

Adults' experience of coping with parental divorce during childhood: A phenomenological perspective

JC du Plooy

24062553

MSc (Clinical Psychology)

Thesis submitted for the degree *Doctor Philosophiae*
in Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the
North-West University

Promoter: Prof E van Rensburg

Co-promoter: Dr MM du Toit

November 2013

DECLARATION

I, Jacobus Christoffel du Plooy, hereby declare that the work upon which this thesis is based, is original (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or shall be submitted for another degree at this or any other university, institution or tertiary education or examining body.

Jacobus Christoffel du Plooy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would hereby like to extend my sincerest gratitude and appreciation to the following individuals:

- Prof Esme van Rensburg, my promoter for her professional conduct, encouragement, guidance, patience and invaluable support throughout the completion of this dissertation. I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to work with her and will always remain grateful for all the knowledge and experience that she shared with me during the process.
- Dr M du Toit, my co-promoter for all her valuable inputs and support in the completion of the present study.
- Mrs L van Kradenburg for her assistance with the final editing of the dissertation.
- To all the participants who participated in this study. Without their valuable inputs this study could not have been completed.
- My parents, Neels and Ida du Plooy for their unwavering support and encouragement.
- My friend and mentor, Le Roux Franken whose input in my life has always been of unlimited value to me.
- My son, Julius to whom this study is dedicated. His love and existence in my life inspires me to be a better person, psychotherapist and father each day.
- Finally and most importantly, to God for having granted me the strength and ability to complete this study. It was an honour and a privilege to have completed it and I thank Him for it every day.

SUMMARY

Divorce has long been described as one of the most stressful experiences that any human being can ever experience. The process of divorce implies numerous sudden and highly stressful changes to any individual affected by it, including children. The literature review of the present study revealed valuable insight regarding the effects of divorce, in particular on children. The studies among them which were found to have identified some of the more detrimental implications of divorce for children in particular, included the studies by Jonsson, Njardvik, Olafsdottir and Gretarsson (2000); Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia and Greenbaum (2009); and Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge and Bates (2010).

Despite numerous research studies having been done on the phenomena of divorce both in South Africa and globally, it appears that the majority of these studies mostly focused on its detrimental implications for both children and adults. Few of these studies were found to have focused on possible optimal implications or on effective coping with divorce. Some studies that were found to have touched on the potential optimal effects of parental divorce included the studies by Mullis, Mullis, Schwartz, Pease and Shriner (2007); Graff-Reed (N.D.); and Spalding and Pretorius (2001).

One particularly influential study that was, however, identified to have been done on the phenomena of coping with parental divorce, was conducted by Roux (2007) who focused specifically on children's coping with parental divorce. This study focused exclusively on children and involved interviews with children themselves at the time of their parents' divorce. No research could be identified on how young adults in South Africa had attempted to cope with their parents' divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years. This determination led to an attempt to fill this apparent void in the literature and expand on the study that had been conducted by Roux (2007) by completing the present study. The focus

of the present study subsequently fell on how young adults had coped with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescent years.

The aims of the present study were:

- To investigate and obtain a clearer understanding of young adults' coping with divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years.
- To determine if there were factors that played a role in coping with parental divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to the parents of children undergoing divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to children while undergoing parental divorce.

The research questions that were included in the present study for the aforementioned purpose included the following:

- How did young adults cope with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescent years?
- Were there factors that played a role in their coping and if so what were the factors?
- What would they recommend to the parents of children during and after divorce?
- What would they recommend to children during and after parental divorce?

Semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with 15 participants in the completion of the present study. Each of these interviews were transcribed and the relevant data were analysed from these transcriptions by firstly reading of the protocols, followed by dividing them into natural meaning units (NMUs), performing linguistic transformation, integrating the NMUs with related themes, synthesising the data and developing a general description before it was finally documented and published. Selection of the participants was made by means of

snowball sampling, as young adults nominated acquaintances whom they believed may also be willing to participate in the research (Whitley, 2002).

The value of the present study was that it expanded the knowledge base regarding young adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years. It also culminated in the creation of a set of recommendations for both children and adults that would promote effective coping among them with parental divorce. It is hoped that these insights and recommendations will enable psychologists, social workers, counsellors, health care practitioners and/or any other individual/s involved with assisting families during divorce, to cope more effectively with this event. It is also hoped that further future research and follow-up studies into this particularly relevant and far reaching phenomenon will continue to be conducted by other researchers both in South Africa and abroad.

Key words: Coping, parental divorce, young adults, middle childhood, adolescence, qualitative research, retrospective interviews, phenomenology

TABLE OF CONTENT

	PAGE
DECLARATION	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
SUMMARY	III

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Motivation for the present study	2
1.3 Aims of the present study	4
1.4 Method of investigation of the present study	5
1.5 Ethical considerations of the present study	5
1.6 Overview of the present study	6

CHAPTER 2: COPING

2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Definition and clarification of coping and related concepts	7
2.2.1 Stress	8
2.2.1.1 Types of stress	9
2.2.1.2 Stress models and approaches	10
2.2.2 Anxiety	16
2.2.3 Coping	18
2.2.3.1 Coping theories	19
2.2.3.1.1 General coping theories	20
2.2.3.1.1.1 Lazarus's cognitive-motivational-relational theory	20
2.2.3.1.1.2 Moos' theory of stress and coping	23
2.2.3.1.1.3 Hobfoll's theory of coping	25
2.2.3.1.1.4 Frydenberg's theory of coping	26
2.2.3.1.1.5 Ntoumanis's theory of coping	28
2.2.3.1.2. Other recent theories and approaches related to coping	33
2.2.3.1.2.1 Interpersonal variables in relation to coping	33
2.2.3.1.2.2 The dynamic systems theory in relation to coping	34

2.2.3.2 Coping strategies	38
2.2.3.2.1 Definition of coping strategies	38
2.2.3.2.2 General coping strategies	39
2.2.3.2.2.1 Problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies	40
2.2.3.2.2.2 Affirmative and abortive strategies	41
2.2.3.2.2.3 Positive psychology-related strategies	42
2.2.3.2.2.4 Coping strategies utilised by children and adolescents	43
2.2.3.2.2.4.1 Middle childhood	43
2.2.3.2.2.4.1.1 Introduction	44
2.2.3.2.2.4.1.2 Coping during middle childhood	44
2.2.3.2.2.4.1.3 Conclusion	48
2.2.3.2.2.4.2 Adolescence	48
2.2.3.2.2.4.2.1 Introduction	48
2.2.3.2.2.4.2.2 Coping during adolescence	49
2.2.3.2.2.4.2.3 Conclusion	50
2.3 Conclusions	51

CHAPTER 3: COPING WITH PARENTAL DIVORCE

3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 Divorce	52
3.2.1 Types of divorce	53
3.2.2 Causes for divorce	55
3.2.3 The process of divorce	60
3.2.4 The divorce-stress-adjustment model	61
3.2.5 The effects of parental divorce on children during middle childhood and adolescence	66
3.2.5.1 Middle childhood	66
3.2.5.1.1 Anger	67
3.2.5.1.2 Low self-esteem	67
3.2.5.1.3 Divided loyalties	68
3.2.5.1.4 Depression	68

3.2.5.1.5 Fear	71
3.2.5.1.6 Shame and hope of reconciliation	71
3.2.5.1.7 Poorer academic achievement	71
3.2.5.1.8 Taking on parental roles	72
3.2.5.1.9 Creating distance from abusive parents	72
3.2.5.1.10 Developing a closer relationship with custodian parent	72
3.2.5.1.11 Relief	72
3.2.5.2. Adolescence	73
3.2.5.2.1 Sense of loss	73
3.2.5.2.2 Anger	74
3.2.5.2.3 Sense of helplessness	74
3.2.5.2.4 Fear of stigmatisation	75
3.2.5.2.5 Lowered levels of empathy with parents	75
3.2.5.2.6 Divided loyalties	75
3.2.5.2.7 Ambivalence concerning morality	76
3.2.5.2.8 Withdrawal and isolation	76
3.2.5.2.9 Low self-esteem	76
3.2.5.2.10 Rapid development of adulthood	77
3.2.5.2.11 Poorer academic performance	78
3.2.5.2.12 Creating distance from abusive parent	78
3.2.5.2.13 Developing a closer relationship with custodian parent	79
3.2.5.2.14 Relief	79
3.2.5.3. Long-term effects of parental divorce	79
3.2.5.3.1 Sleeper effects	80
3.2.5.3.2 Resilience	82
3.2.5.3.3 Factors influencing long-term effects of divorce	82
3.2.5.3.4 Mediators of long term effects	84
3.3. Coping with parental divorce	85
3.3.1. Coping with parental divorce during middle childhood	85
3.3.2. Coping with parental divorce during adolescence	88
3.4. Conclusions	95

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction	97
4.2 Qualitative versus Quantitative research	97
4.3 Phenomenology	100
4.3.1 Historical background	100
4.3.2 Defining phenomenology	101
4.3.3 Key concepts related to phenomenology	102
4.3.3.1 Being-in-the-world	102
4.3.3.2 <i>Lebenswelt</i>	103
4.3.3.3 Consciousness and intentionality	103
4.3.3.4 Perception	104
4.3.3.5 Meaning	104
4.3.4 Phenomenology within the context of research	105
4.3.4.1 A form of qualitative research	105
4.3.4.2 The aim of phenomenological research	106
4.3.4.3 Reliability and validity within phenomenological research	107
4.3.4.4 Data collection within phenomenological research	108
4.3.4.5 Data analysis within phenomenological research	112
4.3.4.6 Retrospective research within the context of phenomenological research	114
4.3.4.6.1 Definition of retrospective research	114
4.3.4.6.2 Features of retrospective research	115
4.3.4.6.3 Strengths of retrospective research	116
4.3.4.6.4 Limitations of retrospective research	116
4.4 Research methodology of the present study	118
4.4.1 Motivation for the use of a phenomenological research design within the present study	118
4.4.2 Aims of the present study	119
4.4.3 Research hypotheses	120
4.4.4 Participant selection	120
4.4.5 Data collection	121

4.4.6 Method of data analysis	122
4.4.7 Trustworthiness	125
4.4.8 Ethical considerations	126
4.5 Conclusions	128

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction	129
5.2 Biographical information	129
5.2.1 Sample size	130
5.2.2 Age	130
5.2.3 Gender	130
5.2.4 Race	131
5.2.5 Occupations	131
5.2.6 Educational qualifications	131
5.2.7 Passage of time since parental divorce	131
5.2.8 Home language	132
5.3 Findings of the present study	132
5.3.1 Themes and sub-themes relating to adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence	133
5.3.1.1 First theme: Cognitive coping strategies	134
5.3.1.1.1 First sub-theme: Persistence	134
5.3.1.1.2 Second sub-theme: Re-appraisal	135
5.3.1.1.3 Third sub-theme: Problem solving	139
5.3.1.2 Second theme: Communication coping strategies	141
5.3.1.2.1 First sub-theme: Choice to communicate	142
5.3.1.2.2 Second sub-theme: Effective communication in relationships	144
5.3.1.3 Third theme: Distraction and avoidance as coping strategy	151
5.3.1.4 Fourth theme: Spiritual coping	154
5.3.2 Factors hindering coping	155
5.3.2.1 Factor 1: Parent-child communication difficulties	155

5.3.2.2 Factor 2: Environmental disruptions	160
5.3.2.3 Factor 3: Parental conflict	163
5.3.2.4 Factor 4: Lack of parental coping	165
5.3.3 Recommendations for parents	167
5.3.3.1 Recommendation 1: Maintain effective parent-child communication	168
5.3.3.2 Recommendation 2: Maintain effective communication with other parent	170
5.3.3.3 Recommendation 3: Maintain stability in children's lives	172
5.3.3.4 Recommendation 4: Refer children for counselling/psychotherapy	172
5.3.4 Recommendations for children	173
5.3.4.1 Recommendation 1: Encourage self-distraction	173
5.3.4.2 Recommendation 2: Encourage communication	175
5.4 Developing and understanding of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence	177
5.4.1 Individual coping strategies	177
5.4.1.1 Adopting an optimistic perception that facilitates effective coping	178
5.4.1.2 Implementing specific behaviours that facilitate effective coping	179
5.4.2 Effective interpersonal communication with significant others in the environment	181
5.4.3 Environmental factors which facilitates optimal coping	187
5.4.3.1 Effective, frequent and continued contact and Communication with non-custodial parent	188
5.4.3.2 Decreased parental conflict	188
5.4.3.3 Maintaining consistency	189
5.5 Conclusions	190

CHAPTER 6 EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction	193
6.2 Overview of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence	193
6.3 The unique contribution of the study	198
6.4 The limitations of the study	200
6.5 The strengths of the study	202
6.6 Implications for further research	203
6.7 Recommendations for coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence	204
6.7.1 Recommendations for parents	205
6.7.2 Recommendations for children and/or adolescents	205
6.8 Personal reflections	206
6.9 Conclusions	207

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent form	208
--------------------------	-----

REFERENCE LIST	213
-----------------------	------------

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1:	Gender, race, age, occupation and educational qualification/s of the participants	129
Table 5.2:	Summary of themes and sub-themes relating to adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence	133
Table 5.3:	Factors hindering coping	155
Table 5.4:	Recommendations for parents	167
Table 5.5:	Recommendations for children	173

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	Selye's three stage general adaptation syndrome	14
Figure 2.2:	Moos's (1994) model of stress and coping	23
Figure 2.3:	Ntoumanis's integration of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping with the self-determination theory	29
Figure 3.1:	The divorce-stress-adjustment model of Amato	62

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Divorce has long been described as one of the most stressful life experiences that any human being, and particularly the children involved in it, could ever undergo (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Kail & Cavanaugh, 2007). The process of divorce implies a number of highly impactful, sudden and stressful changes in the individual's life who experiences it. In addition to this, it also affects not only the marital couple involved but also their significant others, in particular their children, should they have conceived any during the course of their marital relationship. Children have been found to be impacted by parental divorce on an emotional, academic, social and even physical level (Kelly, 2000). The families of origin of both parties as well as the legal fraternity inevitably also become involved at some point during a divorce process, which further highlights what a very far-reaching event divorce is.

