalty conflict, communication issues and relationship difficulties. The author noted that conflict is intensified in stepfamilies, due to volatile relationships between stepparents and stepchildren, conflict with ex-spouses due to financial or child-rearing issues and conflict between stepparents and non-residential parents. A number of studies have found that difficulties in stepfamilies can be exacerbated, when individuals engage in coalition building where two or more family members join together in alliance against another family member (Afifi, 2008; Baxter, Braithwaite & Bryant, 2006; Koerner, 2003).

Boundary Issues

Newman (1999) in McGee (2012) discusses how remarriage creates ties that cross traditional household boundaries. Stepfamilies boundaries may be 'biologically, legally and spatially unclear' and individuals may become confused regarding family membership and norms for behaviour. Koerner (2003) explicates that often internal and external boundaries in stepfamilies can become ambiguous, due to young people changing households on a regular basis, to stay with a non-resident parent. He adds that this issue can present challenges for most stepfamilies, as boundaries become blurred, due to the different rules, arrangements and relationships that need to be adapted to in each household. Hence, young people test boundaries, to establish what rules apply, to which relationship, these issues can prove problematic for families.

Loyalty Conflict

Many authors refer to the construct of loyalty conflict, as a major issue for stepfamily members who struggle with the pushes and pulls of loyalty binds. Often young people feel that a demonstration of care for a stepparent means a betrayal in some way of the

non-resident parent (McGee, 2010). Koerner (2003) noted in his research that young stepfamily members refrained from talking to one parent about the other, to avoid upsetting their parents.

The literature about challenges in stepfamily above has reveal a lot of challenges and difficulties in starting and maintaining a stepfamily. Several challenges have been mentioned by the authors some of the include discipline issue, acceptance of the stepparent, performance of roles, caring for stepchildren as their own. Also, complexity, ambiguity, and loyalty conflict among other challenges have been raised by the authors. From these, it is seen that a lot of challenges are encountered in parenting in stepfamilies.

2.11 Implications of the Challenges

There are no challenges without implications, every challenge comes with implication in parenting in step families. This is why the researcher wants to find out the implications of the challenges on both stepparents and stepchildren (“Implication” n. d.) in Merriam-Webster is defined as something implied such as a possible significance, suggestion, a close connection or a logical relationship between two propositions in which if the first is true the second is true (“Implication” n. d.) Vocabulary.com dictionary explains implication as something that is suggested, or happens, indirectly. Implication has many different senses. Usually, when used in the plural, implications are effects or consequences that may happen in the future. The definitions of implication suggest that, when it comes to parenting, parents have a lot of effects on a child’s behaviour. To support this, Erickson (2018) observes that parents greatly affect their children’s behaviour. And that children are like sponges, they model everything a parent does and incorporate what they see into their own

lives. Erickson continued that antisocial children learn their behaviour from their parents, a parent reaction to stress affects the way a child reacts to stress and the way a parent disciplines greatly affects their children's behaviour and if arguing among parents is done fairly and with maturity, a child can actually benefit from seeing how conflicts are resolved and child abuse causes a range of antisocial and destructive behaviours in parenting. In relating parenting to step parenting, the effects will equally be felt by step children and step parents. The challenges in step parenting mentioned by the authors as discipline issues, financial problems, bonding as a family and so on, all have effects on the step family negatively or positively.

Living in step-parent households has adverse effects on child well-being. Corrie (2002) states that children who are young adults still have many developmental tasks to accomplish, and experiencing a parent's divorce or remarriage at this time can be unsettling. Young adults also need their parent to be interested in and supportive of their activities and to celebrate their achievements. Young adult children with divorcing and or remarrying parents can at times feel neglected. One woman, a graduate student finishing her master's thesis, explains, "I have accomplished a lot. But it's like there's no place to take it to! My dad's acting like a teenager in love and my mom is going nuts. They're both too self-absorbed to notice" (Papernow, 1993, p. 366). The lower level of well-being experienced by children from stepfamilies, compared with children from intact families, extends into adulthood (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). A stable family of origin is helpful to young people as they form and dissolve their own relationships, sometimes many times over, and make the transition to marriage and parenthood.

A consistent finding on nest leaving is that stepchildren leave their parents' household at significantly younger ages than do biological children (Aquilino, 1991a; Kiernan, 1992). Several studies suggest that girls in American stepfamilies are more likely to leave home early than boys (Aquilino, 1991a; Cooney & Mortimer, 1997). A study of British stepfamilies found no gender differences, however (Kiernan, 1992). Reasons for early home leaving among young adults are family conflict, greater household labour for girls, and premarital pregnancy for girls. Young adults from stepfamilies may move sooner, but they are more likely to remain close by than young adults from intact families. This could be related to their lower educational and occupational prospects.

Graham (2010) states that in one longitudinal study, one third of adolescent boys and one quarter of adolescent girls in stepfamilies disengaged from their families and spent little time at home (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Possibly due to these increased difficulties in relationships with adults parents and stepparents, adolescents and young adults in stepfamilies leave home earlier. Moreover, young adults from stepfamilies, compared to those from first-marriage families, have been found to live further away from their parents, to see them less frequently, to give them less support, and to receive less support from them (White, 1994).

Stepchildren are also less likely to reside with their parents as adults than are biological children (Aquilino, 1990, 1991b). They marry earlier and are less likely to leave home to attend college perhaps because parents give less social and financial support to stepchildren than to biological children. This, combined with poorer grades, mean that stepchildren face dimmer prospects for a college education and launching a successful career, buying a car or home, or starting a business, and may

mean a greater likelihood of falling into debt in young adulthood. Older children whose parents have started a second family with younger stepchildren and or new biological children often feel cut off financially, and many receive no help for their college educations. Some older children feel resentful and deprived when they perceive their younger step- and half-siblings getting a bigger piece of the family pie.

Available empirical evidence has shown that there is negative association between family dynamics and academic performance outcome for children who did not live with both biological parents (Sundstrom, 2013; Turunen, 2011; 2014). The higher risks for negative academic performance for children who did not live with both biological parents were related to disruptions in the family structure. Stepchildren experience poorer cognitive, behavioural, educational, and emotional well-being than children from biologically intact (BIT) families, while many stepparents suffer from poorer physical and mental health than biological parents (Jensen, Shafer and Larson, 2014). In the complex stepfamily situation of the polygynous home, Al-sharf, Pfeffer and Miller (2015) posits that research on the effects of polygyny on women has found detrimental effects on the mental health of wives and husbands and children. According to Al-sharf et al. (2015) much of the research has identified negatives outcomes for children including academic as well as psychological outcomes such as internalizing problems, externalizing problems and mental health problems.

Graham (2010) states that the majority of research examining children's adjustment in stepfamilies suggests that they are at higher risk for various adjustment problems, when compared to those in first families. Children in stepfamilies are more likely to exhibit disruptive and delinquent behaviours internalising symptoms, and psychological distress. On average, they are more likely to perform poorly

academically and leave school at an earlier age. Graham also suggest that there is additional research to suggest that stepchildren report lower self-concepts than children from never-divorced and sole parent families and that the relationship stepchildren form with their stepparents plays a critical role in self-perceptions. In general, studies have found behavioural problems to be more pronounced than internalising problems and difficulties are more evident in the early stages of stepfamily life and when stepchildren enter adolescence (Fine, 1997 in Graham, 2010).

Stepchildren are at greater risk than those in sole parent families for long-term effects, such as leaving school and home at an earlier age and experiencing divorce or separation in their own marriage. There is some indication that these increased risks are partly moderated by individual variables, such as the gender and age of the stepchild, and by family process variables; such as the parenting behaviours of the biological parent. In contrast to divorce, girls have been found to adjust less positively to stepfamily life than boys. The majority of research has been based on the adjustment of adolescents, a group whose adjustment to stepfamily life is described as most problematic which is partly explained by the young person's increasing independence from the family. The relationship with non-residential kin that is relationship with others as stipulated by Adeyemo and Onongha (2008) can have significant impact upon the quality of life of new stepfamily. Despite the myriad of the negative implications of the challenges, there are some positives in parenting stepfamilies.

According to Olson (2003) research findings on stepfamilies are generally positive. In spite of the presumptions that stepfamilies will fail to succeed because of the many

unique challenges they face. Most stepfamilies do relatively well. Research on stepfamilies indicates that investigators have often failed to take into account the complexity of stepfamily relationships because of the number of people involved thus extra parents, extra siblings, extra grandparents, extra set of aunts and uncles and so forth, (Olson, 2003).

Benokraitis (2011) maintains that, couples often say that their stepfamilies offer more benefits than their first marriage. Successful remarried couples say that they try harder, are more tolerant of minor irritations, and tend to be more considerate of each other's feelings than they were in their first marriages. Olson (2003) observes that when remarried parents are happy, the children benefit from living in a satisfying household. A well-functioning stepfamily increases the self-esteem and well-being of divorced parents and provides children who have minimal contact with their noncustodial parents with a caring and supportive adult. In addition, children's economic situation often improves after a parent remarries. Olson further indicates that children also benefit by having more objective adult with whom to discuss problems, and they may be introduced to new ideas, different perspectives, and a new appreciation for art, music, literature, sports, or other leisure activities. If stepsiblings live together, they gain more experience in interacting, cooperating, and learning to negotiate with peers. Stepfamily advantages such as increased financial resources and increased access to parental figures, with two adults in the household rather than one. Furthermore, average effects across studies are not large, so that the majority of stepchildren adapt well to stepfamily life. Al-sharf et al. (2015) observes that some benefits to children in polygynous families are availability of numerous role models, large variations in children's experiences, both positive and negative McGee (2012)

contends that, the benefits of the stepfamilies include opportunities to learn, sense of family, co-parent, gaining siblings, a sense of stability and financial benefits.

The negative implications as mention in the literature above by the authors include parents give less social and financial support to stepchildren than to biological children, lower level of well-being experienced by children from stepfamilies, early home leaving among young adults due to family conflict, greater household labour for girls, and premarital pregnancy for girls among others. To add to these, other negative implication of the challenges in step-families are drug addiction which can make step-children sometimes become mad. Step-parents out of frustrations engage in occultist practice which end up by harming them and the children and in other times destroys the entire step-family. However, the positives as stipulated by the authors cannot be over looked. They include extra parents, extra siblings, extra grandparents, extra set of aunts and uncles, couples try harder to make the stepfamily survive by being more tolerant of minor irritations, and tend to be more considerate of each other's feelings than they were in their first marriages, increases the self-esteem and well-being of divorced parents and provides children who have minimal contact with their noncustodial parents with a caring and supportive adult. Also, having more objective adult with whom to discuss problems, and they may be introduced to new ideas, different perspectives, and a new appreciation for art, music, literature, sports, or other leisure activities and last but not the least is increased financial resources and increased access to parental figures. In some stepfamilies, children have the benefit of a mother or father and stepmothers or step fathers who could not bear children of their own get the opportunity of having children.

2.12 Measures Adopted to Overcome Challenges in Step-Parenting

Wherever there are challenges, then measures can be taken to either overcome or minimize the challenges. The researcher wants to look at measures that can be taken to overcome challenges in in step-parenting (Measures n. d.) Cambridge dictionary explains measures as a way of achieving something, a method for dealing with a situation. Some measures adopted by parents in parenting to overcome challenges as stipulated by Khan (2018) are by talking to children to make friends and not force them to converse with someone or play with somebody else when they are shy, introduce children to outdoor activities such as board games and participate with them instead of addiction to digital devices, try talking to your children about the effects of consumption of junk foods by showing them obesity and health issues. Khan also suggested that talk to children about what they like in school and talk to them about how the knowledge can be applied with real-life examples if the child is unfocused in a particular subject, for a complaining and whining child, talk to him the moment you hear him complain and provide a solution quickly, educate him in communicating his issues the right way instead of whining all the time and talk to him about how he himself can resolve certain problems.

Khan further maintains that talk to angry children to find out if there are any situations in the houses or outside that cause him to stressed and react in this manner if the situation is dire and has been continuing for a long time, get him anger management counsellor for professional attention, let lying children know that you can see the lie and talk to them about why it is not good. Rivalry between siblings can be handled by intervening in the initial times to resolve the situation calmly and talk to them about how they could do the same as well, enforce a rule where any argument would end up as a penalty for both kids equally. In dealing with

disobedience, talk to him about why what you are asking of him is necessary and listen to his side of why he does not want to do it and being calm with them will cause them to rethink what they have said. Firestone (2015) contends that being a positive role model for children as the primary caregiver will make them emulate because our actions have a far greater impact on our children than our words and this is a responsibility. Firestone suggests that disciplining and socializing our children is another way of overcoming the challenges faced. Discipline will help the child develop into a decent, likeable adult, capable of survival in a social milieu. Measures in the step-parenting is not that different from parenting in the first family so far as children are concerned. This is where measures are so much required because of the challenges faced by stepfamilies.

Stepfamily formations are common when single adults with children remarry or go on to cohabit with a new partner (Jensen, Shafer, & Holmes, 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Stepfamily formation is accompanied by an adjustment for all members of the family and often results in children experiencing emotional, academic, and behavioural challenges (Amato, 2010; Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Segal and Robinson (2020) suggest that agreeing on consistent guidelines about rules, chores, discipline, and allowances will show the kids that you and your spouse intend to deal with issues in a similar and fair way. Robinson (2005) posted a number of measures that can minimize some of these challenges, that step couples should develop a list of values they both want to teach, such as responsibility and honesty and tackle their beliefs on parenting and draft a list of household rules, such as how much TV the kids are allowed to watch. Once they are both clear on each other's opinions, they can discuss discipline problems and what strategies that they can use that will be effective for their family and that honour everyone's beliefs. Robinson continued that

stepfamilies need time together in order to bond and figure out the new relationships, that the most important relationship to nurture in any stepfamily is between the adult partners, putting more effort into coupledness may improve relationship with all the children.

Morin (2019) observes that to solve the challenge of feeling like two separate families, start the process slowly by beginning new traditions as a family. And that it is important to give kids the time to grieve. Deal (2002) stipulates that the most successful stepparent-stepchild relationships are those where the stepparents focus first on the development of a warm, friendly interaction style with the stepchild. Deal maintains that once a foundation of mutual respect and affection is established, stepparent who then attempt to assume a disciplinarian role are less likely to meet with resentment from the stepchild.

Deal further states that early remarriage biological parents need to remain primary caregivers and disciplinarians, that handing off the children to the new stepparents sabotages his or her ability to build a relationship. To Robinson, one of the best strategies you can employ to make sure stepsiblings get along is to recognize that a stepfamily is a family within a family' and that you and your kids need your own time together. Respecting and cherishing your original family helps kids realize that they are still special and not just part of a bigger group. Research show that one of the primary sources of children's problems after a divorce is the ability of the parents to keep their negative feelings about their ex or their ex's new partner to themselves and that children take their emotional cues from their parents (Robinson, 2005). Deal (2002) asserts that stepparents should encourage and insist that children maintain

regular, consistent contact with the parent living in the other home and do their best to have a functional co-parent relationship.

According to McGee (2012), scholars concur that it is through communicative behaviour, that the family system is regulated and maintained. That many writers present the view that in stepfamilies, communication issues are more important than other families, due to the challenges that threaten this family form. Therefore it is suggested that communication is a key factor in meeting the challenges met by stepfamily members. McGee observes that some stepfamilies develop communication patterns that effectively deal with the challenges faced by family members. Supporting this point is Robinson (2005) who posited that making sure everyone is on the same page is always important, and in times like these, it is fine to over communicate with co-parent. That talking together through things is the much simpler. Abraham and Studaker-cordner, (n. d.) observe that communication is the key where coming together of two sets rules, discipline and expectations. If there is no some discussion ahead of time about things such as values and beliefs, about limits and discipline, it can lead to conflict between parents down the road, which will trickle down to the relationship between children and their stepparents.