Divorce and separation of parents currently appear to be becoming more prevalent in South Africa and to hold far reaching effects for the entire country as a whole. According to the Beeld newspaper of 19 August 2010, Flip Buys wrote an article titled: "Stukkende gesin, stukkende land". Translated into English this means: "Broken home, broken country". In this article Buys (2010) indicates that South Africa as a country would only be able to alleviate most of its current difficulties when families are "healthy" again. Buys (2010) continues to elaborate that there exists a direct link between the challenges facing South Africa and the deterioration of marriages and families. He continues to state that of the more than eighteen million children living in South Africa, 34,3% of these children live with both of their biological parents, 39,9% live only with their biological mother, 2,8% live with only with their biological father and 23% live with non-biological parents (Buys, 2010).

Statistics obtained from Statistics South Africa (1998) released in 1998 indicate that officially recorded marriages in South Africa during 1996 were 146 732 while officially

recorded divorces were 32 775. It further indicates that Gauteng had the highest crude divorce rate of 178 per 100 000 of the population during that same year. In a more recent survey by Statistics South Africa (2010) released in 2010, it was reported that 30 763 divorces were recorded in South Africa in 2009 and that the number of granted divorces had been fluctuating between 28 924 and 34 145 during the last decade in South Africa. In 2011, 167 264 marriages were recorded in South Africa, while 20 980 divorces were granted by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. Approximately 18 571 children were impacted by these divorces that occurred in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2011). The article by Buys (2010) and the aforementioned statistics appear to confirm that there has been a steady increase in the number of divorces and separations in South Africa during recent times.

1.2 Motivation for the present study

The phenomenon of divorce and coping with the divorce by adults and children has been well researched, particularly from the 1970s when the number of divorces started to increase within Western countries. Despite numerous of these research studies having been both in South Africa and globally, it appears that the largest number of them focused on what the perceived adverse effects of divorce is. Some more recent literature has, however, focused on divorce in a more holistic manner (Amato, 2000; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). Few of these studies, however, focused on what could be referred to as optimising the effects of divorce. Some of these implications could include how to optimally cope with this ever-increasing phenomenon in global and South African societies in order to reduce its possible adverse effects and to promote the optimal development of children and young adults following their parents' divorce.

When considering that divorce may not only cause adverse effects for those involved in it, it is also possible that those who are impacted by it may develop and attempt to implement specific coping strategies in order to deal with the divorce process effectively. According to Reber (1995) coping strategies refer to conscious and rational attempts which are made by an individual through which he or she attempts to cope with anxiety-provoking situations encountered within the environment. They

are, therefore, intentionally employed in an effort to alleviate anxiety. Furthermore, these attempted strategies may be described as either having been effective or ineffective depending on their outcomes.

The considerations referred to above ultimately culminated in the formation of the research question for the current study from the experiences of the author in private practice as a clinical psychologist, where an increasing number of cases relating to divorce are being encountered, particularly within the psycho-legal context. Furthermore, after having encountered the research that was conducted by Roux (2007) where children's coping with divorce was explored from a phenomenological perspective, this further led to the development of the research question for the current study.

Roux (2007) conducted a phenomenological study to allow data from interviews with 41 children from white, middle-class families to highlight their perspectives in order to enable a new understanding of children's coping within the context of parental divorce. Her results found amongst others that, similar to the findings of Louw, Van Ede and Louw (1999), children need to develop a personal understanding of their parents' divorce and also need to be given the opportunity to voice their opinions in order to develop a sense of consistency in their lives following their experience of parental divorce.

Roux (2007) also found that the children who had participated in her research expressed a desire to have a voice on matters pertaining to themselves, the need for co-parenting and "equal time" with both parents as well as the value of involvement of significant others in their lives apart from their parents. All of these factors were found to have been of significant assistance to aid children in coping with parental divorce (Roux, 2007). This led the researcher to raise the question whether young adults who experienced parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years, had employed similar coping strategies when experiencing their parental divorce?

1.3 Aims of the present study

The focus of the present study mainly fell on how young adults between the ages of 19 and 35 years had coped with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescence years? The present study therefore differed from that of Roux (2007) as the interviews of the present study were conducted with young adult participants as opposed to child participants.

The aims of the present study were:

- To investigate and obtain a clearer understanding of young adults' coping with divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years.
- To determine if there were factors that played a role in coping with parental divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to the parents of children undergoing divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to children while undergoing parental divorce.

The research questions that were included in the present study for the aforementioned purpose included the following:

- How did young adults cope with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescent years?
- Were there factors that played a role in their coping and if so what were the factors?
- What would they recommend to the parents of children during and after divorce?
- What would they recommend to children during and after parental divorce?

1.4 Method of investigation of the present study

Various databases were utilised in the gathering of data for the literature review of the current study including Nexus, EbscoHost, South African magazines, international magazines, South African journals, international journals, book sources and the internet. By snowball sampling semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with 15 participants. Next, each of the interviews were transcribed and the relevant data were analysed from these transcriptions by reading of the protocols, dividing them into natural meaning units (NMUs), performing linguistic transformation, integrating the NMUs with related themes, synthesising the data and developing a general description before it was finally documented and published.

1.5 Ethical considerations of the present study

From an ethical perspective the following steps were taken to ensure that the current study complies with relevant ethical standards:

- The study was approved by the Research and Ethics committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (number: NWU 00103-11-S1).
- The voluntary and anonymous nature of the information obtained by participants was highlighted both in the e-mails and prior to the commencement of each of the interviews with the participants.
- Participants completed an informed consent document that confirmed the voluntary and anonymous nature of the content of their interviews prior to conducting the interviews with them.
- Steps were further taken throughout the research process to maintain the anonymity of the participants by ensuring that only the researcher personally conducted each of the interviews and that all of the documentation completed by the participants were securely guarded in a secure location to ensure confidentiality.
- Finally, no one suffered any pain or harm of any kind throughout the research process.

1.6 Overview of the present study

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction on the phenomenon of young adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years and also outlines the aims and objectives of the study. Chapter 2 will focus on the concept of coping and coping strategies. Traditional as well as more recently developed coping theories will be discussed, while reviewing further how coping takes place during childhood and adolescence. Chapter 3 will narrow the focus of the present study on coping with parental divorce, in particular during childhood and adolescence. Chapter 4 will describe the research procedure that was followed for the current study, namely that of a retrospective, phenomenological methodology.

In Chapter 5 the results revealed by the data collected from the young adults' experiences will be discussed, together with the coping strategies identified that the participants had reported to use in order to have coped with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years. Chapter 5 will also offer integration with the literature and a conceptualisation of how young adults had attempted to cope with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years. The final chapter, Chapter 6, provides an overview of the phenomenon of young adults' coping with parental divorce during the childhood and/or adolescent years, as well as an evaluation of the study. It will further include recommendations for both adults as well as children experiencing divorce.

CHAPTER 2

COPING

2.1 Introduction

Coping has long been viewed as a vital psychological construct and regarded as a crucial requirement for any individual to be able to function effectively within his or her environment. Hornby (1995) defines the word “cope” in a general sense as “to deal with something successfully, to manage” (p.257).

In the following sections the concept of coping is discussed in more depth within the context of other related concepts such as stress, anxiety, health, problem solving and coping strategies/skills. Without a clear description of these concepts, the concept of coping itself would most likely remain vague, as they form requirements for coping to take place in the first instance. Related theories on coping are also discussed in order to provide further clarity and understanding of coping as a construct. This will also serve as a prelude to Chapter 3, wherein coping with parental divorce as a specific stressful life event will be discussed in depth.

2.2 Definition and clarification of coping and related concepts

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) coping entails a human being's cognitive as well as behavioural attempts to reduce, endure and/or overcome specific internal as well as external environmental demands. A more complete discussion of the views of Lazarus and Folkman is included in section 2.2.3.1.1.1. From this introduction it appears that coping is a necessity for individuals to be able to reduce the stress and/or anxiety levels, which are caused by stressful environmental demands. It could therefore be said that stress, anxiety and effective coping with these stressful environmental demands in life form a crucial part of a person's overall subjective feelings of well-being. Furthermore, coping

not only includes the biological, but also the psychological and environmental facets of all people's lives.

In the sections that follow the theories regarding stress (2.2.1), anxiety (2.2.2) and coping (2.2.3) will be explored.

2.2.1 Stress

Weiten (1997) defines stress as "any circumstances that threaten or are perceived to threaten one's well-being and that thereby tax one's coping abilities" (p.362). Stress therefore depends on an individual's perception of situations, as the same events may be perceived as stressful for some people but routine for others, for example flying in an aeroplane (Weiten, 1997).

Ogden (1997) notes that stress may entail different meanings to individuals, and that lay persons may often describe it in terms of tension, pressure, external forces or emotional responses. Psychologists have, however, defined the concept of stress in more depth by describing external environmental stresses as stressors (such as having to wait while standing in cues). The responses which people display to stressors refer to stress or distress (for example feeling tense). Stress also causes physiological, behavioural, psychological and biochemical changes within people. Ogden (1997) divides stress into different categories, namely certain instances which are potentially harmful to individuals (referred to as distress) and other instances in which stress may be potentially beneficial to individuals (referred to as eustress).

Important contributions to the study of stress were also made by Lazarus and Launier (1978), whom Ogden (1997) indicates had described stress in terms of an interaction between individuals and the environment, which implies that stress involves an interaction between stress and distress. The ideas of Lazarus

surrounding stress and specifically coping are discussed in more depth in later sections of this chapter.

2.2.1.1 Types of stress

Weiten (1997) describes four different types of stress, namely frustration, conflict, change and pressure. The following section will discuss each of them in more depth.

Frustration: Frustration refers to situations in which the pursuit of an individual's goal is hampered in some way or where persons desire certain things which they cannot obtain, for example traffic that people encounter on a daily basis.

Conflict: Conflict describes stress as an incidence where a person is faced with incompatible options or impulses and a decision has to be made that leaves the individual with a subjective sense of inner conflict and/or uncertainty. This could occur in either one of three forms, as originally described by Lewin (1935) and Miller (1944), namely approach–approach conflict, avoidance-avoidance conflict and approach-avoidance conflict.

In the case of approach-approach conflict a choice needs to be made between two attractive options such as what meal to order in a restaurant. Secondly avoidance-avoidance conflict represents situations wherein a choice has to be made between two unattractive options. Thirdly approach-avoidance conflict refers to those situations where a decision is required on whether or not to pursue an option which contains both attractive and unattractive consequences (Lewin, 1935; Miller, 1944, 1959).

Change: Regarding the third form of stress, namely change, Weiten (1997) indicates that all major life changes bring about high levels of stress for the

affected individuals as they demand adaptations when for example getting married, having children, undergoing divorce, retiring and children leaving home.

Pressure: The fourth and final type of stress described by Weiten (1997) is pressure. Certain demands or expectations are placed on individuals by the environment that cause considerable amounts of stress for those affected, for example a person in a sales position feeling under pressure to achieve a certain target of sales by a certain deadline or face possible dismissal or demotion if that target is not met.

Following the aforementioned discussion on the various types and origins of stress, the next section focuses on various models of stress identified from the literature.

2.2.1.2 Stress models and approaches

Numerous stress models have been developed by various researchers in the past. As the emphasis of this chapter is on the concept of coping, only some of these models, which are deemed relevant and related to create a clearer understanding of the concept of coping, were selected and included in the following section.

- **The biopsychosocial model**

Traditionally almost all illnesses were predominantly perceived and described from a purely medical and/or biological model perspective. In more recent years a more encompassing understanding of optimal health has led to the inclusion of psychological and environmental factors, in addition to only biological factors when describing illness and health of human beings. This new understanding of human health and illness ultimately gave rise to what has become known as the biopsychosocial model of illness and health. According to Weiten (1997) the

biopsychosocial model “holds that physical illness is caused by a complex interaction of biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors” (p.361). The biopsychosocial model therefore holds a more holistic perspective. This model further provides a context from within which stress, anxiety and specifically coping with these emotions can be described and understood more clearly (Weiten, 1997).

- **The fight or flight model**

Another one of the most well-known stress models referred to in literature is the fight or flight model of stress proposed by Cannon (1932). According to this model individuals appear to respond to stress in different ways and on various levels such as the emotional, physiological and behavioural levels. Cannon’s fight or flight model (Cannon, 1932) describes stress as a response to an external stressor, which is predominantly seen as physiological in nature. According to this model external threats cause human beings to react by either attempting to flee from the threat or to fight it. During the process the individual experiences physiological changes which aid him or her within that situation to either flee or fight more effectively, for example experiencing increased heart rate and arousal. Cannon’s model is therefore mostly viewed as a model that emphasises the physiological responses to stress (Cannon, 1932).

- **The general adaptation syndrome**

Another important model described in the literature surrounding stress is the model developed by Selye (1956; 1974) referred to as the general adaptation syndrome. Having been a physician by profession, Selye (1956; 1974) described the human body’s responses to stressors as physiological response patterns. According to the general adaptation syndrome, stress is seen as a response to threatening or harmful stimuli from the environment and therefore describes stress as a non-specific bodily response to these threatening stimuli. Selye

(1956; 1974) further upheld that the general adaptation syndrome is a defensive response employed by human beings, which does not depend on the nature of the stressor itself.

In cases where the general adaptation syndrome is experienced as severe and prolonged, disease states may result in those affected (Selye, 1956; 1974). Furthermore, as a defensive reaction the general adaptation syndrome progresses in three stages namely the alarm, resistance and exhaustion phases described next.

Alarm phase: Selye (1956; 1974) explains that during the alarm phase the human body displays an emergency response when its resources are mobilised in response to a threatening situation. From a physiological perspective, upon first perception of the threat, the hypothalamus subsequently sends a signal to the sympathetic nervous system and the pituitary gland, which in turn stimulates the adrenal glands that respond by releasing corticosteroids in order to increase the body's metabolism. This in turn provides access to energy reserves within the body and also decreases inflammation. All of these changes respond by ultimately releasing catecholamines-epinephrine and nor-epinephrine which prolong the fight or flight response. According to Rice (2000) a potentially harmful or threatening stimulus must be present in order for the human body to have stimulated the sympathetic nervous system and the above process to take place.

Resistance phase: During the phase of resistance Selye (1956; 1974) indicates that in cases where the potentially harmful stressor persists, the stage of resistance commences. In this phase the body resists the effect of the continued stressor and the Adrenocorticotrophic (ACTH) hormone is secreted into the blood by cells found in the pituitary gland. This physiological reaction provides the body with sufficient energy to deal with the impending threat – and resistance begins.

In the event of short-lived threats there are usually sufficient resources available to cope effectively. A continued state of arousal is, however, potentially harmful and may lead to harm to certain organs in the body. Selye (1956; 1974) believes that this may also make an individual vulnerable to certain diseases. Rice (2000), however, contends that the stage of resistance could also lead to adaptation or disappearance of symptoms without progressing to the next phase, namely the phase of exhaustion.

Exhaustion phase: Morgan, King, Weisz and Schopler (1986) indicate that during the phase of exhaustion, the body's ability to respond to both continuous and new stresses is significantly compromised and depleted. This ultimately leads to a state wherein those affected can no longer for example ward off infections and these individuals may as a result grow increasingly ill or even die as a result.

Bernard and Krupat (1994) also indicate that during this stage, as the result of prolonged resistance to a point where the body's reserves are finally depleted, a break down will start to occur. The body, however, does not return to homeostasis again following exposure to this stage and instead negative feedback involving the parasympathetic section of the autonomic nervous system produces abnormally low arousal. The adaptive energy has thus been completely depleted.

Selye (1956; 1974) conceptualises adaptive energy to be limited by human genetics and contends that each person has limited amounts of adaptive energy from which to draw and is unable to replenish it once this adaptive energy has been depleted. Selye's (1956) three stage general adaptation syndrome is depicted in Figure 2.1 below.

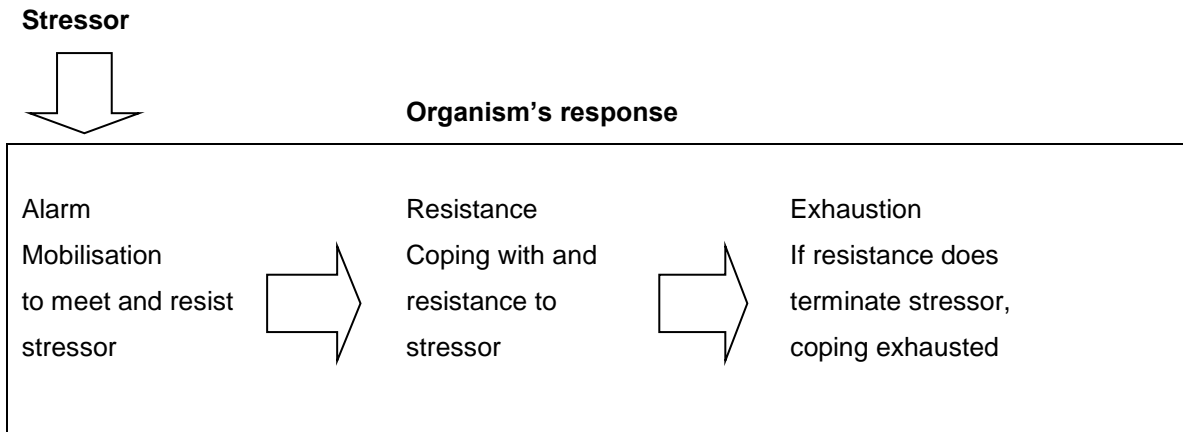


Figure 2.1: Selye's three stage general adaptation syndrome (Selye, 1956)

- **The life events theory**

With the previous models emphasising physiological and biological processes and changes in relation to stress, the life events theory was developed to emphasise stress and stress related changes to an individual in response to life changes. From this perspective Werner (1993) indicates that stress is triggered by events leading to the subjective experience of stress. Werner (1993) names triggering events “stressors” and describes four different types:

- An event when a noteworthy occurrence takes place.
- A situation that consists of a combination of circumstances at any given moment.
- A condition that refers to a state of being.
- A cue that refers to the nature of something that is being perceived at that time.

Werner (1993) also identifies different methods of categorisation of stressors with respect to locus (either internal or external); duration (for example acute or chronic); forecasting (predictable or unpredictable); tone (positive or negative); and impact (normative or catastrophic).

- **The transactional model**

Lazarus (1985; 1991a) originally developed the transactional model of stress, according to which he postulates that stress does not emulate from an event itself but rather from the transaction between an individual and his or her environment. Later he developed the cognitive-motivational-relational theory discussed in later sections of this chapter. According to the transactional formulation, stress comprises of a range of affective, cognitive and coping variables. Lazarus (1985; 1991a) adds that the primary mediator in the interactions between individuals and their environments is based on appraisal. He subsequently describes three types of appraisals which could take place:

Primary appraisal: The first form of appraisal is referred to as primary appraisal, which refers to the judgements made by individuals of what a given situation holds in store for them. In the event that the demands of a given situation outweigh the available resources, individuals may determine that the situation represents either a potential threat, that actual harm had already taken place or that the situation could be potentially beneficial to them.

Secondary appraisal: The second form of appraisal referred to by Lazarus (1985; 1991a) is secondary appraisal, which refers to the process that persons undergo in order to determine what coping options or behaviours are available to them in order to effectively manage the threat at hand.

Reappraisal: Finally, the third form of appraisal known as reappraisal refers to the process whereby individuals continuously re-evaluate and possibly change depending on the outcomes of this re-evaluation, based on their earlier primary and/or secondary appraisals as the situation at hand unfolds. An example which illustrates this process is when a person, who had initially viewed a situation as threatening, subsequently re-evaluated it at a later stage and reached a new view

according to which the situation is then regarded to be a challenge and no longer a threat (Lazarus, 1985; 1991a; Rice, 2000).

According to Lazarus (1985; 1991a) numerous different situations may influence the appraisals that individuals make. These may include the number and complexities of perceived threats, the values which individuals hold, the resources available to them, their social support, their knowledge of coping skills and the proximity, intensity, duration and controllability which that specific threat poses.

The definition of stress by Weiten (1997) was selected to serve as the working definition for the present study namely “any circumstances that threaten or are perceived to threaten one’s well-being and that thereby tax one’s coping abilities” (p.362).

2.2.2 Anxiety

After the above exploration regarding the concept of stress, the attention now shifts to the related concept of anxiety in the following section of this chapter. Barlow and Durand (2009) define anxiety as “a negative mood state characterized by bodily symptoms of physical tension and apprehension about the future” (p.121). From this and the definitions provided in the previous section, it becomes clear that the concepts of stress and anxiety have overlapping features. Anxiety, however, appears to refer more to a subjective feeling or emotional state as opposed to stress, that refers to environmental situations that create an apparent threat to an individual.

According to Barlow and Durand (2009) anxiety poses a potentially challenging concept to study due to its highly subjective nature. Furthermore, anxiety may also involve subjective feelings such as general uneasiness and worrying as well as physiological responses such as palpitations (increased heart rate) and

observable behaviours like constant fidgeting. In addition, Barlow and Durand (2009) add that anxiety has also been found to be closely related to depression.

- **Beneficial effects**

In moderate amounts anxiety is found to be productive and to produce enhanced performances among people. In this regard Barlow and Durand (2009) explain that when approaching an examination, the associated feelings of anxiety may drive a student to prepare more effectively by studying for extended periods in advance. As such anxiety may be regarded as a future-orientated mood state (Barlow & Durand, 2009).

- **Detrimental effects**

Conversely, in excessive amounts anxiety may be potentially harmful to individuals. In linking with the previous example, a student may fail an examination due to an inability to effectively concentrate on the questions during the examination, resulting from excessive feelings of anxiety at the time. Anxiety further differs from the concept of fear with which it could easily be confused. Barlow and Durand (2009) describe fear as “an immediate alarm reaction to danger” (p.123). Therefore fear refers to an immediate emotional reaction to a current threatening situation or danger, whereas anxiety refers to a future orientated emotional response characterised by a concern over the inability to predict or control future events. Anxiety and fear further differ from stress, which refers to a physiological response to a stressor that may have been due to any event or change that required adaptation (Barlow & Durand, 2009).

From the previous sections it may be concluded that stressful life events in combination with psychological vulnerabilities, for example an inadequate sense of control, all play a vital role in the development of both physical and psychological disorders. Individuals may experience feelings which range on a

continuum from depression to anxiety to stress and to excitement, all of which would depend on the affected individual's perceived sense of control, or how well that individual believes he or she could cope with the challenges at hand. The physiology that underlies all of these emotional states is similar. However, the psychological factors and in particular people's subjective sense of control and confidence in their coping abilities in the face of stress or challenges, seem to differ and therefore lead to different subjective feelings or experiences (Barlow & Durand, 2009).

2.2.3 Coping

The above discussion on anxiety and stress aimed to create a context for the following section, wherein specific attention will be given to the central concept of this chapter, namely coping.

Some of the earliest pioneers in the study of coping were Lazarus (1985; 1991a) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) referred to by Brown, Howcroft and Jacobs (2009) who define coping as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person" (p.450). Frydenberg (1997) also defines coping as being "made up of the responses (thoughts, feelings and actions) that an individual uses to deal with problematic situations that are encountered in everyday life and in particular circumstances" (p.25).

Furthermore, Weiten and Loyd (2003) add that coping efforts by individuals could either be regarded as adaptive (for example problem focused) or maladaptive (for example self-blame or giving up on further attempts at solving problems). Coping therefore also closely links with the interpersonal variable proposed by Vorster (2011) of "adequacy of problem-solving skills" (p.94).

In order to further highlight the meaning of coping it could be said that on a day-to-day basis people are required to cope with various challenges, which may cause subjective feelings of stress and/or anxiety as described in the forgoing section. It therefore appears safe to state that any individual requires a degree of skills in order to be able to effectively address these difficulties. According to Louw, Van Ede and Louw (1999) these situations mostly manifest themselves as specific problems which arise from within the environment as well as from various life events or changes.

According to Vorster (2011) the ability to cope is vital for any individual in order to maintain a state of optimal mental health, as in the event that an individual is unable to cope effectively with these everyday problems or life events, he or she may easily feel overwhelmed by feelings of stress, anxiety and/or problems. In worst case scenarios, when evaluated from the medical model in accordance with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition, some of these individuals may be diagnosed with specific mental disorders, for example an Anxiety Disorder such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and/or Major Depressive Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

The definition of coping by Frydenberg (1997) was selected to also serve as the working definition for this research study, namely that “coping is made up of the responses (thoughts, feelings and actions) that an individual uses to deal with problematic situations that are encountered in everyday life and in particular circumstances” (p.25).

2.2.3.1 Coping theories

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the concept of coping, a discussion of various theories that involve the process of coping will be discussed in the following section.

Over the last number of decades numerous journal articles, books and other sources of literature were published which describe the psychological processes involved with coping and its resulting implications for the health of individuals, in particular their mental health. To illustrate this statement Duhacjek and Oakley (2007) wrote that a recent Social Citations Index under the heading of “Coping” had yielded in excess of 25 000 articles published since 1972 in this respect. This large volume of research and publications has made significant contributions and advancement towards coping theory. The inclusion of such a large number of works would clearly have been impractical for the present study and as such only the following theories are included.

2.2.3.1.1 General coping theories

The following section contains theories that were considered to have been generally well known and to have formed the theoretical basis upon which some of the newer and related theories of coping were developed.

2.2.3.1.1.1 Lazarus’s cognitive-motivational-relational theory

One of the earliest, well-known and most influential publications in the field of coping, originally based on Antonovsky (1987) and Kobasa’s (1979) stress resistance research, was written by Lazarus (1966) titled *Psychological stress and the coping process* (Lazarus, 1966). This book provided the impetus for vast amounts of research in the field of coping. In later years Lazarus (1991b) further expanded on his writings to formulate what has become known as the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping (Lazarus, 1985; 1991b).

Lazarus’ work focuses on the role of cognitive appraisals and how they determine a particular individual’s reactions when confronted with a stressful situation. The cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping further highlights the role of

distinct positive and negative emotions during the cognitive appraisal process (Lazarus, 1991b; 1993). The theory links emotions with motivation by emphasising that particular feelings occur as responses to individuals' active pursuit of goals. Lazarus (1999) explains further that as individuals actively attempt to pursue their goals, they could either experience positive emotions as part of attaining their particular goals or negative emotions due to an appraisal of having failed to achieve them, or of having been hampered during the process. Lazarus further emphasises that motivation plays an important role in clearly understanding a person's cognitive appraisals and coping responses to various situations (Lazarus, 1985; 1991b; 1993).

- **Primary appraisals**

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) consider stress to be a relationship between an individual and his or her environment as discussed in section 2.2.1.2 that is perceived by an individual as being too taxing or too overwhelming for his or her resources. The individual's subjective perception and appraisal are therefore of crucial importance in this process. The process of primary appraisal could be explained by indicating that when an individual is confronted with a particular stressful situation, that individual would invariably evaluate its potential personal relevance and significance in order to determine to what extent it would or could impact on that individual's personally valued goals. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) further distinguish between the following types of primary appraisals.