Morin (2019) believes that having family meeting will make your household run smoothly, thus call everyone to the table. More recently, research has focused on the ways in which stepparents develop positive relationships with their stepchildren. Several studies have shown that stepchildren prefer a stepparent who initially behaves in a friendly manner and does not engage in active disciplinary behaviours. When stepparents initially develop friendships with stepchildren, stepparent-stepchild relationships are more often characterised by liking and affection (Ganong et al.,

1999). There are various ways in which stepparents might do this, but the most effective way appears to be individual activities that are chosen by the child. According to Nunez (2016) stepfamilies should choose what hills to die on and do not focus on the petty things you cannot control, negotiate and compromise. Nunez maintains that let go, forgive and reconcile, that great step parenting requires a very forgiving person, do not hold on to grudges and unresolved conflict since it can have very damaging effects on the blending process, and most important, your marriage. That stepparent should get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, and well as all types of evil behaviour. Jensen, Shafer and Larson (2014) believes that clinicians who work with stepfamilies should help parents and stepparents prioritize child-wellbeing, avoid viewing the children as a hindrance to the step-couple relationship, and soften expectations with respect to stepchild obedience, and should also help parents in complex stepfamilies appropriately balance the priority they give to biological children and stepchildren.

Connolly (n. d.) believes that step families also have “insider” and outsider”. It requires a lot of maturity, patience, self-confidence and grit to get through the feeling of exclusion, let go of hurt and resentment and keep the positive thinking and behaving alive. Connolly suggest some tips for couples with step children to use to protect their marriage.

1. Set a positive tone, look for what is good and acknowledge it and let go of negative whenever you can.
2. Talk about parenting, learn about each other’s philosophy about parenting and desires for their children and respect differences.

3. Be careful with any complaints about your stepchildren or your partner's parenting. Rather empathize with your spouse's struggle and provide a "sounding board."
4. Take good care of your own personal health. You will need to go a distance with children, stepchildren, other parents and mental health.
5. Protect time for marriage. Find ways to spend time together each day or night to just keep each other updated on your love map.

The authors have raise quite a lot of measures to adopt to make your stepfamily run smoothly, these include, agreeing on consistent guidelines about rules, chores, discipline, and allowances of kids, develop a list of values they both want to teach, time together in order to bond and figure out the new relationships and beginning new traditions as a family. Communication to most of the authors is a key factor in meeting the challenges met by stepfamily members hence coming together of two sets rules, discipline and expectations, family meeting, choose what hills to die on and do not focus on the petty things you cannot control, negotiate and compromise and others were the assertions made in the literature. In adding to these, the researcher believes that the most important measure is to accept and threat the stepchildren as if they are your biological children and the stepchildren also accept and respect stepparent as their biological parent will make relationship smoother.

Gaps identified in this literature:

- The gap identified in this literature is on the relationship of polygynous stepfamilies. This type of families do not have only step-parents and stepchildren, but they have different stepchildren and stepmothers. In some cases it even becomes a complex stepfamily when the stepparents already

brings different children into the polygynous marriage. This type of stepfamilies has not been explored by researchers.

- Also the complex stepfamilies as one of the types of stepfamily has not been explored extensively by researcher.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the general procedure used in carrying out the study. It describes the research design, study area, study population, sample and sampling techniques, instruments for data collection, data collection procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

Creswell (2009) refers to research designs as the plan or proposal to conduct research, it involves the interaction of philosophical strategies of inquiry, specific methods, and that it is the plan and procedure for research methods of data collection. Research design is the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems to the pertinent and achievable empirical research. In other words, the research design articulates what data is required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyse this data, and how all of this is going to answer the research questions (Wyk, 2015). Qualitative research methodology was employed for this study since it is a form of social action that stresses on the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals. It makes use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions, open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyse, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials, and oral history (Zohrabi, 2013).

Polkinghorne (2005) views qualitative research as exploratory, and seeks to explain 'how' and 'why' a particular social phenomenon, or programme, operates as it does in a particular context and that it tries to help us to understand the social world in which

we live, and why things are the way they are. Berg and Howard (2012) characterise qualitative research as meanings, a concept, a definition, metaphors, symbols and a description of things. This definition clearly shows that qualitative research contains all necessary instruments that can evoke recall which aids problem-solving. Qualitative methods have multiple strengths; they illuminate the diverse situations that people find themselves in and provide greater flexibility to achieve a more meaningful conceptualisation of the participant's personal experiences (Sarantakos, 2005 in Mcgee 2012). Kvale (2007) notes that qualitative approaches seek to unpick the way that individuals construct their world and what is happening to them. Sweeney (2010) suggests that qualitative studies are immensely valuable to stepfamily research, as they can broaden our understanding of the complex within-family processes and mechanisms in the stepfamily system. Qualitative research has types which are referred to as the designs that can be used in conducting a study. Creswell, 2009 and Hancock et al., 2009 as in Haradhan (2018) described qualitative research as an umbrella term used to refer to the theoretical perspectives designs as phenomenology, narrative, grounded theory, action research, case study, ethnography, historical research, and content analysis.

Phenomenological research was adopted for this qualitative research inquiry because the meaning of the phenomenon is conceptualized in the interior of the individual's awareness. Phenomenology is an approach to explore people's everyday life experiences. It is used when the study is about the life experiences of a concept or phenomenon experienced by one or more individuals. A phenomenological researcher investigates subjective phenomena (Creswell, 2009). Haradhan (2018) posited that phenomenology attempts to understand how participants make sense of their experiences. This approach is idiographic, in that it is primarily concerned with how

individuals make sense of their life experiences (Denscombe, 2010). It is interested in what happens, when the everyday course of lived experiences takes on a particular significance for the individual, such as a major life transition.

According to Waters (2017), the goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe a "lived experience" of a phenomenon. The purpose of employing this method is to examine how parenting in step-families in the Zongo communities in Accra is done: so as to describe the nature of the situation as it exists at the time of the study, and to explore the causes of a particular phenomenon. To describe an event, activity, or phenomenon, the aptly named phenomenological study is an appropriate qualitative method. This research focused on individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of parenting in step-families where children live with their step-parents and parents live with their step-children, and involves an attempt to describe the essence of this experience and to draw certain conclusions about it. The description of the lived experience includes both what individuals have experienced and how they have experienced it. Both Creswell (1998) and Merriam (2002) in Sappor (2018), emphasise the importance of bracketing the researcher's own experiences and taking a fresh perspective of the phenomenon being studied through the eyes and experiences of the participants. Bracketing is described as the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world. This research methodology is ideal for this topic because it will bring out the realities of step-parenting with an authentic interest in their lived experiences.

3.2 The Study Area

According to Naylor (2000), Zongo communities in Ghana are a microcosm of people from the lower and middle classes of tribes from both northern and southern Ghana,

as well as immigrants from neighbouring countries. The study was conducted in three (3) Zongo communities in the Accra Metropolis, in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Accra is the capital and most populous city of Ghana, it is also the capital of the Greater Accra Region which is one of the fastest-growing city. The metro area is home to 4.6 million people, more than 16 percent of Ghana's 2016 total population (City Strength, 2017). Accra stretches along the Ghanaian Atlantic coast and extends north inland. The Metropolis is divided into ten sub – metropolitan district councils which are subordinates to the general assembly.

The study focused on parenting in step-families in the Zongo communities. Zongos are suburbs which are often highly populated in Accra. Most of the people living in Zongos are Muslims. Among the Zongo communities of Accra include, New Fadama, Nima and Shukura where the study was conducted. According to Peoples Dialogue (PD) (2019) New Fadama is located within the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and has a population of 5,000. It got its name as a result of heavy flooding in Accra which badly hit the Old Fadama Community in 1940 to 45, which exposed lives and property of residents to continuous danger. One member of the area, Abdul Rahim Abass called the attention of the government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah to the plight of his people at Old Fadama. In response, owners of New Fadama area were contacted to procure the place to resettle victims of the Old Fadama flood in 1963. Shukura Zongo on the other hand is located within the Ablekuma Central Municipal Assembly with a population of 30,000. Shukura Zongo started in the early 1950s. The inhabitants migrated from Ga Mashie through Sabon Zongo and other places with Abdullah Tiah as their first Chief. The Muslim settlers then named the place “Shukura” in Arabic meaning “thank you” (Peoples Dialogue (PD), 2019).

Peoples Dialogue (PD) (2019) further states that, Nima in the Ayawaso East Municipal Assembly has a total of 110,000 inhabitants. Nima was founded by Mallam Amadu Futa in the 1930s, when he got the nod from the Odoi Kwao family to commence settlement for strangers. Malam Futa's dream at that time was to establish an Islamic settlement which he named Nima, which means "blessing" in Arabic language. But now it has people with different religious background. Though these Zongo communities are found in different districts in the Greater Accra, their activities tend to be similar, they are engaged mostly in trading and formal education is to extend not a major concern which makes them go into early marriages (Peoples Dialogue (PD), 2019).

3.3 Study Population

Hanlon and Larget (2011) define population as the individuals or units of interest. Bluman (2004) says population consists of all subjects, human or otherwise that are being studied. The population of this study was all step-parents and step-children in the Zongo communities in Accra from which the sample was taken for the study. Most people who live at Zongos are low income earners who face financial challenges in their families which usually lead to divorce and other ways of creating step-families.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Ten (10) families were sampled in three (3) Zongo communities where a step-parent and a step-child was interviewed. This made up twenty (20) participants that is Ten (10) step-children and ten (10) step-parents each, were interviewed. The points of information saturation occurred after the tenth (10th) person in each category

Purposive sampling was used to select the three Zongos because the Zongos are dominated by Muslims whose faith allows polygamy and divorce is high due to low income levels of the people. According to Crossman (2019), a purposive sample is a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Purposive sampling is where study units are chosen because they are specifically relevant to the study, for instance where sites are selected because the problem being studied is relevant (Ekumah, 2010). Which means the selection of the three (3) Zongos is based on the characteristics possessed which is relevant for the study. The researcher used snowball sampling technique in getting the sample from the population after the Zongos have been selected purposively. Snowball sampling is a sampling technique in which a researcher begins with a small proportion of known individuals and expands the sample by asking those initial participants to identify others that have similar characteristics and can participate in the study. In other words, the sample starts small but “snowball” into a larger sample through the course of the research (Crossman, 2019).

According to Atkinson and Flint (2004), these participants may themselves open possibilities for an expanding of contact and inquiry. The use of the snowball technique helped to identify participants who were likely to have information for this study and also because parenting in step-families in this category are difficult to identify. Again, issues concerning experiences in families are sensitive, hence only people who find it comfortable to talk about their family issues was involved.

Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015) stipulate that, smaller samples are used in qualitative research. This is because the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity,

depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, the commonly proposed criterion for determining when sufficient sample size has been reached in qualitative research is saturation. Saturation is an important topic because it is so widely discussed in the general qualitative methods literature on sampling. It usually refers to reaching a point of informational redundancy where additional data collection contributes little or nothing new to the study. This particular form of saturation is labelled, data saturation. The researcher interview up to eight (8) families and the remaining two (2) families provided the same information so the researcher stopped.

3.5 Instrumentation

According to Eng (2013), a research instrument is what is used to collect information (data) to answer research questions. It applies to both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In a phenomenological study, a lot of interviews is often conducted, usually between 5 and 25 for common themes, to build a sufficient data set to look for emerging themes and to use other participants to validate research findings. In this study, data was primarily collected through the use of in-depth interviews. An interview guide which affords participants the freedom to express their views was used to acquire first-hand experiences on parenting in step-families, the relationship between step-children and step-parents, challenges step-parents and step-children face in parenting in Zongo communities, investigate the implications of the challenges on the step-parent and step-children and to assess the measures adopted by the step-parenting on the step-child and step parents.

Bird (2016) states that, an interview guide is simply a list of the high level topics that you plan on covering in the interview with high level of questions that you want to answer under each topic. The process of creating a guide can help to focus and

organise your line of thinking and therefore questioning. In addition, this research instrument was used based on its advantages spelt out by Kyale (2003) that interview guides compared to questionnaires are more powerful in eliciting narrative data that allows researchers to investigate people's views in greater depth.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the Instrument

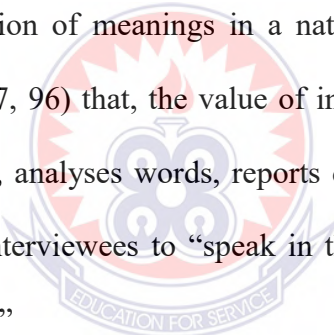
Validity does not carry the same connotation in qualitative research as in quantitative research. Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, participant or the reader of an account (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers, according to Bryman (2012) employ trustworthiness criteria to judge the quality of the studies. The idea such as trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility enhances the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of the findings as well as convince readers of that accuracy. Simon and Goes (2015) maintain that, in qualitative research, validity or trustworthiness and reliability or consistency are discussed in terms of the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the instrument and results of the study.

To ascertain the trustworthiness, the instrument was, however, given to colleagues of the researcher and then to some lecturers in Management in Living who scrutinized, examined and made constructive criticisms of the construction of the instrument before it was given to the supervisor for constructive criticism and modification. Qualitative validation means that the researcher checks for accuracy by employing certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). Member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings. Member checking, according to Creswell (2009) implies that the researcher takes back parts of the polished product such as the

themes, the case analysis, the cultural description and so forth to the interviewee for affirmation. The researcher took the final report of specific themes back to the participants and determine whether what had been reported was accurate.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Denscombe (2010) suggests that interviews are best exploited as a data collection method, when applied to the exploration of a complex subject. Furthermore he suggests that in-depth interviews are particularly appropriate for the collection of sensitive and privileged information, which requires insight into individuals' opinions, emotions and experiences. In a similar vein, Cohen et al (2007, 29) in Alshenqeeti (2014), add that interviewing is “a valuable method for exploring the construction and negotiation of meanings in a natural setting”. This buttresses the point made by Berg (2007, 96) that, the value of interviewing is not only because it builds a holistic snapshot, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants; but also because it enables interviewees to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings”

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central shield with a cross and four smaller shields in the quadrants. Above the shield is a sunburst. Below the shield is a banner with the motto "EDUCATION FOR SERVICE". The entire emblem is surrounded by a decorative border.

Brown (2001) interestingly reviews the advantages as high return rate, fewer incomplete answers, can involve reality, controlled answering order, and relatively flexible. These and many more pros make the use of interview for this study necessary. To collect data from the participants, permission was first sought from the participant with an introductory letter from the Home Economics Department. Once participants had agreed to be interviewed, a time and location was determined for the interview, interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The researcher interviewed the step-parents individually and step-children separately at the agreed locations because the interviews was to address delicate issues. In interviewing them separately,

there was a greater probability that the majority of individuals was more candid in their answers (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Seymour & Eardley, 1995). In each case their step-parents was asked to excuse us or was not available at the time of the interview and vice versa. Interviews began by explicitly stating the purpose of the study. Participants were made aware that the study is being done as a requirement for a Master's programme and to better understand the experience of step-parenting. The researcher repeated that the interview was to normally last for 30 – 60 minutes but would make sure to keep within their time in order not to waste their time.

The next step was to explain to the interviewee what the consent form is about. It was explained to the family members that participation was voluntary. The consent form was presented to them to read through, but those who could not read, the researcher explained it to them in their local language (Hausa, Twi and Ewe) that they could understand. Participants were asked if they would have any questions about the study. When they were ready to proceed, the researcher asked them to sign the form. The consent form included that they consented to be audio-taped. When participants agreed to be recorded, the researcher turned on the recorder.

Interview guide began with demographic information from the participants. Specifically, they were asked to identify their gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, level of education, occupation and number of children they have. After gathering these demographics, the interview process began with questions to collect data on the research questions set for the study. A variety of questions was asked to direct the interviews, in that way, the interview guide had a structure. Yet, at the same time, the researcher wanted adapted to the context and the needs of the participants, and kept the interview semi-structured. Interviews began with an open-ended question inviting

participants to tell the story of how they became step-parents and step-children. The quality of relationship between step-parents and step-children, the challenges in step-parenting, implications of the challenges and assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in the Zongo communities. In the interview process, the researcher utilised active listening skills and verbal prompts such as ‘so what happened next? Is that so’ to encourage the interviewee. The researcher also noted particular non-verbal communication patterns such as their facial expression, shaking of the head or a wave of the hand as well as verbal techniques employed by the interviewee such as the tone used in answering a particular question. The last question on the interview guide asked participants about any additional significant information that was not covered in the interview as well as their impressions about the interviews and whether they needed any follow up information. Any question that was asked the interviewer at the closing, was welcomed and answered honestly because of the level of disclosure and vulnerability the study expected from them.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data was analysis using themes based on experiences of step-parents and step-children. The goal was to gain more understanding about how step-families have overcome the challenges in parenting, and how they have managed in their parenting relationship to work out the challenges of many step-families. The data collected for this research was taken from the transcriptions of the interviews, demographic questions, notes of the interviewer. As the interviews are conducted, the researcher continually transcribed the data collected with the help of an analyst. This information was then used to ask about additional areas in subsequent interviews. After the interviews are completed, the transcriptions were coded with the help of a

professional transcriptionist using QSRNVIVO 9, a computer programme software used in qualitative research. The demographic data was manually analysed to generate percentages for discussion.