Harm/loss primary appraisals: These appraisals refer to injuries or harm which had already been incurred by an individual, for example having been the victim of a crime such as an armed robbery (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Threat primary appraisals: These appraisals refer to those situations in which the potential to experience harm or loss occurs, for example undergoing an HIV/AIDS test (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Challenge primary appraisals: These appraisals refer to situations where opportunities to obtain personal growth or mastery present themselves. An example could be where an individual who decides to train for a marathon, embarks on a training programme in order to be able to achieve this goal (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Benign primary appraisals: These occur in situations where the particular sources of stressors are deemed to be benign. In such instances no further appraisals or actions are made (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

- **Secondary appraisals**

A number of factors could have played a role in determining which of the primary appraisals may have been utilised, ranging from the nature of the stressor/s to the subjective beliefs which individuals hold. Furthermore, these appraisals may occur simultaneously during a particular stressful event and not necessarily independently. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also identify a secondary appraisal process in addition to the primary appraisal process referred to above, which occurs in situations where individuals perceive stressors to be relevant and significant. In such a situation the extent to which a stressor can be controlled is evaluated, as well as an individual's resources and options to control it. A situational appraisal of control therefore forms the hallmark of secondary appraisals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Lazarus (1993) differing stress situations could lead to the implementation of various coping responses. As such Lazarus (1993) describes coping as relating to the cognitive and behavioural efforts implemented by a human being to effectively manage the demands that are created by any stressful person-environment interaction. As a result, people have developed a

large range of coping strategies (Lazarus, 1993), which will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.3.1.1.2 Moos's theory of stress and coping

Moos (1994) and his colleagues (Holahan, Moos & Schaefer, 1996) formulated a theory relating to stress and coping, according to which they advocate that the specific *life context* of an individual (which includes the life stressors and available social resources) as well as personal factors (including personality functioning) *precedes* the coping strategies employed by any human being. Furthermore, Moos (1994) explains that coping processes are mediated between the aforementioned factors and the psychological well-being of an individual as depicted in the model by Moos (1994) in Figure 2.2 below:

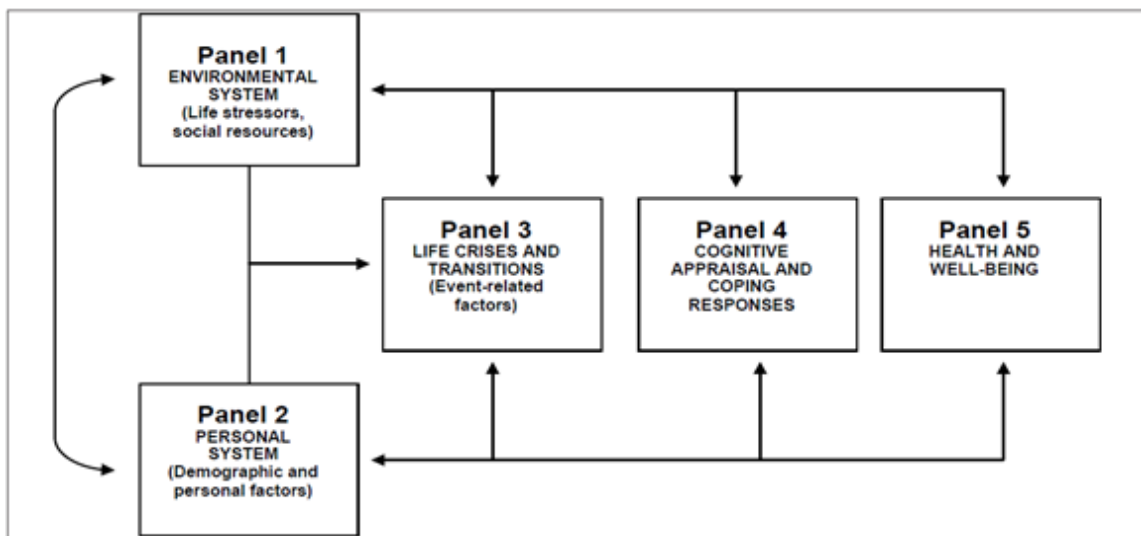


Figure 2.2: Moos's (1994) model of stress and coping

The reciprocal interaction between every phase in the model is indicated by the arrows in the schematic representation depicted in Figure 2.2. According to Louw and Viviers (2010) the model by Moos (1994) is regarded as one of the most encompassing theoretical frameworks to describe the interaction within the stress

and coping process, as well as an individual's perceived controllability with respect to personal and social resources to uphold both mental and physical health within such a process. Louw and Viviers (2010) further explain that the model was derived from the transactional view of stress and coping encapsulated in the views of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Moos's theory of coping is divided into five distinct panels.

Panel one: In the model by Moos (1994) the environmental system refers to on-going life stressors like housing, physical and financial well-being and social coping resources such as social support. The diagnosis of a chronic illness will tap the resources of other areas of functioning, such as the handling of a particular life crisis, which is rather included in panel three of Moos's model (1994). According to Schaefer and Moos (1992) social resources in particular, such as significant relationships with friends, family, work colleagues and other social support services, can be of assistance to cope with life demands and associated stresses.

Panel two: The personal system of a human being may include demographic factors such as gender, age, socio-economic status, personality, self-confidence, cognitive styles and spiritual/religious beliefs. These factors assist the individual to not only formulate a given life stressor, but also to identify and/or develop the coping mechanisms required to effectively address that particular stressor (Schaefer & Moos, 1992).

Panel three: This involves sudden and acute life crises such as receiving the diagnosis of a terminal illness or experiencing divorce. It also involves developmental transitions such as those described by Louw et al. (1999) that human beings undergo as a natural part of life, for example when an individual leaves the parental home. Human beings could experience psychological distress of differing severities during sudden life stressors and developmental

changes depending on how they attempt to cope with it (Schaefer & Moos, 1992).

Panel four: Cognitive appraisals refer to the subjective perceptions and interpretations by individuals regarding potentially threatening aspects of the environment, as well as the evaluations that individuals develop as a result of them. The resulting coping responses entail any behaviours or cognitions that individuals utilise in reaction to environmental stresses or crises. Moos (1994) categorises these coping strategies as approach, avoidance, cognitive and behavioural coping strategies.

Panel five: The model by Moos (1994) is based on the principle that human beings are active agents in the shaping of their personal life contexts. In addition, it highlights how contextual factors could impact on the health and well-being of human beings as mutual interactions between the panels may occur.

Moos's (1994) theory has made a unique contribution to the understanding of stress and coping processes by human beings.

2.2.3.1.1.3 Hobfoll's theory of coping

Hobfoll, Dunahoo, Ben-Porath and Monnier (1994) also developed a theory that describes a general approach towards coping by human beings. According to Hobfoll et al. (1994) coping primarily occurs within a social context, as the majority of life stressors are embedded in social relationships and the coping strategies utilised by individuals in these situations may, therefore, hold significant social implications for these individuals. Within this theory Hobfoll et al. (1994) developed the dual-axial model of coping that includes both action (active vs. passive) as well as social dimensions (pro-social vs. anti-social) of coping strategies.

Hobfoll et al. (1994) propose that effective coping is active and pro-social by nature and that traditional problem-solving techniques may in some cases be regarded as aggressive or passive-aggressive, which may result in antisocial consequences (Hobfoll et al. 1994). An antagonistic coping style may achieve a short-term aim related to coping, but may also cause long-term detrimental effects for an individual who makes use of such a coping style. An individual who is regarded as pro-social/active in relation with this model can be viewed as being assertive, socially co-operative and someone who seeks out social support, whereas someone who acts tentatively and cautiously in social contexts, may be described as being pro-social/passive according to the dual-axis model (Hobfoll et al., 1994). Individual who acts in a passive-aggressive manner may be regarded as passive/anti-social and individuals who make use of aggressive, antagonistic and/or anti-social behaviour in their interactions with others, may be regarded as active/anti-social, according to the dual-axis model.

Later Dunahoo, Hobfoll, Monnier, Hulsizer and Johnson (1998) expanded the dual-axis model to also include a direct and indirect dimension into what is called the multi-axial model of coping. According to Dunahoo et al. (1998) a communal approach implies that when an individual is being active, behaviour may either be direct or indirect.

The theory of coping by Hobfoll et al. (1994) added a balanced model of coping to the literature as it incorporates both the individual as well as the social context of human beings in its description of coping.

2.2.3.1.1.4 Frydenberg's theory of coping

Another important theory of coping is that of Frydenberg (1997) who developed this theory from a combination of various research findings in the field of coping.

According to this theory Frydenberg (1997) regards coping to be the result of the interaction between situational determinants and individual characteristics. It also includes elements of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory put forth by Lazarus (1966; 1991b) as discussed in the previous section.

Situational determinants: These determinants refer to the actual stressful events that are introduced into people's lives, for example parental divorce, and importantly how they are evaluated by individuals (Frydenberg, 1997). Pretorius (2003) indicates that, according to this theory, the introduction of a stressful situation triggers a series of events that determines how an individual will eventually cope with the situation. It is further indicated by Frydenberg (1997) that individuals are regarded to possess numerous personal characteristics on various levels such as biological dispositions, personal characteristics and family history characteristics – all of which contribute to how the individual perceives and evaluates a stressful event.

Primary appraisal: Following the completion of the evaluation, Frydenberg (1997) includes the same primary appraisal process in accordance with the views of Lazarus (1966; 1991b) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The individual therefore determines what impact the stressful event will have, namely challenge, harm, threat or loss.

Secondary appraisal: Following primary appraisal, Frydenberg (1997) indicates that that secondary appraisal, according to the cognitive-motivational-relational theory, occurs in that the affected individual determines what resources are available on a personal and/or interpersonal level to handle the situation (Lazarus, 1966; 1991b; Pretorius, 2003).

Coping intentions: This process comprises the decision whether to act on the stressful situation. If the decision is made to act it also includes the decision on how to act. It is, therefore, related to coping strategies and may encompass a

wide range of and combinations of responses that include thoughts, feelings and actions. The intension, in combination with the behaviour, finally determines the outcome (Frydenberg, 1997; Pretorius, 2003).

Outcome: Pretorius (2003) explains that according to Frydenberg (1997) the outcome is revised following coping behaviour – a process referred to as tertiary appraisal. Another behaviour adaptation could then follow and in this way the individual develops a repertoire of coping behaviours. Pretorius (2003) adds further that this process is circular in that coping strategies may be utilised again in the future or be disregarded, depending on the previous coping experience and also the behaviour style of the particular individual.

2.2.3.1.1.5 Ntoumanis's theory of coping

Ntoumanis, Edmunds and Duda (2009) indicate that a correlation between the self-determination theory and the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping exists, in that both propose a dynamic person-environment relationship which impacts on a human being's subsequent cognition, affect and behaviour. Both of these theories are discussed individually in the next section, namely coping-related theories and approaches.

Ntoumanis et al. (2009) further propose an integration of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping and the self-determination theory and show how elements from both of these theories appear to be associated. By integrating elements from both of these theories, Ntoumanis et al. (2009) formulate a new theory of coping in itself. A depiction of this theory is included below in Figure 2.3.

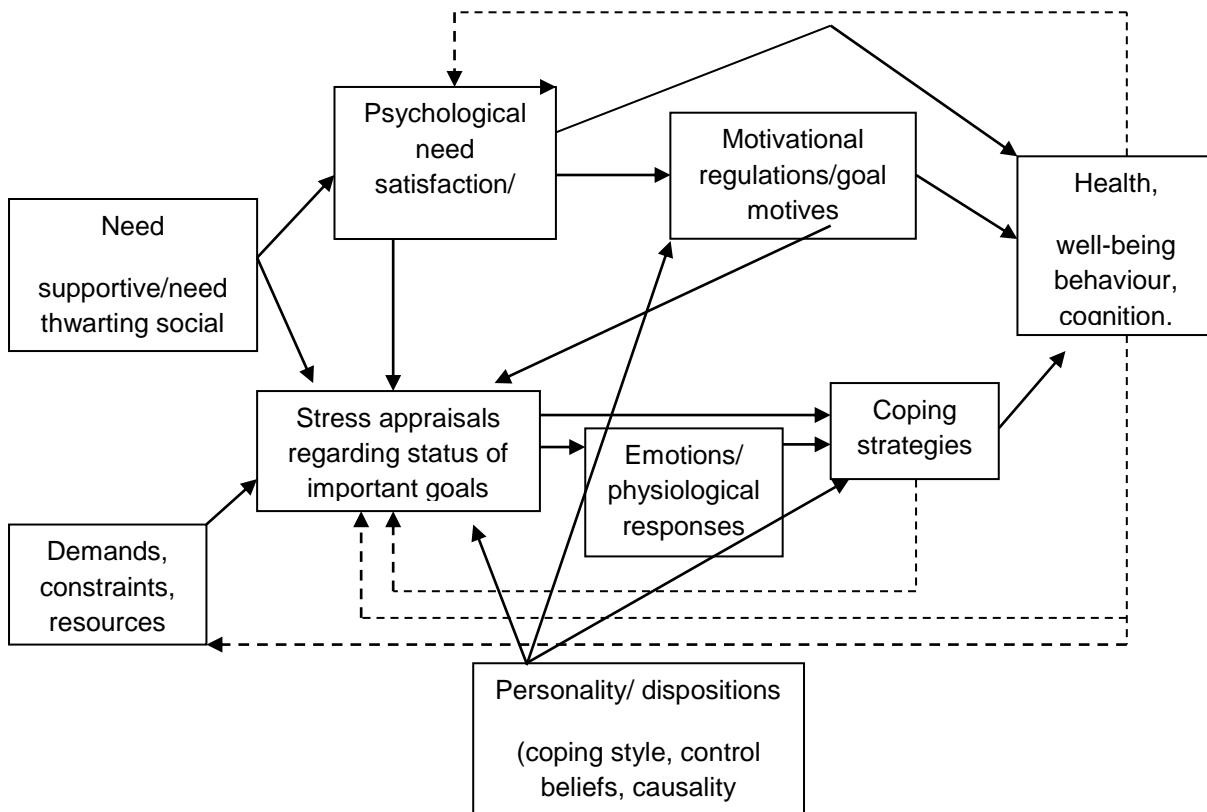


Figure 2.3: Ntoumanis's integration of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping with the self-determination theory (Ntoumanis et al., 2009)

According to the model depicted in Figure 2.3 as proposed by Ntoumanis et al. (2009) a diversity of demands and constraints – in addition to the availability of resources such as prior experiences – all lead to stress appraisals which human beings make. These appraisals lead to a decision whether or not important goals are challenged, harmed or threatened, or whether the consequences are benign. Primary and secondary appraisals of situational control such as these are also influenced by evaluating to what extent the immediate social environment either supports or undermines an individual's three fundamental psychological needs (Ntoumanis et al., 2009).

Ntoumanis et al. (2009) explain further that in their view autonomy, support structure and involvement could either directly or indirectly (via psychological need satisfaction) equip human beings to appraise stressful situations in a more optimistic or positive view, for example by viewing challenges rather than to be overcome instead of being harmful or threatening events. This is because social situations such as these acknowledge the true feelings that people experience, offer support and are not hostile or judgemental. This correlates with the three basic interpersonal variables by Rogers (1963) that influenced Vorster (2011) in the development of the interactional pattern analysis. These variables are empathy, genuineness and unconditional acceptance.

In addition to what has been stated above, environments that are hallmarked by these interpersonal variables further encourage people to act in accordance to their own true priorities and in the process assist them to differentiate between goals and temptations as well as high and low priority goals. These environments, therefore, allow human beings to appraise a particular situation as being more controllable and to invest full regulatory resources to the stressful episode (Ntoumanis et.al. 2009).

Stress appraisals could also be influenced further by satisfying the three fundamental psychological needs (autonomy, support structure and involvement) as these needs form a crucial part of how human beings appraise and cope with stress. Within the model proposed by Ntoumanis et al. (2009) Lazarus's views of appraisals as evaluations of goal striving attempts are incorporated, which propose that psychological need satisfaction could play a crucial role in the pre-existing circumstances of such appraisals. Ntoumanis et al. (2009) hypothesise that if a human being has the subjective experience of feeling autonomous, related and connected within a stressful situation, that particular individual would most likely appraise demands or constraints as representing challenges which require to be overcome rather than being threats or losses.

Furthermore, psychological need satisfaction is also related to secondary appraisals because autonomy and competence need satisfaction will promote situational control as people experience subjective feelings of ownership and efficiency in striving towards their goals. Furthermore, subjective feelings of relatedness act as reminders to individuals that they have a social support structure which they are able to depend on for emotional support and guidance where required (Ntoumanis et al. 2009).

Ntoumanis et al. (2009) further propose that stress appraisals are shaped by the type of motivation which people have in stressful situations, as they advocate that motivation doesn't only play an important role with regards to contextual regulatory mechanisms, but also with regards to the motives which underlie specific goal striving (for example whether an individual has high or low levels of self-determination in the pursuit of a goal in a certain context). Ntoumanis et al. (2009) indicate that people who display self-determined motivation, whether contextual or goal specific, would display more positive stress appraisals as opposed to low or non-self-determined motivation.

As indicated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) the generalised beliefs that individuals uphold about control, may influence their stress appraisals. In addition to this Ntoumanis et al. (2009) state that autonomous, controlled and impersonal causality orientations could influence the extent to which an individual would uphold high, low or non-self-determination in a situation or context. Furthermore, coping styles may also influence the selection of specific coping responses within a specific stressful situation.

Ntoumanis et al. (2009) explain further that coping responses in stressful situations are not only influenced by coping dispositions, but also by stress appraisals and associated emotional/physiological responses, as indicated in the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping by Lazarus (1991b). In the event that an individual appraises a situation as a challenge and perceives him or

herself as having control over it, “positive” emotions such as happiness and pride and facilitative perceptions of arousal should be forthcoming, which would ultimately lead to the use of problem-focused coping strategies. Therefore, stress appraisals appear to have a direct impact on the coping strategies employed by individuals in addition to their indirect impact/s via emotional/physiological responses (Ntoumanis et al. 2009).

Effective coping responses could lead to favourable outcomes for human beings, or at least contribute towards it such as optimal physical and mental health. However, Ntoumanis et al. (2009) caution that concluding that some coping strategies are effective while others are not, should not be carried out on the basis of their results or outcomes as it could be dangerous to generalise them. Some coping strategies may not yield consistent results across individuals, situations or stressful encounters (for example due to different levels of motivations which individuals may hold). Furthermore, to equate coping with mere problem solving and stress reduction may be inaccurate, as such positive outcomes may be impossible for people in certain situations, such as when someone is diagnosed with a terminal illness. In such a case more applicable criteria would be required as in the example above, the degree of adjustment and accommodation. The criteria would therefore need to depend more on a process than on outcomes, which is in line with the goodness of model fit proposed by the cognitive-motivational-rational model of coping theory (Ntoumanis et al., 2009).

Ntoumanis et al. (2009) hold that their integrated model depicted in Figure 2.3 highlights an important factor. In *addition to* assisting individuals in stressful situations to focus on how they appraise these situations and how to choose effective coping responses (as traditionally may have been the approach by most therapists), it is *also* important that therapists understand the personal and contextual motivational factor of a client’s goals that are at stake in these situations. Figure 2.3 further aims to add to research on how *coping* and *motivation* both interrelate and play crucial roles within the domain of health.

2.2.3.1.2 Other recent theories and approaches related to coping

The previous section discussed well-known theories of coping. Other more recent theories and approaches that were found to be related to the theory of coping, will be briefly discussed in the following section.

2.2.3.1.2.1 Interpersonal variables in relation to coping

Vorster (2011) explains that by punctuating from an interpersonal approach of human behaviour, it is possible to make the assumption that the nature and quality of human beings' personal relationships directly correlate with their degrees of mental health. Support for this assumption comes from the views of Rogers (1961; 1978a; 1978b) who demonstrates that high levels of accurate empathy, genuineness (also referred to as congruence) and unconditional acceptance – referred to by Rogers (1961; 1978a; 1978b) as unconditional positive regard – constitute an effective therapeutic relationship that facilitates a human being's personal growth or self-actualisation. It therefore appears logical that the healing effects of these three variables would not be exclusive to therapeutic relationships alone, but that any relationship within which these three variables exist should be beneficial to the individuals involved in it. These variables should therefore also contribute to these individuals' healthy mental development, growth and self-actualisation (Vorster, 2011). As such, another mechanism of understanding human behaviour that relates to coping within the context of a dynamic person-environment relationship was developed, which became known as the Interactional Pattern Analysis (IPA) (Vorster, 2003; 2011).

Within the IPA the emphasis falls on what occurs between people within their environments, as opposed to what is speculated as to occurring “within” them (Vorster, 2003). The IPA is a form of analysis designed as a tool for use in psychotherapy rather than a theory in itself. It describes the observable

behavioural patterns occurring between individuals systematically in order to provide a psychotherapist with a clear picture of where and how intervention is required and in doing so renders any speculation superfluous (Vorster, 2003; 2011). It consists of the following interpersonal variables: Context; definition of the relationship; emotional distance; clarity of self presentation; potential for eliciting acceptance or rejection; confirmation; control; effectiveness of expression of needs; degree of interpersonal rigidity/flexibility; linear/circular approach; skill to meta-communicate; adequacy of problem solving skills; and traumatic incidents. An in-depth discussion of each of these variables was considered to fall outside of the scope of the present study.

The variable “adequacy of problem-solving skills”, however, appeared especially applicable to the present study and to warrant a description due to its strong relevance to coping. This is considered the case as Vorster (2011) explains that effective coping with environmental demands on a day-to-day basis necessitates an individual to have acquired a degree of skill in solving a great variety of problems. This may range from the ability to boil water for coffee, finding missing keys, handling an over-assertive supervisor and coping with divorce. People further vary in their abilities to cope with environmental demands and may find themselves at times in a situation for which their range of problem-solving abilities may be inadequate. The person may further either have or not have the potential to acquire the necessary skills in such a case, which will have to be investigated.

2.2.3.1.2.2 The dynamic systems theory in relation to coping

Another recent theory, which shows a significant relation to coping, is the dynamic systems theory. According to Bonanno (2005) and Hobfoll (2002) research within the fields of social psychology had yielded separate bodies of literature on the effects and responses to challenges in the lives of human beings, which included trauma, risk and resilience, stress and coping, positive

psychology and the strengths perspective. Keenan (2010), however, remarks that limitations exist within each theoretical framework and indicates that the dynamic systems theory addresses these limitations in the sense that it integrates a range of these and other concepts and research.

According to Lewis (2000) the dynamic systems theory originated from developmental biology, which describes how different biological systems move through fluctuations of both change and constancy. It provides a model within which empirical findings can be inserted and tailored for a particular individual and context. Furthermore, it also accounts for the differences within and between individuals and thereby describes multiple pathways towards understanding how human beings cope with life challenges at a specific point in time, based on their current and past processes and experiences.

Keenan (2010) explains that from the dynamic systems theory perspective, there exist two possible response pathways which could take place within an existing form of a sub-system organisation, namely that of a period of brief destabilisation that settles back into an existing organisation, or when an individual shifts from one state of mind to another which more adequately addresses the situation at hand. In both of these cases the individual makes use of existing internal and external resources and capacities in their coping (Keenan, 2010).

In addition to the above, a person may not have felt destabilised by a stressful situation when that individual possessed the resources to have effectively coped with that stressor at the time (Keenan, 2010). When considering the example of brief destabilisation which had settled back to an existing organisation or personal functioning, the concept of resilience would be an applicable example of such an occurrence. In recent years much attention has been paid in the form of research and literature to the concept of resilience. When considering its important relation to coping, clarification of this concept and its origins will be discussed in the following section (Keenan, 2010).

- **Resilience and coping**

The 1970s saw the first appearance of the concept of resilience and an initial focus on researching the resilience of children and adolescents. Later it expanded to include research on resilience among adults as well, particularly within the field of psychiatry. Today resilience represents one of the main constructs of the field of positive psychology (Moenkemeyer, Hoegl & Weiss, 2012). Steiner and Markantoni (2013) define resilience in the following manner: “Resilience is often defined as both a personal and a collective capacity to respond to change” (p.03). Furthermore, they explain that resilience involves an individual’s ability to adapt to and manage change in a constantly changing environment. Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker (2000) define resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p.543). From these definitions and descriptions resilience can be seen to contain two elements: firstly exposure to a significantly adverse situation, change or threat needed to have occurred, and secondly the achievement of what can be referred to as optimal adaptation to it by the individual who had been exposed to it. This process appears closely related to effective coping.

Fraser, Kirby & Smokowski (2004) further explain that “According to interactive models of resilience, protective factors either buffer the effect of risk factors or interrupt a risk chain through which risk factors operate” (p.1048). It could be stated here that resilience therefore refers to effectively adapting to changes brought about by stressful environmental circumstances and that this includes quick recovery from these circumstances or otherwise simply put as the ability to “bounce back” following a setback in life. In this way it could further be said that effective coping forms a crucial part of resilience, as it will in the view of the author form an important prerequisite for the aforementioned to be achieved by an individual. Effective coping strategies are further also important to enable this process to take place, as discussed in the following section (Keenan, 2010).

- **Positive psychology and coping**

Resilience as a construct originated from the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology in turn developed in response to the views that largely dominated the field of post-World War 2 psychology, which was mostly pre-occupied with healing of what was perceived to have been psychologically “damaged” individuals at the time. The emphasis therefore fell strongly on pathology from a medical model perspective at that stage. In response, positive psychology developed with the vision of bringing about a change from the aforementioned view in psychology towards building a new vision of empowering strong qualities within individuals, as opposed to only focusing on “repairing” what had been regarded as “damaged” or “broken” about individuals (Seligman, 2002). In addition to this, Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman (2000) state that:

The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive personal traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic (p.5).

The field of positive psychology therefore brought about a largely optimistic approach to psychology, with a shift in emphasis away from pathology to a view of optimism and the promotion of what could be described as traits which promote optimal functioning, including resilience. Positive psychology also influenced the field of psychotherapy by giving rise to what became known as Positive Therapy (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000).

In his description of Positive Therapy Seligman (2002) describes what he refers to as deep strategies in psychotherapy that include actions such as instilling hope and the building of buffering strengths of clients, which include courage, interpersonal skill, rationality, insight, optimism, honesty, perseverance, realism, the capacity for pleasure, putting troubles into perspective, future mindedness and finding purpose. All of which are considered to be related to effective coping (Seligman, 2002).

2.2.3.2 Coping strategies

In order for individuals to cope effectively with any stressful or anxiety-provoking situation, they require the use of specific methods or approaches. These methods could also be described as a coping strategies or skills. The following section will define and elaborate on strategies that are commonly used in coping.

2.2.3.2.1 Definition of coping strategies

According to Reber (1995) coping strategies are defined as “conscious, rational ways for dealing with the anxieties of life. The term is used for those strategies designed to deal with the source of the anxiety” (p.164). Reber (1995) continues to illustrate the aforementioned definition by use of an example of a student who had experienced a situation which caused him high levels of stress and anxiety, namely upcoming examinations. The particular student subsequently coped with this anxiety by having utilised the coping strategy of studying for long hours in advance of the examinations and in doing so effectively reduced the anxiety and stress this situation had caused. This effectively solved the student’s problem of subjectively experiencing high levels of stress and/or anxiety due to a specific environmental stressor and illustrates how coping had been achieved.

From the aforementioned definition and example it could further be said that different situations, challenges or problems require different coping strategies, as

the same student referred to in the example above by Reber (1995) may at some point be faced with a different stressor for which he did not possess an effective coping strategy or skill. His repertoire of coping skills for another situation may be insufficient. This would most likely lead to an increase in subjective feelings of anxiety and stress for that individual to a point where he may become so overwhelmed by these emotions that he ultimately starts displaying signs and symptoms indicative of psychiatric conditions, such as those diagnosed according to the DSM V within the medical/psychiatric model (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

A variation of the definition of coping strategies by Reber (1995) as included above was formulated as working definition for coping strategies in this study, namely: Those conscious strategies that had been formulated and employed by an individual in an attempt to have obtained relief from subjective feelings of stress and/or anxiety that had been brought about by a particular stressful situation encountered in the environment.

Following the various theories of coping discussed in the previous section, a more in-depth look at different coping strategies which individuals may follow, will be discussed in the following section:

2.2.3.2.2 General coping strategies

Coping strategies appear to form a very important part of human functioning in the everyday environment. In order to live and function effectively within the environment, an individual requires a sufficient repertoire of coping strategies to cope effectively with stressful situations, which will result in a subjective sense of contentment and happiness. Individuals further appear to differ in their range and effectiveness of coping strategies. Some of the more general coping strategies that were identified from the literature include the following.