All of the transcripts was cross-coded by both the researcher and the analyst. Cross coding helps to control for researcher bias, acts to reinforce the credibility of the research results, and was an effort to get a sense of the whole (Boss, Dahl & Kaplan, 1996) of the participants' experiences. The first few interviews was analysed using an open coding approach to identify major themes of relationships, challenges implications of the challenges and assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in the Zongo communities. Open coding is a method of analysing qualitative research that allows the researcher to breakdown and examine data, then compare and conceptualize it (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The themes identified in the first six interviews (stepfamily members) was the primary themes that the researcher looked for in the rest of the interviews. The results of the initial open coding was used to develop selective coding, which allowed the themes initially identified to be generated into a more substantiated understanding of the themes underlying the responses to the quality of relationship between step-family members, challenges that these step-parents and step-children have experienced, investigate the implications of the challenges on step- parents and step-children and assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in the Zongo communities. The identification of these themes throughout the data collection was then used to develop insights into step-parenting in the Zongo communities.

3.9 Ethical Procedures

Access and ethics are critical aspects of the conduct of a research of this nature. The researcher's ability to collect data depended on gaining access to appropriate and relevant sources. In order to have access to the step-parent, the researcher introduced herself to the families as a post graduate student of the University of Education, Winneba, who was conducting a research on "Parenting in step-families in the Zongo communities in Accra". The researcher emphasised that the study was purely academic purpose and as a requirement for the award of a degree in Master of Philosophy in Home Economics. Participants were also informed of their role in providing valued information, and the purpose for which their information would be used. Participants further received assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and were informed of the voluntary nature of the study. Arrangement was made with the target population as to when family members was available for the administration of the questionnaire.

To enforce confidentiality, anonymity and privacy, questionnaire content did not request for personal identification, similarly final report was not commented about or with individual responses. In order not to take so much time of participants, the researcher pre-informed them ahead of time by specifying the duration it was to take participants to complete the interview. The researcher, however, endeavoured to avoid conclusions without empirical evidence. Therefore, the findings of this study was treated with strict neutrality, and was presented as such. The researcher is with certainty that the findings of this study represented the personal views of step-parents and step-children of three communities who were the study population.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study conducted by the researcher. Information was obtained from step-parents and step-children in the Zongo communities on demographic attributes through interview guide to elicit data on the relationship that exist between step-parents and step-children, identify the challenges, investigate the implications of the challenges and assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in step-families in Zongo communities in Accra.

4.1 Demographic Information

The demographic instrument measured such attributes as participants' that is step-parents age, sex, marital status, and occupation, number of own children, religion and ethnicity. For step-children age, sex, educational background, ethnicity, religious background, occupation of step-parent, being out of school, and the frequency in contact with biological parent were sort for. These were done in other to know the background of participants for study.

4.1.1 Age

The participants for the study (100%) had their ages ranging between 25 and 65 for the step-parents. Whilst the age range for the step-children was from 10 to 35. The youngest female step-parent participant was 25 years old, and the oldest was 61 years old. The youngest male participant was 44 years old, and the oldest was 65 years old for the step-parent. The ages of the participants were sort for in order to ascertain the ages at which step-families can begin in the family setting and also at which age is it

difficult to step-parent a step-child. For the step-children, the youngest step-child was 10 years and the oldest was 35 years. The youngest female participant was 10 years and the oldest was 27, whereas the youngest male participant was 11 years and the oldest male participant was 35 years. The age of the step-children were also considered in order to know at which age step-children can tell the difference between their biological parents and step-parents parenting. However, age and maturity do not always resolve issues in step-families (Cottrill, 2018).

Table 1: Personal characteristics of respondents **n=20**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Age (yrs.) of Stepparents		
25-34	1	10.0
35-44	5	50.0
45-54	2	20.0
55 and above	2	20.0
Age (yrs) of Step-children		
10-24	8	80.0
25-34	1	10.0
35 and above	1	10.0
Sex of Step-Parents		
Female	7	70.0
Male	3	30.0
Sex of Step-Children		
Male	5	50.0
Female	5	50.0
Marital Status of Step-parents		
Married	10	100.0
Biological or adopted children	10	100.0
Number of biological or adopted		
1-4	6	60.0
5-9	4	40.0
10 and above		

4.1.2 Sex

The sex of both the step-parents (100%) respectively were seven (70%) females, and three (30%) males for the step-parent. For the step-children, five (50%) of males and five (50%) of females were interviewed. This made it equal for both sexes so that the researcher could be provided with information on how step-parenting is done by females and males. According to Hetherington and Elmore, (2003), Jensen and Howard, (2015), the sex differences of participants is examined in these situations because males and females might respond differently to stepfamily dynamics.

4.1.3 Marital status

Marital status of step-parents was asked for by the researcher. All step-parents (100%) were still married as at the time the data were collected.

4.1.4 Number of biological or adopted children

All participants that is the step-parents (100%) answered yes to the question of having their biological children. The researcher went further to find out the number of biological children from 1 to 10. Sixty (60%) had biological children ranging between 1 to 4 and four (40%) had from 5 to 9 biological children. This was to help the researcher find out the number of children step-parents serve as parents to, apart from the step-children. Also, this could make the researcher understand parenting biological and step-children.

4.1.5 Educational level of step-children

Another important variable used to assess the background of the participants was education level. The educational levels were given as primary, junior secondary, secondary and tertiary. Table 2 shows that almost all the participants (100%) have had some form of education. However, only a few (10%) had tertiary education and the

majority of participants (40%) had secondary education. The rest of the participants (30% and 20%) had primary and junior secondary education respectively. This distribution suggests that most of the respondents had senior secondary education.

4.1.6 Religious background of step-parents and step-children

The religious background of both step-parents and step-children was considered in this study. Half each of the total participants that is step-parents (50%) respectively belonged to Islamic and Christian religions and still worship in that religion with the stepfamily. But with the step-children, (40%) were practicing Christianity and (60%) practiced Islam. This showed that step-families do not bring about changes or discrimination in religion. The religious backgrounds also help the researcher to know the way these major religions handle step-family situation in the Zongo communities.

4.1.7 Ethnicity of step-parents and step-children

Participants were made up of various tribes both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians, even though the non-Ghanaians were also nationals but then they did not form part of the indigenous tribes in Ghana. Participants included these varied tribes as Dagbomba (10%) for both step-parent and step-child, Moshie (10%) respectively for step-parents and step-children, Wangara (10%) for only the step-parent, Ashanti (10%) for both step-parent and step-child, Ga (10%) for step-parent and step-child respectively, Busanga (20%) for parents and (10%) for step-children. the other ethnic group was Ewe (20%) each for step-parents and step-children, Hausa (10%) respectively for step-parents and step-children, Zabarima and Kwahu (10%) for step-children respectively. This showed that step-family system was not practiced by only a particular tribe but cut across all tribes both national and international.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Educational Level of Step-Children		
Tertiary	1	10
Senior High School	4	40
Junior High School	3	30
Primary	2	20
Religious Background of Step-Parents		
Muslim	5	50.0
Christian	5	50.0
Others		
Religious Background of Step-Children		
Christian	4	40.0
Muslim	6	60.0
others	0	0.00
Ethnicity of step-parents		
Dagomba	1	10.0
Moshie	1	10,0
Wangaru	1	10.0
Ashanti	1	10.0
Ga	1	10.0
Busanga	2	20.0
Hausa	1	10.0
Ewe	2	20.0
Ethnicity of step-children		
Ga	1	10
Dagomba	1	10
Kwawu	1	10
Zabarima	1	10
Ewe	1	10
Ewe	1	10
Ashanti	1	10
Hausa	2	20
Busanga	1	10
Moshie	1	10
Out of School before		
Yes	6	60
No	4	40
Occupation		
Cleaner	1	10
Trader	1	10
Housewife	1	10
A caterer	1	10
Baker	1	10
Sewing	1	10
Trader	1	10
Agent	1	10
Teacher	1	10
Carpenter	1	10
Contact with biological parent		
Regularly	4	40
Not regularly	4	40
Not all	2	20



4.1.8 Out of school before

The researcher sort to find out whether step-children were ever out of school, (60%) answered yes to the question and (40%) said no they have never been out of school. Step-children contact with their biological parents was one of the things the study considered. Forty percent (40%) answered yes to regular contact and not regular contact respectively. Whilist (20%) did not contact their biological parents at all.

4.1.9 Occupation

Step-parents were functional members of society who had acquired respected jobs in their communities. All ten participants reported their current work as Cleaner (10%), Trader (20%), Housewife (10%), a caterer (10%), baker (10%), seamstress (10%), an agent (10%), and a teacher (20%). The main observation here was that all (100%) participants were financially stable.

4.2 The Relationship between step-Parents and Step-Children

This section summarises the results of the responses from the first question of the one-on-one interviews in appendix that the researcher conducted with the respondents. The sub-question revolved around: (1) how they became step-parents, (2) number of years they have been step-parents and other questions and many more.

4.2.1 Circumstances of becoming step-parents

The study revealed various reasons that made them became step-parents, which included divorce, death, children out of wedlock and polygamy as the reasons for becoming step-parents, Also participants stated the years they have been step-parents from the shortest years of two to longest of thirty-six. This range of years included those who been step-parents for twelve, fifteen, twenty-one, twenty-seven were the and only a few spend nine and twenty-two years respectively.

4.2.2 Step-children of the step-families

The study enquired about the number and sex of step-children, participants gave varied numbers to that questions of which one, four, nine, and ten step-children each were the number of step-children. While some were with three step-children, more of the participants had two step-children. The study considered number of step-children to ascertain how the number of step-children that can make parenting step-children difficult or easy. Through interaction with the participants, parenting more than one step-child was a challenging text. One step-parent said, *“Because they are three, the elder one will always call them together to sit and discuss concerning me among themselves, but if it were to be one, she or he will not have somebody readily to discuss me.”* This confirms the point made by Segal and Robinson (2020) that step-children prefer to separate from the family as they form their own bond.

The participants had step-children with different sex, some had only boys as step-children while and some had only girls as step-children. The highest percentage of the participants stated they had both boys and girls. Again this was sought for in order to know which of the sexes of step-children make it difficult for step-parenting in step-families.

4.2.5 Behaviour of step-children

Some participants reported the good behaviour exhibited by their step-children, these participants described how their step-children accepted them and respected them as their biological parents. Some participants described their step-children’s behaviour as normal since they did not give any problems in the step-families, however some participants stated that at certain times these well behaved step-children tend to

misbehavior under the influences of the divorced parent otherwise known as nonresident parent who is the biological parent of the step-child.

Conversely, other participants experienced misbehavior from step-children which was described as being disrespectful, did not obey any instructions given by the step-parent and did not even greet the step-parent or allow themselves to be disciplined by the step-parent. For instance a step-parent stated, *“my step-son can pass by me and come to the mother, goes to his mother’s room, they will chat for longtime and he will again come out and walk pass me without even showing a sign that he has seen me let alone greeting me.”*

This showed that step-children behave normally in step-parenting but misbehaved when outsiders influence them. This supports Lehman (no date) point where parents came with difficult situations where the kids were rude or obnoxious saying things like “you’re not my father, I don’t have to listen to you”.

4.2.6 Role or responsibilities as a step-parent

All participants saw that they had the responsibility to care for their step-children, participants stated various roles they hoped to perform as step-parents in their partner’s child(ren’s) life. They moved in, to support in raising the children, a participant said, *“I married into that family to support my husband and help bring them up”*. Others believed they would help in taking decisions together in the step-family, and some hoped to perform responsibilities as a parent for their partner’s child. For instance one step-parent responded, *“I wanted to take them as my children and look after them, help them with school bills”*.

The responses meant that step-parents had varied intentions for step-children before accepting to be part of that family. In Cartwright (2010) a British study suggests that stepparents may engage in regular childcare activities, and that the step-parenting in the 1990s study in Great Britain investigated the sharing of childcare and other domestic work by first-marriage and stepfamily couples. Engel in Cottrill (2018) further states that biological parent remains primarily responsible for the child, while the stepparent play the supporting role for both the parent and the child.

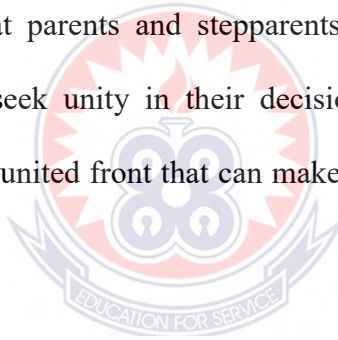
The study showed participants performed their duties in one way or the other in the step-family. Participants mentioned various things they did for their step-children which included feeding, provision of clothing, up-keep money, and shelter among others. Participants stated other duties as helping them do their homework, advise them, see to their educational needs and gave general guidance that a child needs from a parent. The responses indicated that step-parents did their parental duties as parents to step-children. A parent said, *“Can you say you will not perform your duty because he is a step-child, even no matter how mad they can make you feel you still have to perform your duties as a parent”*.

This confirms what Paula in Cottrill (2018) observed concerning the performance of responsibilities of step-parents, that being a step-parent is a confusing, difficult job and that sometimes it is easier but often times more difficult than being a biological parent. That “ I often feel I have all of the responsibility, but none of the authority., I can drive them to hockey practice, bake cookies for them, do their laundry, and cook meals, but if I try to discipline them, they come back with ‘you’re not my mom- you can’t tell me what to do.

4.2.8 Discussions on issues about step-child by biological and step-parent

On the question whether the partner who is the biological parent of the step-child discusses issues concerning the step-child with the step-parent, the study saw participants responded in the affirmative with a few of participants saying no they did not discuss issues together. When asked why they did not discuss, one of the respondent said the partner does not accord him that respect hence she handle her children's issues without involving him. He said, "*The woman, that is my wife does not give me that respect*". However, those who said they discussed their children together explain that their partners considered them as the co-parents in the life of the step-children so they had to collectively discuss issues concerning the children.

Deal (2002) believes that parents and stepparents negotiate rules together behind closed doors and must seek unity in their decisions. When this is done in step-parenting, there will be a united front that can make the communication follow hence a peaceful family.



4.2.10 The Quality of relationship

Some participants indicated they had good quality relationship with their step-children by stating various reasons that made their relationship good. Some said their step-children listened, helped other step-relatives in running errands, chatted with them, worked for them, grown up step-children called stepparents to discuss personal issues, they were more accepting and many other things that they did that made the relationship a good on or quality one. Though interference from outsiders and the non-residence parent sometimes sour their relationship.

One of the step-parent went like,

“It was good, they use to listen to me but now they listen to their mother and also because the elder one has started having boys, she now listens to the boy. But I do call their mother and tell her to let our minds be together to train the children, but she is not helping, and said I should mind my business because when she was leaving, she did not leave the children in my care. She asked them questions that make the children see me as a bad person: questions like if I am going to beat them do I use stirring stick to beat?”

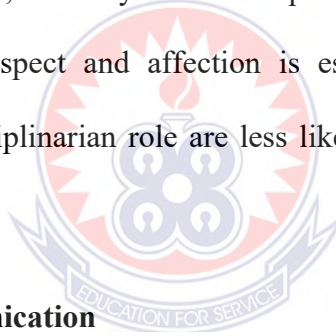
The study showed that even though there was good relationship between step-parents and step-children, there were also unpleasant situations that made life in the step-family unbearable. But some participants said that the relationship between them and their step-children were bad. They mentioned several reasons that made them think their relationship was not good, which were the children challenging them in everything they did in the house, so due to that, they the step-parents did not relate with step-children well, they withdraw, respected themselves as the step-parents and did not open up to their step-children so the relationship was cold. Other step-parents felt it was difficult to relate with each other as stepparent and step-child so they lived separate lives in the same house. Some said the step-children insulted and gossiped about them making them disliked their step-children.