2.2.3.2.2.1 Problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies

Some of the pioneers in the research of coping Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe two distinct coping strategies, namely problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

- **Problem-focused strategies**

Problem-focused strategies involve attempts by an individual to understand the problem so as to effectively seek the most appropriate solution for it. It is therefore closely related to problem solving (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

According to Schlebusch (1990), problem-focused coping involves an alteration of the on-going person-environment relationship in that it requires direct action which could occur cognitively and/or behaviourally. This action is directed at adjusting the situation itself or for the individual involved to remove the source of the stress to him or herself. Furthermore, this approach appears to display a close resemblance to the interpersonal variable of the IPA described earlier in this chapter of the adequacy of problem-solving skills (Vorster, 2011). This is the case because problem-focused coping strategies appear similar to problem-solving tactics, which include efforts to define a problem, generate alternative solutions, weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of all of these options, to act to change what was changeable and to acquire new skills where necessary. Furthermore, it could be directed towards external or internal aspects in the environment or within the self (Schlebusch, 1990).

The approaches directed towards the self also appear similar to re-appraisals, as was referred to in the section dedicated to the integration of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of coping and the self-determination theory (view Figure 2.3).

- **Emotion-focused strategies**

Emotion-focused strategies are utilised in an attempt to relieve the feeling of discomfort which had been caused by a particular stressor or problem, for example having engaged in physical exercise or by talking to a significant other person about the stressor or problem in an attempt to gain emotional support (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In contrast to problem-focused coping, Schlebusch (1990) describes emotion-focused coping as aiming towards the reduction of the emotional impact of stress where it was unavoidable for individuals to have absorbed it. Examples of such an approach could include avoiding, blaming, minimising, wishful thinking, venting emotions, seeking emotional support, avoidance and paying selective attention, all of which will hold different effects for the individuals who employ them, as well as varying degrees of effectiveness.

2.2.3.2.2.2 Affirmative and abortive strategies

Gibbs (1977; 1979) reports that human beings experience certain core needs throughout their lives. Some of these needs include the need to have relatedness (to overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness); transcendence (to display competence); rootedness (the need to experience safety and security); identity (to be aware of oneself as a unique individual and to be in control of one's life) and meaning (to own a set of guiding beliefs, values and principles). Gibbs (1977; 1979) indicates further that when people experience a core need, they seek to cope with it in some way and that this coping may either be affirmative or abortive. Affirmative coping strategies serve to form the basis for individuals to experience mutual love, devotion and productivity.

Gibbs (1977; 1979) also reports that it could further serve to create an egalitarian community in which individuals are all treated as equals and responsive to individuality according to which individuals both respect and react to the individuality of others. In contrast to this, abortive coping strategies would lead to

the destructive creation of an obsession with power or submission. This would subsequently lead to in-group prejudice, group conformity and a rationalised ideology (an ideology in which people attempt to self-justify their unreasonable behaviours or opinions) (Gibbs, 1977; 1979).

2.2.3.2.3 Positive psychology-related strategies

Another more recent view relating to coping strategies emanated from the relatively recent development in the field of psychology, referred to as positive psychology. The field of positive psychology entails what is referred to by Csikszentmihalyi and Seligman (2000) as positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions, which will lead to the development of higher quality of life and be able to prevent psychopathology (view 2.2.3.2.3).

The above statement indicates positive psychology's focus to be on building positive qualities and as such foster a positive affect. In adding to this, Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) indicate that within a positive psychology framework positive affect plays a major role in promoting effective coping. As such they advocate three strategies to generate positive affect in the face of stressful situations or challenging problems, namely positive reappraisal, problem-focused coping and infusing ordinary events with positive meaning. Each of these methods is individually discussed next:

Positive reappraisal: According to positive reappraisal people reappraise situations to view them in a different, more positive light. This approach further appears to strongly correlate with a psychotherapeutic technique advocated by Haley (1976) of relabeling or reframing. Vorster (2003) describes this technique through stating that "by relabeling or reframing, the strategic therapist offered a different view of the presenting problem, thus freeing the participants to think and behave differently and opening up a new set of action potentials" (p.36). The

focus therefore lies with creating a new perspective for individuals which frees them from the constraints of the previous perspective.

Problem-focused coping: The second approach to sustain positive affect from a positive psychology perspective as indicated by Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) is referred to as problem-focused coping. Similar to what was proposed by Schlebusch (1990) earlier in this chapter, this approach entails a more efficient method of coping with problems by handling them individually and one at a time as they arise. The sense of mastery gained from this will in turn advocate positive affect according to this view (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

Infusing ordinary events with positive meaning: The third and final approach advocated by Folkman and Moskowitz (2000) is that of infusing ordinary events with positive meaning, whereby it is proposed that even during difficult and highly stressful times human beings could still remember positive events. By recalling ordinary events, for example having dinner with friends, it is proposed that these events in combination with positive affect would assist people to cope with the challenges in their lives (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

2.2.3.2.2.4 Coping strategies utilised by children and adolescents

Following a description of some general coping strategies in the previous section, the following section focuses specifically on how children and adolescents attempt to cope with their life demands during these phases of their lives. According to Von Wielligh (2003) the coping strategies employed by children and adolescents vary according to individual and contextual factors among them.

2.2.3.2.2.4.1 Middle childhood

According to Louw et al. (1999) middle childhood generally refers to the sixth to the twelfth year of life. Numerous changes occur among human beings during

this period and children often also have to face numerous challenges during this stage of life. The following section focuses specifically on how children attempt to cope with their life demands during this phase of their lives:

2.2.3.2.2.4.1.1 Introduction

According to Smith and Carlson (1997) effective coping among children involves a combination of emotion and problem-focused coping strategies as described in the previous section (view 2.2.3.3.1.1). These strategies would further need to be selected according to the specific stressors, as the coping behaviour of children has been found to be highly context specific (Von Wielligh, 2003)

During this period children could either include cognitive and/or behavioural inputs in their selections of emotion or problem-focused coping strategies. According to Ryan-Wenger (1998) children during their middle childhood years would first tend to evaluate stressors by for example thinking about them. Next they would tend to evaluate what coping resources they have at their disposal, for example by thinking about what needs to happen in order to address the situation at hand. Finally, they could either implement a solution through action to address or resolve the problematic situation facing them, by for example standing their ground when faced with taunting remarks by other children. At this juncture a child could also regulate the emotional response, by for example running away from the situation or by ignoring it.

2.2.3.2.2.4.1.2 Coping during middle childhood

According to Sorensen (1993) children cope according to three different domains namely the cognitive-behavioural, cognitive-intra-psychic and the interpersonal-coping-behavioural domain. Each of these domains is discussed below in relation to what coping strategies children during this phase of their lives could potentially make use of, depending on their circumstances (Pretorius, 2003).

- **The cognitive-behavioural domain**

This domain is characterised by internally focused, emotionally focused and intellectually focused coping behaviours that may include the following (Sorensen, 1993):

Subservience/enduring: This refers to a strategy of acceptance and bearing of the circumstances, for example when a child would think “I’ll just hang on” or “I’ll just do what I have to do”.

Problem solving: This refers to instances where a stressful situation is addressed directly, for example when one child tells another who has been taunting him or her to stop.

Emotional expression: This includes behavioural manifestations of emotions such as becoming tearful or screaming.

Distraction: This is when behaviours are employed in an effort to avoid the stressor at hand, for example when one child starts to play with another.

Behavioural reframing: This is where children attempt to change their perceptions of a stressor or attempt to minimise it, such as in cases where the child acts as if the stressor didn’t have such a drastic impact on him or her.

Aggression: This form of coping strategy refers acting out physical acts of aggression and/or violence by children, such as when one child punches another.

Avoidance: This refers to instances where the child attempts to physically avoid the stressor, such as by hiding or going to his or her room when confronted.

Rebelliousness: According to Sorensen (1993) this coping strategy refers to “refusal to submit, comply or otherwise ‘put up with’ the reported stressor or to perform in the face of the perceived demands or injustices of stressor situations” (p.33).

Manipulation/misleading: These strategies involve conscious efforts by a child to purposefully mislead, lie, place the blame elsewhere or deny negligent or punishable behaviour.

Self-effacing: Resorting to regressive or self-soothing behaviours such as biting nails or sucking thumbs in an effort to cope.

Immobilisation: These are instances where a child appears immobilised and unable to act in a stressful situation, for example where a child felt unprepared for a specific task that needed to be performed at school.

- **The cognitive-intra-psycho domain**

This domain is described as having being hallmarked by internally, emotionally and intellectually focused coping behaviours as described below (Sorensen, 1993).

Emotional-sensory responses: This is where emotions are expressed in the absence of any associated behaviours such as feelings of anxiety, happiness or fear.

Cognitive re-defining: This refers to intellectual or emotional attempts to alter thoughts, perceptions and/or self-talk.

Analysis/evaluation: These include coping strategies whereby cognitive, problem-focused attempts are made in an effort to resolve a problem. An example may be where a child contemplated and planned actions to manage a specific stressor.

Accepting responsibility: This refers to cognitive-behavioural and self-focused activities, such as where a child blames him or herself or makes excuses in an effort to improve his or her surrounding circumstances.

Emotional-external focus: These are emotional responses directed towards the self rather than to focus on emotions. External-focused reactions involve worrying about something or to long for something without any actions accompanying it.

- **The interpersonal domain**

This domain primarily involves support from the environment and in particular social support, which is sought from significant others in the child's environment such as parents, siblings, teachers and friends (Sorensen, 1993; Pretorius, 2003).

Friendship: In addition to the aforementioned domains as postulated by Sorensen (1993) Pretorius (2003) suggests maintaining friendships as a possible coping strategy for children during middle childhood. According to Pretorius (2003) friendships serve as an important source of social support for children, whereby difficult subjective experiences can be normalised when friends share them. In addition to this, friends also support one another by providing each other with advice where possible. In this manner children can obtain a sense of relief from feelings of guilt, depression, anger and/or shame (Pretorius, 2003).

Emotional intelligence: Another form of coping proposed by Pretorius (2003) involves emotional intelligence that is described by Caruso, Mayer and Salovey (2002) as referring to an individual's ability to process emotionally laden

information affectively. Pretorius (2003) adds that this could further assist in cognitive activities such as problem solving and could in such a manner also be regarded as a coping strategy for children during middle childhood.

2.2.3.2.2.4.1.3 Conclusion

The strategies children utilise during their middle childhood years in their attempts to cope will be influenced by a wide range of factors. From the aforementioned it is apparent that children cope in a wide variety of ways during their middle childhood years. These methods and the strategies they employ change as they grow older and more mature in the next phase of their lives, namely adolescence.

2.2.3.2.2.4.2 Adolescence

Following a discussion on coping strategies during middle childhood, the following section focuses on coping strategies that are commonly identified in the literature to be employed among adolescents.

2.2.3.2.2.4.2.1 Introduction

Louw et al. (1999) indicate that the developmental phase of adolescence ranges between the ages of eleven and thirteen and ends between the ages of seventeen and twenty one. This phase is further described by Louw et al. (1999) as a phase characterised by intense conflicts and challenges for individuals to overcome. Some authors have even referred to this phase as a period of storm and stress. According to Compas (1987) all adolescents experience three categories of stressors during this phase of their lives, namely major life changes, chronically stressful situations and day-to-day hassles.

All adolescents do not, however, experience this phase of their development in the same manner and Louw et al. (1999) therefore warn that when considering adolescence, it is important to bear in mind the diversity and complexity of adolescents' physical and sexual development. In addition to this the development of adolescents' thinking, feeling, personal relationships and their identities need to be considered within their individual and unique contexts at all times.

2.2.3.2.2.4.2.2 Coping during adolescence

Recent research suggests that adolescents' coping strategies involve primarily four strategies, rather than the traditional problem and emotion-focused strategies identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). These strategies are identified by Phelps and Jarvis (1994) as active coping, avoidant coping, emotion-focused coping and acceptance-coping and are discussed below.

- **Active coping**

This refers to behaviours such as making use of valuable social support and strategizing alternatives.

- **Avoidant coping**

This coping strategy is evident in cases where adolescents deny that an event is actually occurring or that it has made an impact on them. They may also remove themselves from a situation and try to escape, by for example joining a gang and/or abusing substances such as illegal drugs or alcohol.

- **Emotion-focused coping**

This coping strategy involves the release of emotions, for example by crying and making use of social support in an effort to find relief from uncomfortable emotions. According to Von Wielligh (2003) problem-focused coping strategies are more applicable in cases where a person has the ability to influence his or her problem. Emotion-focused coping strategies also appear to be more applicable in situations where stressors appear outside the sphere of influence of an individual. Furthermore, emotion-focused coping strategies appear to be employed more frequently among adolescents than by younger children (Von Wielligh, 2003).

- **Acceptance coping**

This coping strategy refers to situations wherein adolescents psychologically remove themselves from a situation, cognitively redefine it and ultimately accepted the situation as it is.

2.2.3.2.2.4.2.3 Conclusion

Certain specific coping strategies may be more or less effective in managing stressful situations. For certain adolescents who are exposed to stressful situations and who employ less effective coping strategies in an attempt to cope with it, dysfunctional behavioural patterns and/or emotional difficulties may arise as a consequence. Examples of this may include substance abuse, self-mutilation and feelings of depression. With regard to the effectiveness of the aforementioned approaches, Compas, Howell, Phares, Williams and Ledoux (1989) found that adolescents who employ problem-solving coping strategies had reported experiencing less psychological distress. In addition to the above, family relationships and surrounding adolescents along with certain other environmental

factors may also influence how they attempt to cope with environmental stressors.

2.3 Conclusions

This chapter highlighted various theoretical discussions with specific reference to the concept of coping. It contains discussions on related concepts such as stress and anxiety and provides various theoretical models on these concepts in an attempt to facilitate a clearer understanding of these concepts. Specific references are also made to coping strategies during the middle childhood and adolescent phases of human life, on which the study focused.

The author also included certain traditional or well-known theoretical models, as well as some more recent models related to coping to further expand on the discussion of coping. Other models and perspectives also exist in the literature. However, the specific theoretical models included in this chapter were included in an attempt to create an appropriate context for the following chapter, wherein attention will be paid to coping with parental divorce as a specific stressful life event.

CHAPTER 3

COPING WITH PARENTAL DIVORCE

3.1 Introduction

Divorce has often been described as one of the most stressful life-changing events that any human being could experience. Some of the earliest research findings to have supported this notion were reported on by Holmes and Rahe (1967), whose research focused on stressful life changes as experienced by human beings. Holmes and Rahe (1967) found divorce to be rated as the second most stressful life event, with the death of a spouse the only other event rated as being more stressful. Divorce therefore appears to have a highly stressful impact on all those who are affected by it, including young children and adolescents.

The following chapter will expand the focus of this research project by focusing specifically on coping with parental divorce. In doing so, the chapter will include an exploration of the concept of divorce and all of its implications for those who have been affected by it. Coping with parental divorce by children and adolescents will receive particular attention, as well as a review of the literature on this subject, both internationally and within South Africa. This will endeavour to facilitate a better understanding of these concepts and how they led to this particular research study having been conducted.

3.2 Divorce

Divorce has become a very common occurrence in South Africa and most countries around the globe, especially in recent years. Amato (2000) indicates that near the middle of the 19th century approximately 5% of first marriages had ended in divorce. In contrast it is estimated that about 50% of first marriages initiated in recent years will eventually be ended voluntarily. Second marriages

also show a higher likelihood of dissolving as opposed to first marriages (Amato, 2000).

Two general definitions of divorce are included here for the purpose of clarity on the concept, namely that divorce refers to “the legal ending of a marriage” and “to end one’s marriage by legal means” (Hornby, 1995, p.340). From these two definitions it appears that divorce takes place once two individuals, who had once been legally married, voluntarily end their marital contract. However, divorce has multiple additional implications on different spheres of the lives of those affected by it. It is much more than the mere ending of a marital contract. Therefore, these definitions were not deemed to provide a sufficiently encompassing description of divorce or to include all of its far-reaching implications. The following section will aim to provide the reader with a clearer perspective on the far-reaching implications of divorce by describing the different types of divorce as identified from the literature.

3.2.1 Types of divorce

When considering the various implications of divorce as referred to above, Sadock and Sadock (2007) describe divorce as a major life crisis and they refer to various types of separation and/or divorce, as originally proposed by Bohannan (1970). These include psychic divorce, legal divorce, economic divorce, community divorce and co-parental divorce. Each of these types will be briefly discussed below.

- **Psychic divorce**

Sadock and Sadock (2007) explain that during psychic divorce the individual commences with grieving for the loss of the relationship and this forces the individual to become independent, which in most cases is a very stressful change from a position of dependence within the marriage. In most cases both partners

were accustomed to being dependent on each other and this change could therefore be very difficult for both of them. As a result, those affected often report subjective feelings of depression, anxiety and mood swings during their divorce. Sadock and Sadock (2007) further add that in most cases the recovery process from divorce lasts an average of a two year period, by which time the affected individuals have accepted their newly formed single identities.

- **Legal divorce**

According to Sadock and Sadock (2007) this form of divorce refers to the legal ending of the marriage via the legal system and therefore the courts. This is normally done with the assistance of an attorney who represents the parties involved. At times this process can occur relatively swiftly and amiably when both parties agree on a settlement that they mutually deem to be fair and just under the circumstances. In other cases the legal process may be contested and protracted with high legal costs for both parties.

- **Economic divorce**

Financial implications usually have a significant impact on both parties during a divorce. Where couples had been accustomed to a certain lifestyle which they were able to afford due to a combined income, they very often have to sacrifice this in order to manage on a single income following divorce, which entails a significant financial loss for everyone involved in the process. Furthermore, Sadock and Sadock (2007) also refer to the division of property between the two parties as well as financial support after the divorce, which is in most cases granted to the former wife and children.

- **Community divorce**

Following divorce another loss experienced is usually a change in the social network of the divorced couple. Sadock and Sadock (2007) explain that in most cases only certain relatives and friends are retained from the community, while new ones are also added. Rebuilding social networks in order to avoid isolation is usually a challenging endeavour for divorced couples. Vorster (2003; 2011) also reports a similar finding in that by punctuating an interpersonal view of human behaviour, it is possible to make the assumption that the nature and quality of human beings' personal relationships directly correlate with their degree of mental health. This also appears to pose a significant challenge to individuals undergoing divorce, as they have to face isolation and loneliness often for the first time in their lives, which could easily lead to subjective feelings of anxiety and depression.

- **Co-parental divorce**

This form of divorce refers to the separation of a parent from the children's other parent. This is often highly stressful to both parents and their children involved, as adapting to being a single parent can be highly stressful (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). More focus is given to single parenting and the impact of divorce on children in later sections of this chapter.

3.2.2. Causes for divorce

As every human being is unique, that would imply that every marital relationship and, should it ever reach such a point, every divorce would also be unique. The reasons why a marriage ultimately ends in divorce could therefore be multiple, complex and could be viewed from various perspectives. The following section will discuss some commonly identified causes as well as uniquely communication based causes for divorce.

- **Commonly identified causes for divorce**

With respect to commonly identified causes for divorce, Sadock and Sadock (2007) found that there appears to exist a tendency for divorces to run in families over generations and to occur most frequently among couples who married at a younger age, such as during their teenage years, as well as among couples who had emanated from very different economic backgrounds. Furthermore, couples may have held differing expectations and needs from their marriage and therefore could have felt disappointed during the marriage when these had not been met. Parenting further placed great pressures and strains on marriages as Sadock and Sadock (2007) note that in marriages where children are absent, both parties report more satisfaction with the marriage by obtaining more pleasure from their spouse. In cases where a child falls very ill or died, more than half of these marriages have ended in divorce.

Sadock and Sadock (2007) further highlight other possible causes for divorce, such as difficulties surrounding sex and finances, which lead to multiple conflict situations between married couples in addition to children and parenting-related matters. Furthermore, more couples appear to have started considering divorce as an option due to changes from the perceived norm in the environment about divorce. Reduced social pressure to remain married appears to have led to more couples opting for divorce as an option, as opposed to earlier years (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

- **Communication breakdown as a cause of divorce**

Another description of how a couple's marriage ultimately ends in divorce that was identified from the literature, involves the breakdown of communication between the parties. According to this interactional approach the focus falls on the process of communication that takes place between the married couple, rather than on the actual content of their communication itself that is referred to

above (finances, sex and/or parenting-related topics). Put differently, the focus in this description falls on *how* the couple communicates rather than *about what* they communicate (Vorster, 2003; 2011).

Valuable information on what led to a couple ultimately getting divorced can be established from this perspective, which is based on the IPA developed by Vorster (2003; 2011) and referred to in the previous chapter. This could be done by describing the process of the communication that takes place between a married couple over a period of time, as opposed to what is hypothesised to have taken place within their minds or psyches, similar to describing a dance that had taken place between two people on a dance floor.

An example of such a description is where a married couple has become entrapped in an ineffective pattern of communication, which escalates between them to the point of their divorce over time. In most of these cases both parties involved are unaware of their own contributions that they make to this process and instead mutually blame each other for the difficulties that occurred in their marriage and which had ultimately led to their divorce (Vorster, 2003; 2011).

In an attempt to illustrate the aforementioned, a more comprehensive example by Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) within the context of marital psychotherapy, is explored at this point. Watzlawick et al. (1974) indicate that from their work and observations it became clear how both marital partners who seek therapy are constantly making use of behaviours which they mutually deem to be the most appropriate reactions to what the other partner is doing. This in turn leads to a situation where, from both of their own perspectives, the particular corrective behaviours which are being utilised by the other, is seen as the exact behaviour that needs to be corrected.

A typical case to illustrate this is where a wife has the view that her husband has not been sufficiently “open” towards her for her to be clear where she stands with

him, what he is thinking, what he is feeling and what he has been doing when they are not in each other's company. In order for her to obtain this information she starts to ask him questions about the above on a frequent basis, while observing him more closely and frequently "checking" on him. Her husband in turn starts to view this new behaviour of his wife as being too intrusive. As a result he becomes more likely to withhold information from her that could have been regarded as harmless, trivial and irrelevant to be disclosed, to prove to her that she need not know everything about him in such detail (Watzlawick et al., 1974).

In the illustration above, the husband's attempted solution not only fails to bring about the desired change in his wife's behaviour, which is what he had sought, but in fact only succeeds in eliciting the opposite from her by heightening her feelings of concern and mistrust. As a result she has most likely come to the conclusion that if he is unwilling to disclose trivial information to her, something serious must be wrong or he might be hiding information from her. And so they have become entrapped in an ineffective communication pattern wherein the less information the husband volunteers to his wife, the more persistently she seeks it, and the more persistently she seeks it, the less information the husband is willing to provide. Under certain conditions problems tend to arise in a marriage due to ineffective attempts at changing existing difficulties that may eventually contribute to divorce. In the case of this couple Watzlawick et al. (1974) compare their situation to two sailors hanging out on their respective sides of a sail boat, attempting to steady it. The more one of them leans overboard, the more the other would also lean over in order to compensate for the instability created by the other's attempts of steadying the boat. The irony is that the sailboat would most likely have been in a steady state, if not for their respective efforts of steadying it.

In order to change the absurd situation described by Watzlawick et al. (1974) in the previous paragraph, at least one of the two would be required to do less of

what he or she has been doing persistently and with increasing intensity up to that point. This may seem quite unreasonable to him or her, in other words to attempt *less* to steady the boat instead of *more*, as he or she has been persistently attempting without success up to that point. Should one of the two decide to stop the persistent efforts, it would bring about a change that would force the other sailor also to do less of the same, unless he or she wants to fall into the water! They would subsequently and most likely find themselves comfortably back in a steady boat, should they have implemented this solution.

In cases where marriages end in divorce, in keeping with this analogy, the parties concerned would in most instances become so rigidly entrapped in their process that they are unwilling to execute the above solution. Subsequently it seems self-explanatory how the situation will escalate to a point where they both fall into the water – and get divorced (Watzlawick et al., 1974).

If the hypothetical couple referred to above should consult a psychiatrist, who may overlook the aforementioned communication process and view them both exclusively from a medical model perspective, it is likely that (in accordance with the DSM V) the wife in this example will be diagnosed with a Paranoid Personality Disorder and the husband with an Antisocial Personality Disorder. This would most likely have occurred if their ineffective communication pattern (which in fact is their actual problem) and attempted solutions had not been considered (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

The above example describes a process that includes the marital couple only and does not yet refer to other factors, which may also contribute to them having become entrapped in ineffective communication patterns. These may include the influence of children, extended families, friends, work and so forth. It therefore further appears to highlight how vulnerable most married relationships are to becoming entrapped in ineffective communication patterns, such as the one described above, and that could eventually lead to divorce.

Once the divorce has finally taken place, the divorced individuals appear to go through certain phases or steps known as the process of divorce, as is described in the following section.

3.2.3 The process of divorce

As all human beings are unique, it may be concluded that the process of divorce will also be unique for every person who experiences it. Certain similarities however appear to exist between individuals who undergo divorce. Although this is one of the older sources relating to the process of divorce, the description by Hetherington (1979) remains one of the most applicable, comprehensive and well-known descriptions surrounding the topic, as this process appears to have remained largely unchanged over time. According to Hetherington (1979) divorce occurs through four stages over time, namely: the breaking up period; the experimentation stage; the new equilibrium stage; and finally the new re-organisation phase.

- **Breaking up**

During the first stage, namely the breaking up period, separation and pending divorce occur. This phase is usually particularly stressful in that rapid change such as moving into a new home takes place (Hetherington, 1979).

- **Experimentation**

During phase two of the divorce process that is referred to as experimentation by Hetherington (1979), the family with a single parent at the helm of the newly formed family structure, attempts various new and different strategies in an attempt to cope with the stressful changes which are brought about during stage one.

- **New equilibrium**

Stage three subsequently follows, where a new equilibrium is achieved as the family becomes organised in the newly formed single-parent household and the initial impacts of stage one have subsided (Hetherington, 1979).

- **Remarriage**

During the fourth and final phase as proposed by Hetherington (1979), another reorganisation takes place when the single parent remarries and the family has to adjust to yet another change in the form of incorporating a new stepfamily within the existing family system. Therefore, a new family structure has to be created. This description also appears to correspond with the general systems theory on divorce, according to which a change occurred within the family when it was viewed as a system, by a member having been lost and therefore the entire system needs to re-adjust itself. According to the general systems theory a change to any one part of a system affects the entire system as a whole (Vorster, 2003). It therefore becomes clear from the above that divorce implies rapid, sudden and stressful changes to everyone involved in the process.

3.2.4 The divorce-stress-adjustment model

Another valuable contribution from literature that assisted in creating a clearer and more in-depth understanding of divorce, is the divorce-stress-adjustment model proposed by Amato (2000). According to Amato (2000) divorce is not viewed as a single event but rather as a process that begins while the couple is still residing together and ultimately ends only long after the legal divorce is finalised. Amato (2000) further explains that what is known as the uncoupling phase, usually sets in motion numerous stressful experiences for individuals

involved in the divorce, which increase their risk of experiencing detrimental behavioural as well as emotional and health effects for both adults and children.

According to this model the severity and/or duration of the aforementioned detrimental outcomes will also differ among individuals, depending on the presence of a variety of moderating and/or protective factors. Furthermore, this model indicates that successful adjustment can only occur to the extent that affected individuals experience fewer divorce-related symptoms, are able to function effectively within a new family, work or school environment and develop an identity and lifestyle that is no longer tied to the former marriage (Amato, 2000). A depiction of the divorce-stress-adjustment model is included below in Figure 3.1 for further clarification.