One of the step-parents said;

“My step-children decided that when I give them work, they should behave as if they have not heard me or if I give them things to wash they should not wash it well, in English. They thought I did not hear so I told them if they do not work for me they will work for nothing”.

Some of the participants felt that their step-children did not want to accept their biological children as part of the family creating a difficult relationship. *“with the second wife’s children, we are not in good relationship, they sometimes do not greet me”.*

This tells that in some step-families, good quality relationship is not experienced due to disrespect, sibling rivalry, incompatible behaviour and many more resentments which could bring about adjustment problems. According to De'Aths (1992) in McGee (2012), the issue of control and discipline caused the most tension and conflict in stepparent-child relationships, as there was a belief that if relationships were not defined by blood, individuals were not entitled to make demands. Positive relationships with stepparents were earned gradually, through respect and understanding and a 'non-interfering' style of management was appreciated by stepchildren. Backing this is a point made by Truatner (2017) that the most successful stepparent-step-child relationship are those where the stepparent focuses first on the development of a warm, friendly relationship with the stepchild. That once a foundation of mutual respect and affection is established, stepparents who then attempt to assume a disciplinarian role are less likely to meet with resentment from the stepchild.



4.2.11 Effective communication

When participants were asked about communication in the stepfamily, some participants said communication was well done with their step-family members. This suggested that even though step-family members were not all biological, they still accepted each other as such and communicated freely. This was good, as The Family Guidance and Therapy Center (2020) stipulates that respectful communication and acknowledgment builds trust. That, when your child or partner converse, you and other family members must respond with courtesy, compassion, and honour any differences to bolster open communication and to nourish family growth. However, other participants said it was very effective if outsiders did not interfere. Some

responded that there was no effective communication which sometimes brought about conflict in the family.

4.3 Challenges in step-Parenting in the Zongo Communities

This section summarises the results of the responses to questions revolving around: (1) do you experience challenges in step-parenting, (2) challenges encountered in parenting; (3) when do challenges become more; (4) At which stage is parenting step-children more difficult; (5) do the step-children disengage from the family at a point in time; (6) does your partner support you in putting disciplinary measures and (7) do you experience disagreement leading to conflict?

4.3.1 Challenges experienced in step-parenting

Many of the participants responded there are challenges in step-parenting while a few of the participants did not experience any challenge at all. Participants who accepted there were challenges mentioned several things that were difficult for them in step-parenting, these included financial challenges, the interferences of the biological parent outside the family otherwise called the nonresident parent and step-children listening to their biological parent who were outside the family who instigate them against the step-parents, the adolescent girls following boys, not taking advice, doing what they liked instead of going to school, sometimes insults from the step-child, and even go as far as labeling step-parents as wicked and a witches, pretending not to hear when you talked to them or gave them instructions. Other challenges stated were, step-children not eating food prepared by step-parents and being misled by people, concerning the financial challenges, a participant said, *“there are times things will be difficult financially and the little that we have my husband will give it to my step-children, this makes me think that if my step-children were not there, things would*

have been fine financially.” Another big challenge was that, some step-parents did not want to see the other partner’s children around which scares the children and sometimes made them stay far away from the stepfamily. Some participants also said their inability to relate with their step-children like their own children as well as the step-children not respecting and obeying as they did to their biological parents was a difficult situation in step-parenting. Other participants believed that some biological parents who were partners to step-parents tend to side with their children, disobey the partner, did not support their spouse and did things secretly with their children making it even more challenging. Discipline issues, payment of their school fees, challenges in combining the step-children’s with own children as some were young and needed more attention and many others were stated by the step-parents as the challenges.

The challenges mentioned above by step-parents confirm what other authors say about challenges in step-parenting. Adeyemo and Onongha (2008) maintain that without biological link, it can be extremely difficult to tolerate, let alone like stepchild who is being particularly troublesome and coping with recalcitrant teenagers can be a nightmare. Grace (2012) states that matters of discipline are often mentioned by stepparents as one of their greatest challenges, and that children may object to taking direction from someone other than their parents, and some parents fail to offer support to their spouse, which only enforces the kids’ desire to disregard the authority of their stepparent. These suggest that parenting in stepfamilies come with difficulties as observed by Nunez (2016) that, being a step-parent is very sacrificial and requires a thick skin to roll with the punches that come with the role.

4.3.2 Challenges being more when there are step-siblings?

Many of the participants accepted that the challenges are more when there were step-siblings, and that some of the challenges came from their grown up biological children who tend to maltreat the younger step-children example *“the challenges are more, my own children have bad characters, there was an instances where my own child slapped my stepchild I advised him never to do that again but whenever I am not around he maltreats the stepchild”*. But some said the difficulties were mild because their own children are still very young and there was no that kind of interaction that could bring about problems. For instance a step-mother said, *“There is nothing like that, because my children are young”*. However, other participants said there was no problem at all between their children and the stepchildren.

The percentage of those who experience more challenges with their own children and stepchildren indicated that it was a difficult task to parent one’s own children with stepchildren in the stepfamily. As suggested by McGee (2012), stepsibling relationships provide scope for personality clashes, conflicts, rivalry, perceived injustices and other sources of family tension and that young stepfamily members can find it difficult to cope with preferential treatment of other siblings in the family, such as a biological child of a stepparent.

4.3.4 The Stage at which parenting step-children is difficult.

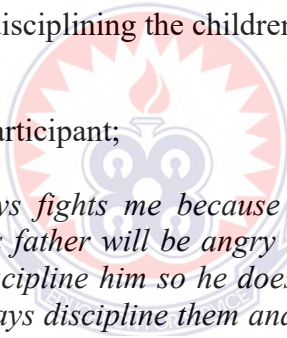
Some of the step-parents said it was the young age that was more difficult with varied reasons, for instance a parent said, *“because they are young, you have to do everything like bathing, washing, assist in homework, pick and drop them from school among other things which makes it so tasking and if you also have your own children it even make it worst”*. While other step-parents believed that parenting grown up

step-children is more difficult. This was to say that older step-children find it more difficult to relate with step-parents making it a challenge in stepfamilies. As supported by Deal (2002), younger children tend to grant stepparents parental status much more quickly than adolescents. To confirm this, the study further posed a question on the level at which adolescents actually bond in step-family by finding out whether they disengage. Many of the step-parents said their adolescent step-children did not disengage but a few participants said the adolescent step-children disengage from the family because they could not adjust.

4.3.5 Spouse support in discipline of step-children

Participants said their partners who normally were the biological parents to the step-children did not support in disciplining the children.

As was said by one of the participant;



“My husband always fights me because of the boy, when he does wrong and I talk his father will be angry and fight me. He will never correct, shout or discipline him so he does not support me, if it is my children he will always discipline them and tell them they do not listen to him but only listens to their mother”.

The unrealistic expectations of a stepfamily as suited by Dan (2016) is that step-parents believe that the biological parent, who is your spouse, support you. This buttresses the point made by Pablo in Papernow that, “when I try to discipline Carmen’s children, she consoles them instead of supporting me. Then I feel cut to the heart when Pablo treats my children harshly”. (P.50)

However, some of the step-parents said their spouses support them in disciplining their step-children. This means that some spouses see the need to discipline the children together so they support their partners. Abraham and Studaker-Cordner

(2021) agreeing on this stated that, how you will discipline your kids by coming up with a plan together is a good way to go about getting on the same page.

4.3.7 Disagreement or misunderstanding resulting in conflicts

In finding out whether there were disagreement or misunderstanding which lead to conflict among step-family members, the researcher posed a question to that effect and participants were of the view that they sometimes had misunderstanding resulting in conflict in stepfamilies. It was suggested that most stepfamilies encounter conflicts in their families. For instance, some parents gave instances where there had been conflict between them and their spouses and between them and their step-children.

Step-mother stated:

“sometimes there is conflict between me and their father because of the children, then the second child too. There was a conflict between me and the younger one who is the second step-child which even lead to him hitting me, because I wanted to discipline him.”

Another parent reported an incident between her and the partner because of the step-child, She said:

“Yes, there is conflict between me and my husband because of the boy, he once slapped me because of the boy, which made my biological children to left the house and went outside because they were not happy seeing him beat me, my husband does not have understanding for me, so it affects me”.

Others stated that there were no conflicts in their step-families because for them in every family, so far as people are living together misunderstandings are bound to come. As stated by Don (2016) that the truth is that whether co-parenting in an original or complex family, conflicts are going to occur, and that you cannot live together without some disagreement occurring.

4.4 Implications of the Challenges on Step-Parents

This section summarises the results of the responses to questions revolving around: (1) stresses or changes experience as a step-parent; (2) feelings when the challenges come as a stepparent; (3) feel like ending the marriage; (4) Effects challenges on the performance of parental duties; (5) whether step-children's behaviours remind them of not being their biological children; (6) expectation of step-parent from step-children to be treated like biological parents by step-children; (7) Benefits of being a step-parent.

4.4.1 Stresses or changes experience as a step-parent

Participants agreed that there were stresses in step-parenting, they listed a number of things that brought about stress in step-parenting to include financial problems, spousal disagreement, not being accepted as a parent by stepchildren, for example a parent said her step-child told someone that I was not his mother and his father supported him. She said, *“Yes the stress is too much, financial problems and my husband's disagreement”*. Also, biological children who did not want to accept step-children as part of the family, the step-children not taking advice, dealing with misbehaviour, disrespect and hypocritical life were some of the things that stresses them up. GoodTherapy (2012) believed that for stepparents, people who have married a spouse with children from a previous relationship, the stress may be multidimensional. Step-parents must take on the role of parent in addition to being a spouse. This may be especially challenging if the person is not accepted by the children or the children's other parent. Additionally, partners may disagree on how to raise the children, which can add to the stress of the stepparent. All of these conditions can contribute to distress for the children, the parents, and the family as a whole. This confirmed what participants said. Some of the participants stated various

reasons that made them took things normal and not get stressed which included, did not get angry, asking one's self if it were your own child and the step-children helping a lot in the house and other things made them felt normal about the challenges. The results showed that, step-parenting stressed step-parents a lot.

4.4.2 Step-parents response to challenges

Many of the participants stated so many feelings that came with the challenges which included, felt hurt, not appreciated, disappointed, disturbed, rejected and not allowed to play their roles. Some participants said *"I feel my husband does not help me discipline the boy but my own children he disturbs them a lot,"* another step-parent said, *"I feel hurt from the stress my own children give me"*, another step-parent stated *"I get hurt by their behaviour because I do not have any bad intention towards them"*. Hurt because their mothers' behaviour did not show appreciation, a step-parent said *"I will be disturb, the small boy's mother will come and fight me in my house."* While other participants took it normal by stating that, *"I feel it is normal because they cannot take me as their mother; I take it as normal in parenting, I console myself with the fact that they are very young and when they grow they will help me"*. For these participants, whatever happens in step-parenting was normal. Majority of the participants who experience so much stress feel like leaving the marriage while others felt that stress or challenges should not let them leave their marriages.

4.4.3 Effects of challenges on performance of parental duties?

Participants stated how the challenges affected their parental duties and mentioned various things that made them feel reluctant in the performance of their duties as parents. These included step-children not listening to step-parents making parental duties difficult, did not respect them as their parents so they did not listen, which

made them sometimes felt like sitting back and watch the step-children did what they liked whether wrong or right. The challenges also made them not to care and provide the material things for the up keep of their step-children and also did not provide the emotional support that step-children needed because they did not recognize and did not accept to be disciplined by them. To support the responses of the step-parents is where Smith (2020) thinks that just because you have to take a backseat in the discipline department, does not mean you have to be a placid pushover. If the children are mistreating you, or walking all over you, you are not required to ‘give them a ride to the mall, or help them with their project, or make them an ice cream sundae. That “Respect begets respect”. Until you get it from them, it is okay to say ‘not until you treat me with decency and respect will I do XYZ for you.’”

However, some participants said the challenges did not affect the performance of their parental duties. They gave their responses as; always advise them as a parent; did their duties such as buy clothes for them gave them money and disciplined their step-children. They believed that if they did not do their duties who will?

Here a step-parent said;

“It affects a little because they know I am not their mother so they do not listen to me but I have to do my duties, For instance last Christmas I said I will not buy anything for them because they do not respect me as a step-mother, but at the end, I gave them cloths and money to go and sew.”

This means that no matter the challenges, step-parents have to still perform their duties in one way or the other as parents to their step-children.

4.4.4 Do the behaviour of your step-children remind you they are not your biological children?

To the questions whether step-parents were reminded that step-children were not their biological children, participants said they did not see the step-children that way but that they still consider them as their children. Their responses were: one said *“I see them as my children so I care for them”*. Another said, *“No, because I take them as my children, so far as you are a woman, you cannot leave them to do what they want”*, another participant said, *“it is rather my children who behave in that way towards them”*. Another participant said *“No, I do not think that way because if you even care for somebody’s child you will be blessed.”* But then some participants said they felt that way, they saw that the step-children did not misbehave towards biological parent who was the partner of the step-parent.

This tells that step-parents feel their step-children prefer to behave well towards their biological parents than their step-parents. However, majority of the participants felt that children behaved sometimes in way that could provoke you but then that did not mean because you were not their biological that was the reason for their misbehaviour.

Some of the participants expected step-children to accept and obey them as they did to their biological parents. While others did not expect that from the step-children because step-children already knew their biological parents so it would be hard for them to accept and obey somebody, like they did to their biological parent. According to Randel in Bayless (2014), whether the new marriage is a result of divorce or death, you can never take the place of the other biological parent and should not attempt to and that *“these children are not yours”*.

4.4.5 Benefits of step-parenting

The participants mentioned various things they benefited from step-parenting which included, running errands for step-parents and sometime other step-family members, step-children making them laughed and felt happy. One step-parent said, *“we play a lot when watching TV together, they make me laugh”*, having other children to be part of their children as siblings, picking their younger step-siblings from school, they greeting and checking on them to see how they are as parents in a respectful manner, help in house chores and fetch water for the family were things which made is beneficial it the step-parenting. Some stated that, stepchildren managed and sold their things for them when they were not around at the market or in their businesses. A step-parent said, *“They help me, they also make me feel happy by helping me at dawn in my business.”* Biological children of the step-siblings could get the opportunity of having sisters and brothers. The grown up step-siblings helped their younger step-siblings financially and gave them other things as gifts. Another thing step-parent stated was that they got to have children as step-parents who did not have their own children. For instance, a step-parent said, *“when I had not given birth I told my husband not to worry and that his children are also my children”*. Also some said that it was beneficial because grown up step-children gave the step-parents gifts. Some said having them as children alone made them happy.

The responses of the stepparents showed that step-parenting have benefits, the fact of having a partner and in marriage is a source of joy. To confirm this, Miller Law Group (2021) believes that benefits that can be reap is from increased stability and the model of a healthy marriage, increased household income, new siblings to bond and grow with, and more loving adult people to guide, mentor, and help the children, in fact there are tremendous benefits for everyone involved. But most of these

participants stated again that all that mentioned benefits are achieved through endurance.

However a few said they did not see the benefits, because the step-children did not respect or allowed themselves to be treated as children of the family. They did not run errands, cared or helped in anything in the house. Some said their step-children have left the family and gone on their separate ways so there was no benefit from parenting step-children.

4.5 Measures put in Place to overcome the Challenges

This section summarises the results of the responses to questions revolving around: (1) what do you do when you are not treated like a biological parent by your step-children? (2) what are some of the measure put in place to overcome the challenges?

4.5.1 What step-parents do when not treated like biological children?

Participants mentioned various things they did when not treated like biological parents by their step-children some indicated that they did nothing, just remained patient, they withdraw, ignored, sit back and watched. Others said they consoled themselves with the fact that they also had children who would grow and, that children of today could do anything so just leave them, a parent said, *I withdraw sit back and watch, I console myself with the fact that I also have children who will grow, and sometimes my husband will tell me to ignore them*". However some were not treated like that because the step-children were very young. She said, *"I have no experience of such, I am not treated like that because they are young children"*.

4.5.2 Measures put in place to overcome the challenges

Measures taken to overcome the challenges was key to the study so the researcher posed a question to that effect. Participants had one or more measures they took to

face the challenges. Some of the measures put in place were to get close to step-children, talked to them and got them to open up to the step-parents and to avoid step-sibling misunderstandings, they shared the house chores clearly and equally among them and tried to treat them equally by meeting every child's needs. Another thing was patients which most of the participants stated as their major weapon to face the challenges and did what was expected to do as a parent and just let go. Also, spouses said they sometimes told their partners the truth about the behaviour and attitudes they put towards the step-children. Living in separate houses too was one of the things a participant raised which she thought could also minimize step-family problems. And she said, *"as for my husband's trouble, I ask him to rent a room outside and be sleeping with the boy when it is day time they can come to my place and eat"*. Some step-parents said they stopped whatever they did which brought the problems and tried to also forget the issues or problems caused by the step-children, and even if the problems came, they did nothing because of their partners. Step-parents had done several things to overcome financial challenges. These included set up business for step-children to make some money, bought things down when they had money so that if the man did not give them money, they can depend on it. One said, *"I try to buy things when I have money so that if the man does not give me money, we can depend on it"*, others also thought that step-parent should try not to fail promises made to partner.

Further measures put in place by step-parents included respecting themselves and being an example by not starting issues that could bring misunderstanding between the children and themselves or did something to provoke them because they were children, a participant said, *"I also try not to start any fight with the children or do something to provoke them because they are not my age mates"*. Some also took bold

step in talking to the nonresident parent to discuss how they can collectively bring up the step-children instead of allowing them stay outside and influence the behaviour of the step-child. Others believed that, you should face it and resolve it or leave it as it was and withdraw. In the case where step-parenting was brought about as a result of divorce, some step-parents tried to let the step-children know that they were not the cause of their first family dissolution, and they did not cause their patients divorce. Further measures put in place by step-parents who did not want fail marriages were, try to tolerate step-children and ignore some of the things they did and even tried to start conversation between themselves and step-children. Others also thought that they probably behave in a certain way which brought changes and misbehaviour so they tried to change their behaviour. Last but not the least, step-parents with younger children who got stressed up by doing everything tried to plan ahead for everything that they had to do because they had no helping hands and the children were young, and also gave the ‘a bit grownups’ among them little things to do to help the step-parent. A participant said, *“I try to plan ahead for everything that I have to do because I have no help and the children are young, and also give them little things to do to help me”*.

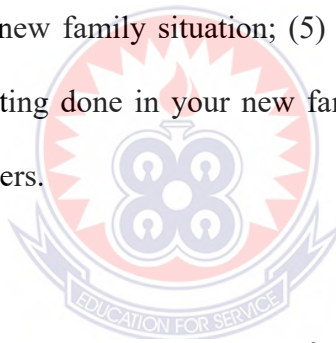
The measures stated showed that step-parents put in extra effort to make the step-families work which confirms Rusincovitch (2021) point that, step-parents should move forward slowly and with patience. Depending on the situation, some kids may take longer to warm up. Build trust by following through on your word. Sit down and be honest with the stepchildren that you are committed to building a home of trust and peace. And remember, that the ultimately is only to control yourself and cannot force people to like or love step-parents. It may take months or even years for the relationship to grow. Instead of focusing on what is not going well, pick out the good

moments. When step-parents focus on what is going well, they will have something to hold onto when in a challenging moment. As a step-parent, remember to give yourself and the kids' time and that there is no challenge too big to overcome (Rusincovitch, 2021).

4.6 Analysis for Step-Children

4.6.1 How is the relationship between step-parents and step-children?

This section summarises the results of the responses from the first questions of the one-on-one interviews in appendix D that the researcher conducted with the participants. The sub-question revolved around: (1) who is your step-parent; (2) how did you become a step-child; (3) how long have you been a step-child; (4) How did you find out about your new family situation; (5) how are you treated in your new family; (6) How is parenting done in your new family as compared to your first or biological family; and others.



4.6.2 The Step-parent

In finding out who the step-parent was, many of the participants said their mothers were the step-parents, and a few of the participants said the step-parent was the father. This was sought for in order to help the researcher know who does step-parenting best or badly, either step-mothers or step-fathers.

4.6.3 How did you become a step-child and how long have you been a step-child

Some participants said it was through divorce that they became step-children, others said through death, through polygamy and refusal of their biological mothers to marry their father by their grandparents, while others stated they did not know what made them step-children.

Participants shared the number of years they had been step-children ranging from four years to twenty-seven years. Some participants have spent four years, others ten and eleven years and some were twelve years as step-children, twenty-one and twenty-seven were years.

4.6.4 How step-children found out about their new family and how they are treated

Participants said they found out about their new family from their fathers, mothers and other relatives. One step-daughter stated, *my mother told us about my step-father moving in with us*". To the question how they were treated, some of the participant stated they were treated well by their step-parents with various things that made them feel they were treated well which included their step-parents bought things for them, did not shout on them, provided their needs, talked and advised them as well as went for outings with them and even travelled with them to their step-parents' hometowns and some said they can really see that their step-parents liked them genuinely. For example a participant said, *"I am fine, they give me all I need."*

However, majority of the step-children did not agree with what the others said and mentioned several issues that made them think that they were not treated well by their step-parents such as treated like a maids, insulted step-children, for instance, a step-child said *"my step mum will buy things for me and again use it to insult me."* Other bad treatment by step-parents was, talked badly about them to people, course confusion between them and their biological parent that is the spouse of the step-parent and do not show love and care for them, and that the way their step-parents treated them made people know that they were not their biological children. She said, *"it is not nice, he cause confusion between me and my mother"*. Other family

problems like being denied the basic necessities of life made them feel that they were not treated well by their step-parents.

The percentages of the participants for the above question tells that some step-children are treated well by their step-parents whilst others are not treated well in the step-family. This means that some step-parent can accept, tolerate and treat step-children the way they treat their biological children. Korf (2016) said that a parent has a higher level of tolerance for their own child than the step-parent has and that parents have unconditional love for their child, and the step-child can feel like a foreign entity to a stepparent.

4.6.5 Parenting in new family compared to first family

In order to find out participants feeling about the step-family life, the researcher asked participant to compare parenting in the step-family to their first biological families. Various answers were given, the participants stated that they could not compare the parenting due to them being young and could not remember or they never lived together with their biological parents before. Others said their present step-family was better than the first biological family. They felt they were better off in the step-family because their step-parent did everything a parent could do for a child such as never gotten angry at them, and that it was simply good in the step-family. One of the participant said “ *it is a special family because my stepmother’s brother even gives me things, my stepmother chats with me, is good in the stepfamily as compared to staying with my drunkard biological mother who did not care about me.*” Others said it was better because you had a family and someone to call a dad or mum. This confirms the point made by Miller (2020) that step-family leads to having more family members

that can offer personalized support and can provide kids with more responsible and loving adults in their lives when they approach their relationship situation with care.

However, other participants compared their new family, to their first biological family and said their biological family was good. They outlined a number of things which made them think that way which included, firstly not being able to get closer to the step-parent and even sometimes their biological parents, stepparents making them cry, not treated equally by favouring their own children, different parenting styles from their first family. A participant said, *“There is interruptions in the up-bringing because of differences in the mothers with different perceptions in their child up bringing”*. Another participant said, *“In this family, you must work before you eat, you are given food only when you work, your needs are provided based on when they have and you eat what is there not what you want unlike my previous family where I eat what I like”*. Some also maintained that in step-family care is not given, nobody shows love and support, you are not pampered and that you are like a stranger and feel unwanted in the family. Again you have to share things and even the parents with other people you barely know and being jealous of each other which made the first family where you were born into better.

It can be seen that participants preferred to live with their first biological family than living in the step-family per the percentages. Miller (2020) believes that kids struggle in step-families to share parents since the unconditional attention and time are now split between two kids.

4.6.6 Responsibilities performed by step-parents as parents to step-children

Participants were asked whether their step-parents took up their responsibilities as parents and this was what they had to say. Step-parents performed their responsibilities very well as parents. Sometimes bought clothes for them and even took them out with more than their own children, talked to them and corrected them when they went wrong and disciplined them as parents did to their children. Step-parents basically perform their duties as step-parents. However, some said step-parents did take up their responsibilities but with conditions and condemnations. Some of the things they did included, sometimes bought things for them but used it to insult them later, some step-parents cooked and gave them food but never allowed step-children to get near the kitchen to learn how to cook which was not a good training for instance, one step-child said, *“step-mother sometimes buys things for me but later use that to insult me”*. The step-daughter said, *“she cooks and gives me food but does not allow me to get near the kitchen so that I can learn how to cook and I am girl I want to learn how to cook, and she has to teach me but she does not, so she does not perform all her responsibilities”*. They provided some of their needs for them but said bad things about them to their friends.

Meanwhile other participants stated clearly some of the things their step-parents did not do for them and they were, no provision of their needs especially our school needs making step-children perform poorly academically in schools, step-parents did not get closer and converse with step-children so they could not tell them their problems which meant nobody to share emotions with. They were not there when step-children needed them the most, leaving step-children to themselves. Another bad things step-parents did was to tend the step-children against biological parents who was the spouse of the step-parent by telling them all manner of things about step-children in

order for our biological parents not to show concern in anything about they the step-children such as not to provide for them, care, love and support them.

This means some of step-parents do not take up their responsibilities which may not build healthy relationship between step-parents and step-children. Segal and Robinson (2020) thinks that step-parents will increase their chances of successful bonding with their stepchildren by thinking about what they need, that all children have some basic needs and that once met, can help establish a rewarding new relationship.

4.6.7 Dealing with parents new relationship

In dealing with parents new relationship, Participants said they were able to cope with the new relationship in so many ways, adjusting to their step-parents ways of doing things, try to do things differently, be quiet and do nothing. One of them, *“said I was happy because I was always hungry so when I met the step-mother in the father’s house I became so excited because she could give him food”*, and another one said, *“I like it because this man does not disturb me like the first stepfather.”* Other participants said they tried to cope with the new relationship of their parents in several ways as they had no option, firstly, did not complain. One participant stated that *“I do not complain, I have to adjust to living with him because I have nowhere to go, when he does something I just keep quiet”*. Coping with the treatment but no trust, for instance one said *“coping with her treatment and do not confide in her, because my step-mother has been an influence to my father, he listens to her more than me”*. Another step-child related her story about just trying to cope, no trust because she had nowhere to go, she said, *“when I first came she was not having children I was the only one staying with her, one day she asked me to go out and I went out I didn’t know she was planning something bad so I decided to return. When I returned I saw*

her taking money from my father's bag, when my father came to ask she said I was the one who took the money and that made me not to like her since then. But, I just have to accept staying with her, no choice”.

Some also said living with the new partner of their parents makes decision making difficult but they just have to adjust to it. Also others considered it normal and that what has happen cannot be changed. For example, *“I saw it as normal because my mother was not in good terms with my father so my father has to go in for a new wife.”* But then, some of the step-children said they could not cope with their parents new partners so they did various things which included leave the house, pick quarrels with their biological parent for bring someone else, did not show any regard for the step-parent or even get closer. They did everything they could to let their biological parents realize that they simply did not like the new partner idea.

Looking at the responses, it was easy to say that step-children do not readily accept their parents' new relationship of bringing another partner. Even if they try to cope with it, they still maintain a close circuit relationship between them because they have no option after a divorce or death of one of their parents. This confirms the point made by Deal (2002) that one of the hardest things children in step-families must learn is to share a parent with a step-parent or stepsiblings. *“She said they've lost so much already, it's understandable why they would resist “losing” another parent (p. 40). To protect their relationships, children may push away a stepparent which brings about competition and insecurity”.*

4.6.8 Experience with step-siblings

Some step-children had no step-siblings so they did not had any experience to share. The step-children whose step-siblings accepted and respected them had so many good

things to say which included peace and harmony among them, accept each other as real siblings, free with them, care for each other, support one another when they were given work to do and shared things and ideas. They serve as brothers and sisters that were needed and corrected each other so that they would all be disciplined children. One step-child stated his relationship with a step sibling as *“they respect, greet me and I send them on errands, I treat them well. But sometimes I am a bit strict on them because of one of them who is a stubborn boy among them in order to discipline him.”*

This means that even though siblings in step-family might not be of same biological parents, they still cared for one another as they met the needs a real biological sibling would have met. As for those who share same parent with the step-sibling that was half step-sibling, they bond even more because of the blood ties. This approves the accession made by Miller (2020) that new brothers and sisters can provide an only child with new companionship and playmates. Nonetheless, the rest of the participants, said they did not enjoy having step-siblings and will love not to have them. They stated various reasons to support their point. First of all they saw that step-siblings disrespected, disgraced and insulted them. For example, one said *“there was a day I ask one of them to wash plates whilst I clean the kitchen and she said she will not do it and that she is not a maid but it is me who is a maid I should do it, which really hurt me. So, I had to minimise the way I am free with them”*. The other thing mentioned was that, step-siblings cause confusion in the family because their biological parent always sided with them and defended them and blamed you over their wrong doings. For instance one of the participant said, *“when my step-siblings do something wrong they will blame it on me”*. Another one said *“it is not nice staying with them because they cause a lot of confusion, they do not work and leave*

the work for us to do and when we complain their father will insult us". Moreover, step-siblings bring division in the family by grouping themselves ganging up against their fellow step-siblings in the family, with step-siblings you had to share everything in the house with them. What worsen the case was, they brought financial burden on to the family also. The most annoying thing was the misunderstandings that came with step-sibling relationship in the family, to them they can never be a cordial relationship between them so there is always conflict.

From this, it can be seen that step-siblings relationship is not the very best one even though some of them got along very well. This is to confirm Morin (2012) point that combating step-sibling rivalry is harder because they are different and resent having to share their respective parents and house with each other, and that they fight and argue over everything, as they are in a constant power struggle.

4.6.9 Experience of being a part of a two parent home

Some of the participants said it is nice to stay in the stepfamily and they liked being part of that family. They stated a number of things that made them liked it. These included, doing everything to make them happy, nobody punishes them in the step-family, again it was nice because they gave them what they wanted and also gave them advice, their step-parents gave them food to eat, force them to learn and give them support in any way they needed. You are loved and cared for in the step-family. Whiles many of the participants said life was not good in the step-family. They went further to mention what made life in the step-family bad as step-children cried a lot due to things done to them, beat them, sacking you from their sight which shows you are not part of the family, the love was not there in the step-family for you the step-child. For instance, a step-son said, *"it is not easy, your mother is your mother no*

matter the situation you will lack that mother love even if your stepmother does her best in providing everything for you, she cannot still be like your mother". The majority of the participants believed that life in the step-family was not the best so for them parents should try to work on that to improve the situation.

4.6.10 Relationships with step-parents

Relationships in every family is very important and so there was a question to that effect and this was the responses given. The participants said their relationship with their step-parents was good and they loved it. Step-parents advised them, took care of them well, chatted with them and were so close and open for them to share their problems with, discuss issues and watched television together. That their step-parents practically cared for their wellbeing and appreciated them, it is only good relationship that can bring about all these. As posted by the Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited (2021), spending time developing a relationship with your stepchild will lead to better relationship within the whole family and that the various ways you can start developing a relationship are to show interest in your stepchild's life, spend time alone, help out in practical ways and support your partner's approach to discipline.

Participants stated they were not in good relationship with their step-parents because their step-parents always showed hatred, envy, rivalry and they pretended to be good or treat them well but behind their back they talked bad about them, step-parents are not real. One step-child said, *"my step mother pretends to be good or treats me well when my father is around, but talk to people about us and sometimes she does not give us food"*. Step-parents did not relate with us the way they related with their own children, so they had no one to share their problem with, insult, maltreat sometimes accused us of being witches and wizards and does not open up or allow us to get

closer to them. A step-daughter said, *“my first stepfather at Kasoa did not like me he once told my mother that I am a witch and that I will kill my mother, He also used to beat and insult my mother”*. Step-parents exhibit poor quality relationship, their parenting style is difficult making it uneasy to establish a good relationship. For instance, a participant said: *“my step-father is not good at all. The way he behaves kills my soul because it is just a casual relationship, he not friendly to you, the way he smiles to me, children, it is just good morning, good morning, nothing like how are you, or how is school.”*

From the results, it can be deduced that step-parent, step-child relationships can be good and can be unhealthy in different step-families. But the percentage for poor relationship between step-parent and step-children are common. According to Wallerstein and Lewis (2007), some stepparents were shown to love their stepchildren as if they were their own, whereas others only chose to develop a relationship with a select stepchild or none at all. Jensen, Shafer and Larson (2014) also stated that research has shown that poor step-parent-child relationships can lead to relationship dissolution among new couples, even with a strong couple bond. Graham (2010) thinks that the relationship between stepparents and stepchildren is one of the most salient relationships in a stepfamily, and that the quality of this relationship is more important to family well-being than the marital relationship.

4.7 Challenges in Step-Parenting in the Zongo Communities?

This section summarises the results of the responses from the third question of the one-on-one interviews in appendix that the researcher conducted with the participants. The sub-question revolved around: (1) how is your adjustment to life in a stepfamily; (2) Was adjusting difficult; (3) What are the particular difficulties or challenges that

you face as step-child; (4) Are you able to cope with the parenting styles of your stepparent; (5) is it a difficult experience not living with one of your parents or sharing living arrangements with other step-siblings; and others.

4.7.1 Adjustment to life in step-family

The step-children said they adjusted into step-family through so many ways. Firstly, by trying to do what the family wants to avoid trouble whether they liked it or not. Step-children have to pretend to be happy, go along with what is happening in order to survive in the step-family system. A step-child said, *“I do not frown my face when she hurts me and talks me again, otherwise she will do it more”*. In step-family, you do not complain but try to cope by keeping the bad things to yourself. In order to meet your needs in the step-family, one had to get a source of support outside either through friends, dubious means or other relatives. A step-child disclosed how she is able to meet her school and other personal needs, she said, *“I meet my needs through sources I should not have gone through, such as joining bad company sleeping with men and stealing from my mother in order to adjust to the situation in the this new family”*. Another way step-children adjusted was to see things normal that is view things as normal in the parenting of children and considered the steps as biological parents because that was the family they were born into and could not change.

One of the participants talked about obedience as one way to adjust into the family, being silent, and also going to or talking to close relative who could listen to and calm their depression down. These are ways some of the step-children used to adjust to fit into the family they found themselves. For example, one participant said, *“I was not free with her so I was not fine in the house. I wanted to go back to my biological mother, but then I had an aunty around I always went to at the beginning until the*

woman said I should take her as my mother and I said I cannot take her as my mother. But when I did try, she started taking care of me well and I was happy”. Above all this, step-children had to be patient and also try to find something doing or leave the scene when things they hate things happening in order to live in the step-family.

From their revelations, it can be seen that all step-children need one ability or the other to be able to survive in the stepfamily. Although stepparent-child relationships take on many forms and often require significant amounts of time to develop (Papernow, 2018), High-quality stepparent-child relationships can also exert positive influence on youth adjustment, including reductions in youth stress, internalizing problems, externalizing problems, substance abuse, academic problem, and physical health problems (Jensen, 2018).

4.7.2 Difficulty in adjusting

The researcher followed up with a question to know whether adjusting in the step family was difficult, and these were what participants said. Some of the participants stated that adjusting in the step family was not difficult, it was simple because they were happy to meet the members of the step-family. Others said the good quality relationship that existed between them made adjusting so easy. However, majority of the participants expressed their difficulty in adjusting into that stepfamily by mentioning so many things. That they get hurt because of the way they are treated, they cannot get to share their feelings with anybody, they cannot express their opinion on anything in the family whether good or bad, just have to say yes to everything. So they suffer emotionally within them which is not good for their mental health. One of them said, *“I feel depressed because I do not want to complain to my mother for her*

to see I am worried, so I weep within me, my step siblings too are difficult, living with them is not easy, they do not relate well with us, when you want to even talk to them they will snub you and another thing is doing bad things you do not want to do just to be able to adjust, it so difficult". It is more difficult when you are compared with others, and worse when you do not have anywhere to go.

From the responses, one can say that adjusting in the stepfamily is really a difficult thing that burdened and have a lot of effects on step-children. This confirms the assertion made by Zill (1994) that current research consistently indicates that children in stepfamilies have on average a higher probability of problems in social relations, health, internalizing and externalizing problems and educational achievement. Backed by this point, findings from nationally representative studies and meta-analyses indicate that children in stepfamilies are at an elevated risk of experiencing maladjustment in terms of academic, social, behavioral, and psychological well-being (Hoffman, 2002, 2006; Jeynes, 2006; Tillman, 2007 in Jensen, Lippold, Mills-Koonce, Gregory & Fosco, 2018).

4.7.3 Particular difficulties or challenges step-children face

The participants stated several challenges they face as step-children to include emotional challenges such as crying, not having someone talk to, to share your happiness and sad moments. Financial challenges which comes with hardships, example a participant side *"the several wives brought hardships that did not let any of us get to the higher level in education"*.

Also, challenges with school issues such as buying school items, discussing school issues and even not getting anybody to represent you when they call for parents in the school. Lack of affection, abuse from step-parents, authoritarian style of step-parents

parenting, that is just imposing things. Furthermore, discrimination, food to eat, sharing of loyalties as well as parents, challenges with misunderstanding leading to constant conflicts, not seeing biological parent regularly was difficulties expressed by participants.

The percentage of participants with particular challenges in the step-family shows that stepchildren obviously go through a lot. This confirms the fact made by Jensen, Lippold, Mills-Koonce, Gregory and Fosco (2018) that Common stepfamily stressors include shifts in the quality of parent-child relationships, conflicting family cultures and expectations, family boundary ambiguity, step parenting issues, uncertainty among children about how new step-parents should fit into their lives, and co-parental conflict. Meanwhile, a few of the participants believed that there were no challenges in the stepfamily system and that anything happening in the stepfamily is part of family life.

4.7.4 Coping with parenting styles

The participants said their stepfamilies parent use the authoritarian style which is very difficult to cope with. They did what they thought was right and the children had no say. They could beat, decide, scold, and treat the children the way they liked. They could actually impose things on the step-child and they would be left with no option. In fact step-children were trying so hard to cope with this style of parenting in the stepfamily. One said: “*I have no option just obey, yes try to do what you can do and leave the rest*”. Some step-children said their step-parents used more of the permissive style of parenting where their step-parents did not care about anything they did. Even though being allowed to do whatever they like without anybody’s concern was still challenging to cope with, because they need someone to care, love and

support and correct what the children do but you do not get that done in step-parenting. However, some of the participants said they were able to cope with their family style because they used authoritative parenting style where their opinion matters. Here the step-children were considered and things were not imposed on them. One participant said: *“I like the way my step mother treats me, she teaches me things about life, when there is a problem she calls me to discuss things with me so that we can think of a way to solve it. She also makes me learn a lot of things when I am helping her to cook which can help me in future. She can make me laugh which makes me happy so her style is good”*.

For this, majority of the participants think step-parenting was all about authoritarianism through which step-parents imposed and rejected whatever step-children said. This buttress the point made by Cassoni and Caldana (2012) that authoritarian parents tend to emphasize obedience through respect for authority and order, and frequently use punishment as method of behaviour control.

4.7.5 Difficult experiences not living with one of your parents

The participants stated reasons why they answered yes to the question whether it was difficult not living with one of the parents. They felt bad, not happy and wish they were staying with both parents. One of the step-children expressed her wish as *“I wish I was staying with my father because I see how people live with their fathers”*. That was really difficult they could not see their biological fathers or mothers who they would wish with. Some said that they even missed their parents more especially when they are punished and treated like orphans. That their step-parents did not care for them, love or provided for them. Also, it was so difficult because you did not have your privacy when you were to share a room with step-siblings.

These showed how step-children battle with life living without one of their parents in the step-family. Ganong and Coleman (2004) asserts that in virtually every area of assessment, stepchildren are found to fare more poorly, on average, than children living with both of their parents.

4.7.6 Common difficult emotions children in stepfamilies experience

The participants mentioned so many difficult emotions they went through in the step-family. They engaged in many of house chores making them late to school which affected their learning and performed poorly in school, Not letting them visit or talk to their non-residential parents, a step-daughter narrated her difficult situation as *“I always think that if my mother will let us visit my father but she will not, this makes us sad always, because we wish to be closer a little to him, when he even comes to visit us my mother will lock us inside the room and say he will kill us so I will be looking through the window to see if my father is standing out there. But now that he is dead I cannot see him again”*. Another one said. *“My father ever sacked me from the house for wanting to visit my mother, after that I felt like leaving the house because they are treating me badly my dad does not treat me the way I want him to treat me and this makes me feel bad”*. Fighting between step-parent and step-children’s biological parents’ saddens them most.

Other things mentioned were the bad treatment by step-parents and sometimes their biological parent in the step-family such as no attention, love or affection towards them makes them sad in the step-family. That their needs are not met, nobody to share issues that boarder them with so they cried a lot, they disrespected and also disgraced them in public when they asked for something, no emotional support, the apprehension and hate. Worry and nervousness caused by hostility and anger of step-

parents are all difficult situations in the step-family system. The most difficult emotions come when you were sick in the step-family, one of the participant said, *“Sickness is my most difficult emotions in the step family, and nobody will mind you. They wait until the sickness becomes serious before they buy medicine for me”*. Additionally, some step-children face hunger problems because they are not provided with food on time, when they even gave them food it was not sufficient, no proper clothing was given, getting shelter among other things were raised by step-children as their difficult issues, and that these things made some stepchildren to start stealing because they need money for survival but they do not get it from home.

With all these narrations, it can be realized that step-children face a whole lot of difficult emotions that can affect the socially, mentally and physically. To confirm this, Deal and Petherbridge (2009) believes that strong negative emotions usually express themselves as criticism, attacking words, or emotional distancing. The problem with this type of response is that it gives the very ones with whom you are trying to connect further reason to withhold themselves from you.

4.7.7 Challenges in relating with half step-siblings or stepsiblings

Some of the participant had challenges relating with step-siblings with varied reasons. They did not respect, they sided with their biological parents, bad treatment from the step- sibling child’s biological parent made step-children did not even want to relate with them in anyway. Some of them liked fighting a lot because they do not have understanding about issues. When they wanted to discipline their young siblings when they went wrong as the elder brother, they felt they hated them. They also mentioned that there was always jealousy and envy among them because they had to share everything in the family including their parents, so there were not able to relate well.

Other participants said they related with step-sibling well, because they did not have siblings to bond with and share ideas and the older ones served as role models to the young ones. However, some of the step-siblings tried to be stubborn, however a few of the step-children said that they have no siblings.

The results from the analysis show that step- siblings in step families do not relate very well since majority of the participants stated various challenges. To support this is a point made by Guertin (2021) that potential challenges for kids who are stepsiblings or half-siblings living in a step-family can include social, emotional and physical challenges.

4.8 What are the Implications of Challenges?

This section summarises the results of the responses from the fourth question of the one-on-one interviews in appendix that the researcher conducted with the respondents. The sub-question revolved around: (1) how do the challenges affect you as step-child; (2) Are you at increased risk of negative outcome of the effects of the challenges of step-parenting compared to children in first-marriage families; (3) describe how it has affected your relationship with your biological father or mother; (4) how does your stepparent way of parenting affect you;

4.8.1 How challenges affect step-children

The interviews of step-children revealed that all participant were affected by the challenges in one way or the other. Some said they felt like running away from the stepfamily because they were scared, some felt like they the step- children were nothing and not part of that family and having bad feelings. Some said maltreatment in the step-family made them afraid of freely talking to people, hence they have become introvert who could not freely share or discuss problems with people.

Another significant effect the interview revealed was the effects on their education, most of them stated how step-parenting had affected academic performance such as not getting time to learn, get to school late and sleep in class while lessons are going on, lack of materials for learning to lack of concentration for either thinking of what to eat or the situation in the house in class. One participant stated: *“you find it difficult to understand what they teach as you are thinking of the situation in the house”*. Some further stated that some implications of step-parenting are that, it affects the future of step-children psychologically, love aspect, emotionally, social life, create hate in them which make them feel any love shown was not from within step-parents heart but pretence. The younger participant revealed they feel shy of their step-parents and for that matter could not express themselves freely around them. It also affected their work efficiency when they got hurt from the challenges. A step-daughter said *“I even fear for my future because of sexually transmitted infections for sometimes having to sleep with men around to get money”*. However, a few believed that some of the things step-parents do to them will prepare and toughen them for life. A participant said *“it affect me positively I to learn more and also get food to eat”*.

These show that step-children in stepfamilies suffer a great deal from the challenges they experience going through step-parenting which affects their well-being. To support these is Jensen, Shafer and Larson (2014) who state that stepchildren experience poorer cognitive, behavioural, educational, and emotional well-being.

4.8.2 Negative outcomes of the effect of the challenges

The participants were required to indicate negative outcomes of the effect of the challenges step-children face. Some thought about themselves as being low in self-esteem, so when they were with friends they still had that low personality making

them timid, found it difficult to share their problem for solutions from others, and rather keep to themselves and got eaten up with the problems. Some said it made it difficult for them to associate with friends and fear of their friends being blamed by their steps-parents for being those influencing them when something happens. Some also feared for their poor educational outcome, and also getting discouraging comments from step-parents kills ones spirits, a step-daughter said, *“I have always said I want to be a midwife, and my stepfather will say I cannot be because I have nothing in my head”*. They also said they were scared for biological siblings’ life outcome. Sleeping time and eating times were delayed which could affect the health of step-children. Furthermore, the challenges may lead to divorce of the step-parent and step-children would not have that adult in the house help shape their lives. The worse of it all was, some step-children had become drug addicts and prostitutes. Others revealed they would not in any way be affected negatively, due to the better treatment given to them and are also guided by the advice given them by their step-parent’s relatives.

The participants who had negative effects out of step-parenting of step-children were more, which shows that most children in step-families end up with serious problems. Stepchildren are at greater risk than those in sole parent families for long-term effects, such as leaving school and home at an earlier age and experiencing divorce or separation in their own marriage (Kiernan, 1991; Smith, 2008; Wallerstein et al., 2000 in Graham, 2010).

4.8.3 Relationship with your biological father or mother

Participants said the step-parenting had affected their relationship badly with their biological parents, some step-children felt that their nonresidential parents did not like

them that was why they were left in the step-families so they blame them for whatever happens to them. They felt they were abandoned by their biological parents and that they should have stayed to take care of them. They could not get to talk to their parents regularly and could not visit each other. Others said it had affected the way they use to share ideas as well as their problems with their biological parents because they did not have that close contact again to even sit and communicate. Furthermore the effect was to the point that their biological parents did not meet their needs any longer because of increase in family size by step-siblings. One of them said, *“it has affected our relationship because if she gives us something and do not give the man’s children they may say she does not like them so she has stopped giving we her children too. We cannot share what worries us with her, so it has really affected our relationship with our mother”*. The step-family situation makes their biological parents easily angry and rebuke or insult them with the slightest thing they did. Some blame their biological parents for all that was happening. This means that stepchildren believed their nonresident biological parent could do something to serve their situation. According to Graham (2010), children’s levels of contact, involvement and closeness with non-resident parents may be important factors in predicting stepchildren’s perceptions of the stepparent role.

Meanwhile a few interviewees said living with the step-family had not affected them and their biological nonresident parent relationship in any way but rather it had strengthen their relationship which made them want to get money and help their biological parents. So, sometimes they save some of their pocket money and send to the nonresident parent. Others said it has rather made them happier for the nonresident parents because they would not struggle to provide for their needs as they used to do because the stepfamily would now provide for the step-children. An interviewee said,

“No it has not affected my relationship with my mother it is my mother who is rather drinking and not taking care of me before I came to stay with my father and step mother and can now get food to eat, but I still visit my mother because she gave birth to me”.

4.8.4 How do step-parenting styles affect step-children?

Participants disclosed that their stepparents parenting style affected communication, academic work, emotionally, and materially. It made them feel they were good for nothing, it made them sad, sick such that they hide to cry. Another thing they said was that, the parenting style of their step-parents made them develop bad attitudes, behaviour in character could not love which had affected their human relationship. For instance a step-child said *“I learnt things from our stepmothers’ characters that is not good, she does not easily forgive, so it has become part of our habit and we are not able to forgive others when they offend us. We do not also know how to show love to others”.* Also, some step-children said their step-parents style affected them morally, because they were not provided with their needs, they resorted to getting things from boys and men who had to sleep with them before giving them. Their style made some of them angry because stepparents pretends to love them when their biological parent who was the spouse were around but when they were not around, their step-parents treat them badly.

Some of the participants revealed that the parenting style of their stepparents was good and it had affected them positively because they got trained the hard way which would help them in doing things for themselves like washing, taking care of personal things and life in general.

Though there were some good things about step-parenting style, the bad effects outweighs the good things as majority of the participants stated their displeasure in the way their step-parent parent them which could have adverse effect on their lives. This confirms the assertion made by Kison (2011) that children who have step-parents who are not authoritative exhibit more positive adjustment than children who have stepparents who are authoritarian, Supportive, or Disengaged. Step-children who were exposed to an Authoritative, non-supportive, or disengaged step-parenting style as compared to an Authoritarian step-parenting style were less engaged in criminal behaviours. Further, stepchildren exposed to Authoritative step-parenting styles also were less likely to engage in early sexual activity (Nicholson, Phillips, Peterson, & Battistutta, 2002 in Kison, 2011).

4.8.5 What comes to mind being part of a stepfamily?

Participants stated various things that came to mind being part of the step-family. The interviewee revealed they wanted to complete school and live on their own, some wished they were never part of this type of family, others thought they should stop school, work and get money by trading and live on their own. One of the participants said, *“What actually comes to mind is to learn hard and become somebody in future”*. Some said they felt sad and unhappy seeing that their step-parents were not there for them when they needed them and showed that they were not liked in the family and that step-parents did not care for their interest but rather concentrated on their own children. Step-children also felt that because they were not treated well and properly taken care of, they were not able to progress in life.

However, others revealed they sometimes felt happy for having a parent even though their behaviour sometimes made them want to leave the house. They further said that everything had its good and bad side and for them it was good this way otherwise it would have been a different story because they would not have had anybody to provide their needs and encouraged them. For instance a step-son said, *“I feel bad a little because I did not like learning so the woman use to insult me but I realize it was my fault. So, I decided to learn. If it was not her, I would have dropped out of school or die of hunger if I was not part of this family”*. This means that step-children always have a lot of things on their minds either positive or negative as members of step-families.

4.8.6 Other difficulties or issues arising which can be shared

On the question on difficulties or issues arising, participants had one or two things to say. These included how they were treated, the emotional and academic problems, having to go hungry at certain times, being disrespected by younger siblings and health issues. A participant of age (17) revealed her health issue as, *“I have a problem with my bladder so I sometimes urinate on myself and they do not care about that, they think I am being lazy. So they have never made any attempt to cure me of it. It is my mother who sends me medicine”*. Issues of quarrels between biological parent and stepparent too much, step-parents getting angry unnecessarily were their issues as well. Step-children wanting to live with both biological parents, did not get chance to learn because of the load of work given by step-parents, getting sick from crying and financial issues, having to go to bed on an empty stomach among others were difficult. The most difficult issue to them was being disgraced in public. For instance, one participant said, *“my difficulty is when there is a problem with me, they will call everybody instead of talking to me and they will not even allow me to talk, so they*

impose things on me, because of that my other younger sibling (half-brother) of a different mother does not come close to them. But if it is their own children they will not call anybody. They will just talk to them alone". Another participant also revealed that it was because of one property they were all struggling for, and that these could bring confusion in future among the step-siblings. Another issue was insults from step-siblings and step-children being blamed whenever they went out without finishing their work but the step-siblings were not blamed for the same offence. Also, no matter how hard a step-child works, his or her reward is not measured up to the biological child. A participant said, *"I work more than my step-sister but she receives more than me"*.

Loneliness as shared by the participants was another thing stepchildren had to deal with due to the untrusting nature of step-siblings. The step-siblings also do not help and every house chore was left for the step-child in the house, the worst case was when the step-child was older than the step-sibling. A participant said *"my difficulty is with my step-siblings who are still young, so they wet their bed and I have to wash it and do other things before I go to school which make me get to school late sometimes, since the elder is about ten years I expected her to be helping but she does not help so I do everything so that I can get food to eat even if it bored me"*. Some also said what was difficult was the fact that they did not see their biological nonresident parent.

These particular difficulties experienced by step-children mentioned showed that step-children living in step-families really go through difficult times. This confirms the point made by Robinson (2005) that children may have issues of trust and might be reluctant to trust a stepparent and may feel abandoned by a biological parent after a divorce.

4.8.7 How difficult emotions affect growth, development and social life

All the participants had several things to say as to whether the difficult emotions affect growth, development and social life of step-children. These included, did not have much of social life as they were not allowed to go out, they were always treated like little babies. Because maltreated step-children cried and thought so much about their step-parents, they could not concentrate on their studies, they had no material and financial support in schooling and time to study which affected their performance academically hence their hope of getting to the higher level and a good job in future may not be achieved. A participant said, *“It has affected my education and that of my siblings, because I was good in school and used to like schooling but we were asked to stop because of money”*. Another participant, *“It will affect growth and development if you do not get time to learn and pass your examination”*. Their growth was also affected when they had to share the little resources with others, they did not get any form of support, care and encouragement from their step-parents which made it difficult to grow. Loneliness was another thing that disturbed their development such that some felt it had made them introverts, those from the polygamous families and were married thought that their marriage could also experience polygamy since they came from such family with so many step-children and step-mothers.

Also, because they did not get enough rest and enough sleep it affect their physical development, growth as well as health. Also, they did not get time to socialize with friends since they had overloads of work to do which affected social life. Financial growth and development was also affected. Step children suffered a lot and could end up badly. A participant revealed that his friend who was also a step-child’s situation was worse, as *“the stepmother maltreat him, he does every work in the house while her children are there and they do not give him food or money, he survive by people*

giving little and he goes round picking polythene bags and helping people instead of going to school and Arabic school (Makaranta). I was afraid he would become junky and it happened. They have even send him to the village where his mother is and he has started smoking wee. So the other friend who is also facing similar problem should be taken care of by someone before he also becomes a junky.”

From their assertions, it can be realized that several factors affect the growth and development of step-children in the step-families which when not addressed can affect stepchildren’s development drastically. According to Sandstrom and Huerta (2013) children’s early experience shape who they are and affect lifelong health and learning. To develop to their full potential, children need safe and stable housing, adequate and nutritious food access to medical care, secure relationship with adults caregivers, nurturing and responsive parenting, and high-quality learning opportunities at home in child care setting and in school.

4.8.8 Benefits of step-parenting to the step-child

Many of the interviewees said they had benefited in one way or the other from being part of a step-family. These were some of the things they benefited. First of all getting food to eat was so important to them because food is a basic thing for life. Aside that, they bought things like clothes and basic things for life and sometimes their request were provided. Step-children were also taught how to do basics things for living like cooking, washing, cleaning and how to take care of themselves personally. Apart from these, they had an adult person to call a mother or father in the house who guided them, and through this step-parent, they got new family members. These new step-family members treated them as part of their family and gave them a lot of gifts. Others benefits include having siblings that they did not have or getting more siblings

that they could relate with as brother or sister if they did not have already. Sometimes in the stepfamily, step-children were made happy by outings and allowing them to play more. A participant said, *“My step-father makes me happy, I get to do things that I was not able to play more, watch TV together and laugh and more things for socializing at my biological”*. Another participant said, *“It has benefited me a lot because living with my mother was so bad because of her drinking habits. So staying with the step-family has given me a lot of hope in life because she sent me to school encourages me to learn, a mother who provide my needs and feed me so it is beneficial”*. They went further to say that step-family system helps one to fight for his or her rights that is self-defense, learn how to share and cater for one’s siblings. However a few said they have never had any benefits from step-family, because since they went into it their lives had change from better to worse. One step-child said, *“I do not see anything positive about step-families, it jealousy here, envy there and fights all the time”*.

Even though stepfamily have lots of challenges, the findings suggest that they have benefits as stated by the majority of the participants. As stated by the Miller Law Group (2021), Step-families can certainly pose many challenges for everyone involved, but that does not mean that everyone cannot reap the benefits. That from increased stability and the model of a healthy marriage, increased household income, new siblings to bond and grow with, and more loving adult people to guide, mentor, and help the children, there are tremendous benefits for everyone involved.

4.9 Measures adapted by Stepchildren to Overcome Challenges

This section summarises the results of the responses from the first question of the one-on-one interviews in appendix that the researcher conducted with the respondents.

The sub-question revolved around: (1) what measures do you take to survive the challenges in the family; (2) what do you do to control your emotions and feelings about your situations as a stepchild; (3) Is there anything that could be done to help in your situation; (4) what do you think need to be known in order to help children going through similar situations; (5) is there anything else you would like to add that you think might be important to know in order to understand how children experience stepfamily life.

4.9.1 Measures taken to survive the challenges

Participants used different measures to overcome the challenges faced, first of all, they just listened, obeyed and did their work as prescribed by their step-parents so that they would be able to cope with the challenges. Some said they hide and cry when the problems come so that they can be relieved a little. Also they use the silent treatment and walked away to overcome the challenges and other times they refuse to give in to their step-parents and call to tell or run to their biological nonresident or other relatives like grandmothers. Furthermore, they had to fight their steps' back to overcome the challenges. Others adapt different methods such as plan their house chores and other activities well in order to finish and sleep early, learn more at school because there is no time to learn at home. A participant said, *"I sleep early if I am done with my work in the bakery so that I can get up early, do the supply of bread quickly in order not to be late to school and I also try to learn more at school because you will not get the chance to learn at home"*. Other measures taken by step-children included seeking advice from other relatives and friends as to how to manage their situations. Others also did small business to support themselves financially. Example, one said, *"I rear rabbits and sell after school and also fetch water for people for money"*. The grownups among them said they left home and were living alone and do

not rely on the stepfamily, so they provide for themselves in order not bring any difficulty to the step-parents and themselves. From the discussion, the study showed that step-children adapt so many measures to be able to overcome the challenges that come with living in the step-family in order to survive.

4.9.2 What step-children do to control emotions and feelings?

Participants revealed what they did to control their emotions. One way they controlled their emotions was try to get over it and console themselves with the fact that one day they would be out of that situation. One said, *"I tell myself that I will one day be with my mother"*. Some of the step-children would be quiet and look at their step-parents, some said they remember what their biological parents in the family do for them, the care and the love, to control their emotions. Another participant stated, *"I remember what my father does for me to control my emotions"*. Also some revealed that they cried to get whatever was troubling them out of their chest or keep to themselves or talked to friends who listened to them. A participant said, *"I cry to get it out of my chest and I talk to friends who will listen to me and console me"*. Quarrels were also another thing which they used to let their emotions out, this was where they would confront anyone gets into the problem in the family. For example a step-daughter said, *"I quarrel with them, my elder siblings will fight for me"*. Where they have direct siblings, they shared their sorrows with them and the elder siblings would console or fight for them. One thing again step-children did was talked to their biological nonresident parent or other relatives like their grand-parents to feel relief. However, a small number of the participants took whatever challenge faced normal, because they had the chance of being in school so did not had bad emotions. For instance, one said, *"I take it normal, because I am able to go to school in the city, I do not like village school"*.

People's emotions can be controlled by doing so many things, and the step-children are not an exception, in the discussion, the step-children who faced series of challenges through step-parenting stated what they did to overcome their challenges. This means that there are various means through which step-children can control their emotions to be able to fit into the step-family.

4.9.3 What could be done to help in step-children situation?

So many things could be done to help step-children as stated by the participants. Some said they need to study hard, complete school and get a job so they can leave that house. And that when it comes to health issues, they would also still have to find money on their own and take care of themselves as their step-parents did not care. They also want their step-parents to stop fighting their biological parents and step-children should also be listened to and considered as members of the family. For instance a step-child said, *“what I think can be done in my situation is for my step-family members to listen to me and consider me as a member too”*. They further said that the biological parents of step-children in step-families should be made to know that not all of their partners they got married to loved and cared for the children brought into the marriage. A participant said, *“I want my mother to be talked to, she should know that the man does not love her because if he loves her, he will love and care for her children too”*. Those who were step-children in the complex step-families like the polygamous homes wished the step-mothers were in separate houses so that the jealousy will be minimized or better still, stop or practice polygamy in the right way.

Others also said step-parents should be told to minimize or shared among the children equally the work load on their step-children so that they could go to school early, and also parents who were spouses to the step-parents should listened to their children when they tell them sometime and not listened to only the step-parent who is the spouse and try not to call other people and discuss step-children issues with when there was a problem but settle it within the family. One said, *“I want my step father to let me go to school early and also listen to us when we tell him something and stop listening to only my step-mother”*. The study also revealed that, the provision for step-children needs are not met so they wished if someone could provide their basic and school needs. To add to that, step-children wished they could see their nonresident biological parent more regularly. A step-son said, *“Yes let me see my mother more often at least four times a year and not twice”*.

Step-children believed a lot could be done to help them in the step-parenting situation considering all that they mentioned. To support this is the various ways Perry (2019) suggested that the best treatment to help in step-children situation are to refuse segregation, show equal respect and set equal limits where step-siblings are involved. Also, Sloan (2019) thinks step-children need to be treated with patience and allowed sometime to fit in through clear rules as well as giving the kids their own space as they need that sense of belonging.

4.9.4 What can be done to other step-children in similar situation?

The participants stated that so many things could be done to help step-children. That Step-children should try to talk to their stepparents about what borders them so that they can cope with their situation in their step-family, people need to listen to step-children who go through challenges, they need to be heard, somebody they could talk

to and share their sorrows and joys with and express their feelings and should not be judged by their step-parents. A participant said, *“step-children should be listened to and not be judged by their step parents”*. Also, stepparents should treat stepchildren as their biological children, Relatives should help stepchildren because they were suffering in the hands of their stepparents. Others said that, step-children should be determine, take schooling or training seriously, work hard and be focus to make life better no matter the situation in which they find themselves. They felt that they should try to take things normal and control their emotions in that situation. The other thing they said could be done was that, parents should try to settle their differences instead of divorce and stay together to raise their children because step-children do not enjoy living with step-parents.

A participant said, *“what I want to say is that step-children do not enjoy being without one of their parents, they want all their parents to be together”*. They should let us visit the nonresident biological parent often and better still the society should look out for those children in step-families and do something to help them. That step-children can also work to support themselves financially and people should look out for those who suffer a lot in stepfamilies and help them, such children should be convinced to talk about their problems to be helped because some of them do not want to disclose what they go through with the fear of their step-parents. One participant said, *“The society should study those children in step families and do something to help them because some of them cannot open up to people for help”*.

From the discussions in this study, a lot can be done to help the situation of some step-children in the step-parenting families.

4.9.5 Other important things to know in order to understand how children experience stepfamily life

The participants had these to say when asked about other things to know to understand how children experience step-family life. The study revealed that in some step-families, step-children had no rights, but just have to obey. For instance a participant said, *“Children in step families do not have any right, they just have to listen and obey”*. The findings further revealed that even though some stepchildren were fine, others went through bitter experiences to cope with that life and manage the situation, that step-children also needed love, care and some pampering so step-parents should try to give them that.

Some step-children revealed that, some step-children did not consider their step-parents as their real parents so they did not treat them with respect and obedience, but no matter the condition, they should be good, respect and obey. A participant said, *“sometimes treatment given to step-children is cause by them, some of them do not accept and treat the step-parents as they should, they show disrespect, I always try to obey and respect them no matter how they treat me for my own good”*. They should do their work well when given to do in the house so that they can become useful adults in future. Another thing that was made known was, step children suffer silent maltreatment so the need to help them persevere and achieve their dreams. That stepchildren were afraid and shy of their step-parent and may not be able to express their feeling to them. One said, *“step-parents should take proper care of us the step-children and God will bless them”*. They explained that, some step-parents are good and some are bad, those who were good showed you love, but the bad ones treated step-children badly so stepchildren should be patient. Another interesting thing the study revealed was that, step-children felt they were not shown love in their families

so it was the street that showed them love so they remained there and some became junkies and others even end up dying. Some of the participants said, *“step-children should be convinced to talk about their problems, they feel they are not shown love in their families so it is the street that shows them love, so they remain on the streets and become junkies by smoking weed and other drugs, some becomes armed robbers and some even end up dead”*.

From the study, step-children experience so many treatment both negative and positive but the negative outweighs the positives, step-children go through a lot of abuse. As stated by Holland (2018), adults abusing children may also show certain signs or behaviours as ignoring or denying a child’s problematic behaviour, changes or difficulties, using language that shows they view the child as worthless or burdensome, rarely showing physical affection to the child and displaying little concern for the child, which is what step-children go through in step-families. To identify abused child is through changes in behaviour including hostility, hyperactivity, anger or aggression, reluctance to leave activities, attempts at running away or leaving the home, withdrawal from friends, family, or usual activities self-harm or attempted suicide and defiant behaviour.

Depression, anxiety or unusual fears, or a sudden loss of self-confidence and this could jeopardies their lives if it is not look at by the society. In light of these, measures should be put in place to help such families, counselling, support institutions like school and individual counseling. Individual counseling sessions with the step-children which gives the child the opportunity to accept the natural differences inherent in the stepfamily structure, acknowledging them as normal variant rather than defective variations (Johnson, 2000). As the diversity of the stepfamily is normalized, various ways of dealing with stepfamily issues can be explored without comparison to

a singular, “normal” model. Individual counselling also provide an opportunity to address and challenge irrational beliefs that the stepchild may hold about self and stepfamily living, needs of security, belonging and self-esteem can also be addressed.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings. Recommendations for the application of findings and suggestions for further research are also included.

5.1 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore parenting in step-families in selected Zongo communities in Accra. The objectives for the study were to examine the quality of relationship that exists between step-children and step-parents in the Zongo communities, identify the challenges step-parents and step-children face in Zongo communities, investigate the implications of the challenges on step-parents and step-children in Zongo communities and to assess the measures adopted by step-parents and step-children to overcome the challenges faced in the Zongo communities. Various topics were reviewed to find out more about what other people have said relating to this study.

The best people to offer information on how parenting was done in step-families were those who have experienced it themselves. In this regard, the researcher employed a qualitative research approach because this study focused on individuals who have experienced the phenomenon of living in a step-family system to describe the life experience this family system and draw certain conclusions about it. The sample for this study was made up of twenty (20) for both step-parents and step-children in the Zongo communities in Accra. An interview guide was used to collect information from the participants. Interview was done individually and not at the same time for step-parent and step-child and each interview session lasted about 50 minutes at the

participant's own place of preference. Data gathered from the interviews were transcribed, coded and discussed under various themes giving insights into parenting in step-parenting, its challenges, measures adapted to cope and benefits of being part of that family.

The findings of the study have been summarised in the sub-section that follows

5.1.1 Findings

1. Some participants had good quality relationship with their step-children by stating various reasons that made their relationship good while others did not have good quality relationship.
2. The study revealed that some step-children did not like to relate with step-siblings because of confusion and rivalry in the family while others believed it was good to have step-siblings.
3. The challenges revealed by the step-parents included financial challenges, the interferences of the biological non-resident parent and outsiders, the adolescents' misbehaviour, sometimes get insults and labelled as wicked and witches, not eating food prepared by step-parents and so on.
4. Step-children stated a number of difficulties they faced as emotional challenges, neglect and abuse, financial challenges, school issues such as buying school items, and nobody to represent you when they call for parents in the school. Food to eat, challenges with discrimination in sharing loyalties leading to misunderstandings and conflicts, and not seeing biological non-resident parent regularly.

5. Participants listed a number of things that brought stress in step-parenting to include financial problems, spousal disagreement, not being accepted as parent by stepchildren.
6. The study revealed the effects of the challenges on step-children as running away from the stepfamily, low self-esteem and confidence, shy, timid and introvert. Another significant effect was poor academic performance, psychologically, emotionally and social well-being. However some believed it affected them positively by preparing and toughing them for life.
7. The study revealed the benefits from step-parenting, step-children run errands kept their step-parents company and so on. Step-children on the other had an adult person to guide them, and also got new family members.
8. Some of the measures step-parents put in place were to get close to step-children, shared things clearly and equally among children in the step-family and try to meet every child's needs. Another thing was patients, building trust. Separating wives and children in polygamous step-families to different houses, setting up business for step-children and bought things down when they had money to overcome financial challenges. Some talked to the non-resident parent for collaborative parenting of step-children and so on.
9. Step-children revealed several measures such as listened and obeyed, hide and cry for a little relief, remain silent and walked away, sometime refuse to give in to their step-parents demand and call to tell or run to their biological non-resident or other relatives. Other times too, they have to fight their steps' back, plan their house chores and other activities well in order to finish and sleep early, learn more at school. Others also did small business to support themselves financially and more.

10. They need to be heard, step-children felt they were not shown love in their families so it was the street that showed them love so they remained there and some became junkies and others even end up dying. That parents should try to settle their differences instead of optioning for divorce, step-children should be determine, take schooling or training seriously, work hard and be focus to make life better. Step children should be convinced to talk about their problems to be helped because some of them do not want to disclose what they go through with the fear of their step-parents

5.2 Conclusion

In recent times, families all around the world has under gone transformation from the traditional family system to so many family systems. The family structure has changed dramatically which include single parent family, childless family, grandparent family, stepfamily and many more where children are being brought up. However, these families have different compositions and different ways of parenting.

Step family system is one of the fastest growing type of family formed from either a divorced, death, polygamy, concubine relationship and for some other reasons. Most step-parenting comes in where there is a child or children who become a step to the non-biological who is a spouse and has a say or become a co-parent to the biological parent of the child or children which brings about step-parenting. Parenting in itself comes with varied challenges, to make it more challenging is where the child is not your biological. This is why step-parenting everywhere is not an easy task including step-parenting in the Zongo communities. The findings of this study revealed that there are challenges with step-parenting in the Zongo communities which both step-child and the step-parent have to grapple with. They do these through so many

difficult issues and stress such as compromising on certain things to be able to cope with this family system which make some of both step-parent and step-children not to enjoy the step-parent, step-child relationship in the Zongo communities.

Even though there are difficulties in the step-family system, the study has also revealed some benefits. Step-family has benefits and should not be overlooked. Parenting in step-family give step-children the opportunity to have adults in their lives to serve as role models and to also have such adults to provide their needs. In view of this step-parents and step-children put in measures to overcome the challenges to be able to drive the benefits from the family. These makes it clear that when measures are put in place, both step-parents and step-children will be able to adjust and cope with the step-family challenges not only in the Zongo communities alone, but the nation as a whole.

To conclude, step-parenting is not easy as compare to the regular parenting. It comes with a whole lot of challenges which lead to poor relationship among members in the stepfamily. For proper family functioning, step-family members should strive hard to work at issues that affect their relationship to maintain a healthy family living for all its members which can translate into the Zongo communities and Ghana as a nation for peaceful co-existence for development.

5.3 Recommendation

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

1. Step-families that did not have good relationship with their members should work hard to build a good quality relationship.
2. The challenges brought into limelight in this study about step-parenting in the society today; should be looked by institutions and organizations such as

Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Domestic Violence and Victims Supports Units (DVVSU) and some non-governmental organizations to provide support for both step-parents and step-children and also, plan counselling session for step-families members.

3. The benefits that come with step-parenting should not be over looked, but be enhanced in other to enjoy by all step-family members.
4. This will also assist step-parents to adapt the best measures to deal with step-children and step-parent's behaviours. Different step-parenting styles highlighted in this study, will guide step-parents identify styles best suited for their individual parenting situations, and those who are yet to go into the blended families to have a fair idea as to how to be step-parents.
5. Step-children should be shown affection by both step-parents and other family members so that the do end up on the streets.

5.4 Suggestion for Future Research

Research is recurrent and after every research, new issues are generated and needs to be looked at. This study was based on family life experience of step-families and how parenting is done in the stepfamily. It was to look at how step-parents and step-children related. But then there are other critical areas in the step-family system that can be researched into by future researchers.

1. Firstly, the communication between stepfamily members is an important thing to be studied since effective communication is the key to healthy relationship in every part of human society. It is considered important here because people with different backgrounds have been brought to stay under the same roof of which was not the case initially. So when there is effective communication, there can be understanding in the step-family.

2. Also, the polygamous aspect of step-family system is more complex and needs to be looked at as a research topic.
3. Another interesting aspect of the step-family that needs to be researched into by future researchers is the complex step-family system where there is also more than one simple step-family members.
4. The most interest of them all will be researching into the outcomes of step-children in step-parenting and their impact on the society.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent for Research Study

The purpose of this study will be to understand how step-parenting in step-families, the kind of relationship that exist between step-parents and step-children, the challenges they go through and the measures taken to overcome the challenges. You will be asked to participate in a 30 - 1hour interview. During this interview you will be asked about the challenges you have experienced in the step-family, what challenges you relate to being part of a step-family, and what you have done to overcome those challenges and build a healthy relationship. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience in a mutually agreed upon location, and will be audio taped to make sure we understand exactly what was said.

The researcher anticipates that there will be no risk to you as a result of your participation in this research study. The researcher will ensure that your information will be kept confidential. In an effort to really understand all the components of your experience, the interview will include some questions about emotional issues; however, you may decline to answer any question at any time.

As a result of participating in this study you may feel empowered and feel a sense of satisfaction because you have contributed to an important study that may benefit other step-families, and those professionals who work with families in building healthy relationship in families. Every effort will be made to keep all information you provide in the strictest confidence. Any specific identifying information will be omitted from your transcript (e.g., name changes, age). Your responses will be kept locked for the duration of the project and access will only be allowed to the researcher and her assistant. After the study has been completed your name and any other identifying information will not be reported in any publications or presentations. Once the data collection is complete and the interviews are transcribed, a copy of your interview transcription will be sent to you if you so request. If there are any portions of the interview you wish to change in order to protect your confidentiality, you may do so and send it back to the researcher by the date designated. You may also highlight any portion of your transcription that you do not wish to be quoted later when the research project data analysis is reported. These highlights can be sent back to the researcher as well. If you do not respond to the interview transcription by the designated date, the researcher will assume that you do not wish to make any changes. Your participation is completely voluntary and there will be no compensation other than the researcher's appreciation for your time. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions and you may drop out at any time.

Thank You,

.....
Lamnatu Ziblim

APPENDIX B

Participants Permission

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I have read and understand the Informed Consent and the conditions of this project. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project by signing my name on the line below. I realise that, although I choose to participate right now, I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without any penalty.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



APPENDIX C

Interview Guide for Step-Parents

The purpose of this study is to explore how parenting goes about in step-families in a selected Zongo communities in Accra. Your candid expression of opinion in this interview would be helpful in analyzing the issue. Meanwhile, be assured that all information you provide is strictly for academic purpose and will be handled with utmost confidentiality and your identity would not be revealed in anyway. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Data. The purpose of this section is to obtain general information related to yourself as a participant in this research (Please tick (✓) where appropriate).

1. Age:
2. Sex: Male Female
3. Marital Status: i. Married ii. Divorced iii. Single iv. Living with Partner
v. Other:
4. Do you have any children (biological or adopted)? i Yes ii No
5. Number of children
6. Your occupation
7. Religion. Christianity , Muslim traditionalist others, specify.....
8. Your ethnicity.....

Section B: What is the relationship between step-parents and step-children?

1. How did you become a step-parent?
2. How many years have you been a step-parent?
3. How many step-children do you parent?
4. Are your step-children boys, girls or both?
5. What are the behaviours of children in a step-family
6. What are your duties as a parent?
7. Around the time when you and your partner moved in together, can you remember what role you hoped your partner or you would play in the life of the step child/children.

8. How do you see your responsibilities as a stepparent now? How are these different to yours or your partner's responsibilities to this child?
9. Do you and your partner discuss about how you will handle issues concerning the kids?
10. What quality of relationship do you have with your step-child, describe it.
11. Is communication effectively done in the step-family?

Section C: What are the challenges in step-parenting in the Zongo communities?

1. Do you experience some challenges in step-parenting?
2. What challenges do you encounter as a step-parent in parenting your step-children?
3. Are the challenges more when the step-children have step-siblings?
4. At which stage is parenting step-children more difficult to deal with?
5. Do they disengage with the family at a point in time especially at the adolescent stage?
6. How does your partner support you in putting in disciplinary measures in step-parenting?
7. Do you experience disagreement or misunderstandings which leads to conflicts?
 - a. Between you and your step-children.
 - b. between you and your spouse?

Section D: What are the implications of the challenges on step-parents?

1. Describe the stresses or changes you experience as a step-parent.
2. Describe your feeling when the challenges come as step-parent.
3. Do you sometimes feel like leaving the marriage?
4. How do the challenges affect the performance of your parental duties/ relationship with partners?
5. Do the behaviours of your step-children remind you they are not your biological children and for that matter do not care for them?
6. Do you expect your step-children to accept and obey you as they will if you were their biological parent?

Section E: What measures are adopted by step-parents to overcome the challenges?

1. What do you do when you are not treated like a biological parent by your step-children?
2. What are some of the measures put in in place to overcome the challenges?

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide for Step-Children

The purpose of this study is to explore how parenting goes about in step-families in a selected Zongo communities in Accra. Your candid expression of opinion in this interview would be helpful in analyzing the issue. Meanwhile, be assured that all information you provide is strictly for academic purpose and will be handled with utmost confidentiality and your identity would not be revealed in anyway. Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Data. The purpose of this section is to obtain general information related yourself as a participant in this research (Please tick (√) where appropriate).

1. Age
2. Sex: Male [] Female [].
3. Your ethnicity.....
4. What is your step-parent's occupation?.....
5. Educational level. i. Basic ii. Senior High iii. Tertiary
6. Have you been out of school for more than one term or semester due to circumstances beyond your control? Yes [] No []. If yes, why?
7. Religious background: Christianity [], Muslim [] Traditionalist [] others, specify.....
8. How frequent is your contact with your biological parent if he or she is alive?.....

Section B: How is the relationship between step-parents and step-children?

1. Who is your step-parent?
2. How did you become a step-child?
3. How long have you been a step-child?
4. How did you find out about your new family situation?
5. How are you treated in your new family?

6. How is parenting done in your new family as compared to your first or biological family?
7. Does your step-parent perform his or her responsibilities as a parent?
8. How did you deal with your parent's new relationship with a new partner?
9. What is your experience with your step siblings, if applicable?
10. Is it nice to be a part of a two-parent home? Could you tell your experience of a stepfamily?
11. What is your relationship like with the step-parent?

Section C: What are the challenges in step-parenting in the Zongo communities?

1. How do you describe adjustment to life in a stepfamily?
2. Was adjusting difficult?
3. What are the particular difficulties or challenges that you face as a step-child?
4. Are you able to cope with the parenting styles of your stepparent?
5. Is it a difficult experience not living with one of your parents or sharing living arrangements with other step-siblings?
6. What are the common difficult emotions children in stepfamilies experience?
7. Is it a challenge for you to relate with half- stepsiblings or stepsiblings?

Section D: What are the implications of the challenges on step-children?

1. How do the challenges affect you as step-child?
2. Do you consider yourself at risk as a result of the negative effects of the challenges of step parenting compared to children in first-marriage families?
3. Describe how the challenges have affected your relationship with your biological father or mother.
4. How does your stepparent way of parenting affect you?
5. What comes to your mind when you think of being part of a stepfamily in your life?

6. Are there any other difficulties or issues you would like to share.
7. How do the common difficult emotions for children in stepfamilies affect growth, development and social life?
8. How does the positives of step parenting benefit you as stepchild? / In what ways would you benefit from step parenting as a stepchild?

Section E: What measures are adopted by step- children to overcome the challenges?

1. What measures do you take to survive the challenges in this new family?
2. What do you do to control your emotions and feelings about your situation as a step-child?
3. Does the pain of the past often lead you to be secretive and untrusting which may cause a tremendous fear of the future? How?
4. Is there anything that could be done to help in your situation?
5. What do you think needs to be known in order to help children going through similar situations?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think might be important to know in order to understand children's experiences in stepfamilies?