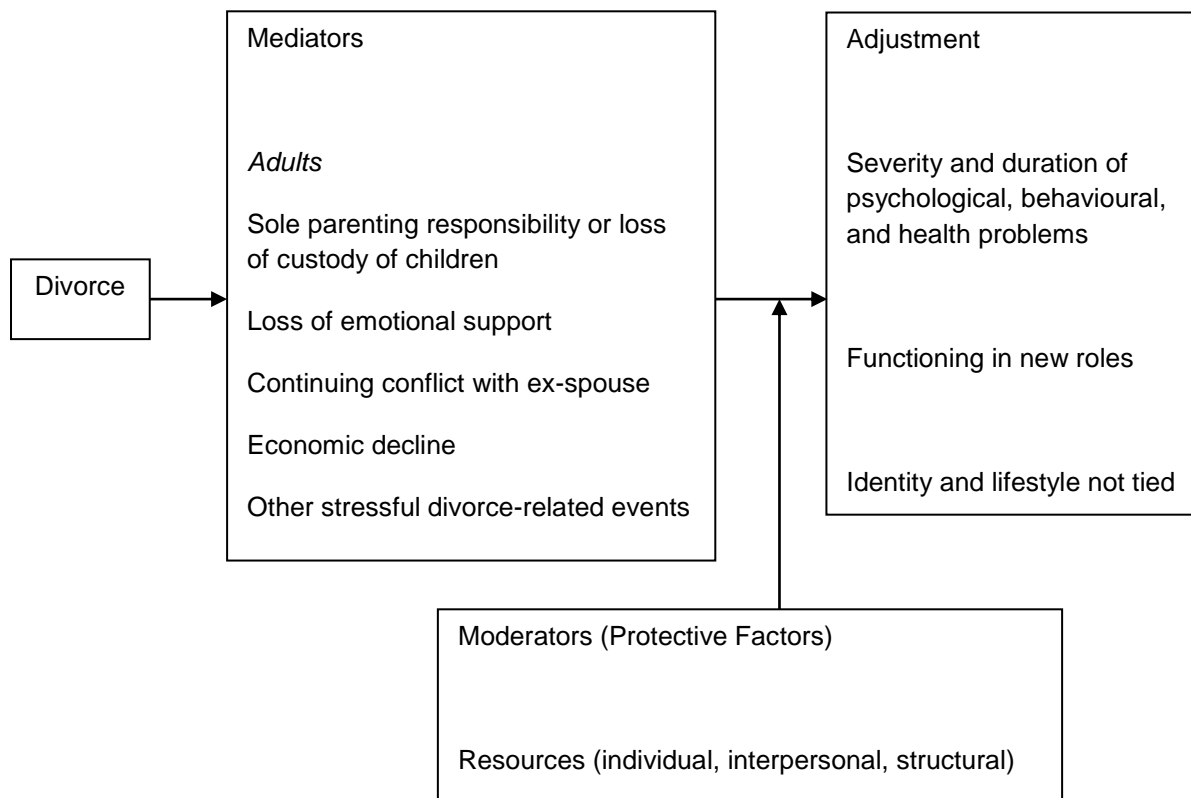


Figure 3.1: The divorce-stress-adjustment model (Amato, 2000)

According to this model, Amato (2000) indicates that legal divorce will not necessarily bring about an end to the stress associated with the initial uncoupling phase of divorce. Instead, during the phase where the marriage is coming to an end and shortly thereafter, new events and processes (mediators) come to the fore with the potential to affect people's emotions, behaviours and health.

In the case of adults these mediators include receiving sole custody for the care of the children¹ (among custodial parents); losing contact with children (among non-custodial parents); continued conflict with the former spouse concerning matters such as custody of the children, support for the children and visitation rights; loss of support due to a decline in contact with former family in law and mutual friends; financial decline and other financial life events such as moving from the family residence into less expensive accommodation (Amato, 2000).

For children, divorce can result in less effective parenting from the custodial parent, decreased involvement from the non-custodial parent, exposure to continued interpersonal conflict, decline in financial resources and other disruptive life events such as changing schools, moving into a new home and additional possible parental divorces and remarriages. These mediating factors represent the mechanisms by which divorce affects the functioning and well-being of those who are involved (Amato, 2000). Amato (2000) explains further that moderators introduce variability regarding the manner that divorce and mediating factors are linked to personal outcomes, as they serve to absorb and weaken the links between divorce-related events and the stress that people experience, hence the extent to which divorce is followed by detrimental emotional, behavioural and health outcomes.

¹ This dissertation made use of the internationally used term "custody" despite the fact that in the current South African context it is referred to "residency".

Moderators may reside within an individual (intra-psychically) and include constructs such as self-efficacy and coping skills and/or between individuals (inter-psychically) and include optimal social support, employment and community services. When considering individual characteristics, some individuals may perceive the divorce to be a personal tragedy, whereas others may perceive it as an opportunity for growth or escape from a dysfunctional marriage.

When considering interpersonal characteristics, individuals have been found to vary in terms of how quickly they are able to form new social networks or to rely on existing networks as opposed to isolating themselves following divorce. A number of demographic aspects such as gender, age, race and ethnicity may also moderate divorce. As a result of the particular configuration of these moderating factors, some people appear to be resilient and others vulnerable following divorce, which leads to a diversity of outcomes (Amato, 2000).

Amato (2000) further explains that two conflicting models are encapsulated within the divorce-stress-adjustment model, namely the crisis model and the chronic strain model. According to the crisis model, divorce is seen as a temporary crisis to which an individual adjusts over time. Factors such as personal resources and perceptions will determine the pace according to which such an adjustment takes place. In time, divorced individuals thus return to their same level of functioning as prior to divorce.

In contrast, the chronic strain model perceives divorce as putting persistent pressure or strain on affected individuals, for example in the case of persistent financial pressure, isolation and single parenting responsibilities to those divorced individuals with children. Although personal resources and perceptions may determine the amount of stress that divorce causes for individuals from this perspective, it holds that divorced people never return to their level of functioning prior to the divorce (Amato, 2000).

Huurre, Junkkari and Aro (2006) also report research findings that appear to confirm the abovementioned view of the divorce-stress adjustment model proposed by Amato (2000). In their 16-year follow-up research study that involved 317 participants, they evaluated whether 32-year old adults who had experienced parental divorce prior to the age of 16 years, differed from non-divorced two-parent families with regards to their psychological well-being and life trajectories at the time. The long-term effects of parental divorce in adulthood such as general psychological well-being, life situation, health, social support, negative life events and interpersonal difficulties, were assessed. The results from this study reveal that females from divorced families, in comparison with females from non-divorced families, reported more psychological difficulties and interpersonal relationship difficulties. These differences were, however, not found among males. Shorter education, unemployment, divorce, negative life events and more high risk health behaviours were also found to be more common among participants from both genders who had experienced parental divorce (Huurre et al., 2006).

This study reveals that parental divorce appears to be a sufficient indicator of stress during childhood, and for its impact to persist into adulthood, with a wider scope among females. It further appears to highlight the importance of recognising the needs of children undergoing parental divorce in order to minimise or prevent the detrimental effects and chain reactions of this stressful life event in their subsequent later life (Huurre et al., 2006). What the study does not reveal, is what exactly their needs are and how these children attempt to address them, especially if their parents are unwilling or unable to assist them due to their own lack of coping with the divorce (Huurre et al., 2006).

In the following section the effects of divorce on both adolescents and children are highlighted before attempted coping strategies with parental divorce are reviewed.

3.2.5 The effects of parental divorce on children during middle childhood and adolescence

According to Amato (2000) who summarised and organised research findings from the 1990s for both adults and children from the divorce-stress-adjustment perspective referred to earlier in this chapter, it was found that divorce has the potential to create a considerable amount of turmoil for all those who are affected by it. However, Amato (2000) importantly adds that people's reactions vary considerably in the face of divorce due to multiple factors. Some people appear to benefit in certain respects from the divorce, while some fall into a downward spiral from which they never recover. Others may only experience temporary decrements in their well-being as a result of divorce.

The aforementioned is also identified by Lansford (2009) who determined that regarding the age at which parental divorce occurs, it was found that in terms of behavioural outcomes younger children appear to be more at risk when parental divorce occurs. With respect to academic and social relationship outcomes (including romantic relationships), adolescents were found to be more at risk.

The following sections will consider research findings which highlight various effects of divorce by focusing on both the apparent detrimental and possible beneficial outcomes of parental divorce on children, as identified from the literature during both the middle childhood and adolescence stages of life.

3.2.5.1 Middle childhood

Middle childhood includes the period of life between the age of six and twelve years (Louw et al., 1999). This is also often the period which coincides for children in South Africa with their time at primary school.

According to Van Rensburg (2001) children during this phase of their lives have developed from a cognitive perspective to the point where they are able to grasp the permanency of divorce. Furthermore, they are able to grasp to an extent the complexity of the disorganisation in the family while they continue their attempts to make sense of it. Some of the effects identified by Van Rensburg (2001) which could possibly surface during this phase of life are discussed below.

3.2.5.1.1 Anger

This commonly manifests as defiance and animosity towards the parent whom the child perceives as the “guilty” party and whom the child blames for causing the divorce (Van Rensburg, 2001). In addition Fisher (1999) also states that children frequently vent their anger towards the custodian parent who is present with them most of the time. Jansen van Rensburg (2004) also describes anger as often being used as the vehicle to express a deeper sense of helplessness, due to the child finding him or herself in a situation which he or she did not wish for and wherein others are often making decisions on his or her behalf.

3.2.5.1.2 Low self-esteem

In relation to a sense of anger, Fisher (1999) reports that children often experience their parents’ divorce as a form of treason towards themselves and could therefore react towards them with anger and bitterness. They could also experience a sense of shame and embarrassment in relation to their peer group because of their parents’ behaviour. Some children may experience judgement and rejection by their peer group as a result of their parents’ divorce, which in turn could lead to a lowered self-esteem for the affected child.

3.2.5.1.3 Divided loyalties

Children exposed to parental divorce have often reported experiencing divided loyalties because they feel that they no longer belong anywhere following their parental divorce. This is often found because of the fact that while visiting one parent, they feel guilty for not being with the other and/or concerned about the other parent's well-being and vice versa (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976). Another related aspect to divided loyalties, as indicated by Van Rensburg (2001) is that a tendency also at times exists among children under these circumstances to view one parent as "good" or "right" and the other as "bad" or "wrong" during the divorce process. In this way the child may develop empathy for one parent while developing anger towards the other during divorce.

3.2.5.1.4 Depression

Another commonly identified effect of divorce during middle childhood as seen in the literature, which is closely linked to the aforementioned effects, is that of feelings of depression. Multiple factors appear to have contributed to the development of this significant impact of parental divorce during middle childhood, as discussed below.

Sense of loss: Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that children between the ages of six and eight years appear highly susceptible to feelings of depression as a result of the divorce of their parents, because they are more able to fully comprehend the extent of the effects of their parental divorce. The most significant effect on children contributing to depression is often the loss of the non-custodian parent.

Often the custodian parent also needs to spend more time at work in an effort to cope with decreased financial resources that frequently coincide with the divorce and this results in less available time to spend with the child. This inadvertently

implies a loss of time with of both the custodian and non-custodian parent for the child affected by the parental divorce. In a number of cases this may affect the child, for example by forcing him or her to spend afternoons at an after-care facility, whereas he or she may have been accustomed to be collected from school by one of the parents, thus spending more time with the child prior to the divorce. In this manner the loss involves multiple effects on the child who has to adjust in a very short space of time, which could contribute to feelings of depression for the affected child (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

Uncertainty and doubt: In addition to the loss of both the custodian and non-custodian parents, a sense of doubt could further contribute to feelings of depression for children affected by parental divorce during middle childhood. Van Loggerenberg and Roets (1993) found that the divorce often entails a shift in the pillars of security which the child had relied upon up to that point. The affected child may therefore doubt whether the non-custodian parent still cares for him or her, which in turn could contribute toward feelings of sadness, despair and depression.

In cases where the parents had divorced with one of the parties intending to form a new relationship with another party with their own children, the child may experience a sense of rejection by feeling that he or she was no longer “good enough” for his or her own parent (Francke, 1983). In addition, Lansford (2009) also found that these children have been seen to experience more doubt and confusion about their own identities than children from intact parental homes. All of these circumstances may contribute to feelings of depression for the affected children.

Disruption and disillusionment: The doubts experienced by children as referred to in the former paragraph could further be exacerbated and thereby contribute to feelings of depression, as the child experiences disruptions and a sense of disillusionment in certain instances of parental divorce. Steyn (1989) states that

children often understandably question whether the custodian parent may also leave if the non-custodian parent has already done so?

Furthermore, in cases where children have become aware over time of contributing factors towards the divorce, especially in cases where one or both of their parents have been disloyal towards the other, this may lead to a sense of disillusionment for the child about his or her parents that may contribute to feelings of disappointment and depression. In addition to this, in cases where children are made aware of judicial proceedings concerning payment of maintenance and visiting arrangements, this could further contribute to disillusionment and also create feelings of worry, uncertainty and depression among these affected children (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

- **Isolation and loneliness**

Amato and Keith (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of 92 studies in which children from divorced homes and children from intact families were compared in terms of their subjective states of well-being. Their findings show that children whose parents are in the process of getting a divorce, display more difficulties with their interpersonal skills, such as easily alienating themselves from their friends. This inadvertently leads to isolation and subsequent feelings of depression.

- **Risk of suicide**

According to Jansen van Rensburg (2004) some literature findings were identified regarding suicide rates among children emanating from divorced families in comparison to children from intact families, although these findings had been drawn from small samples. These findings therefore only produce indications rather than a true reflection of this comparison and further research is still required in this area. However, Gould, Shaffer, Fisher and Garfinkel (1998)

did find that changes in the composition of families, as in instances where children do not grow up in an intact family and where depression related to divorce is prevalent, there does seem to exist a higher risk of suicide among these children.

3.2.5.1.5 Fear

According to Amato and Keith (1991) children at times experience feelings of intense fear towards the non-custodian parent during parental divorce. Furthermore, Francke (1983) indicates that with one of the parents leaving the home, who has served as a source of security for the child up to that point, the child will also experience more fear following his or her departure.

3.2.5.1.6 Shame and hope of reconciliation

Children often experience feelings of shame during the divorce of their parents and will attempt to hide it from others, such as their peer group. This often leads them to maintain the hope that their parents will reconcile and they may even make active attempts to reconcile the family. According to Francke (1983) this hope of reconciliation may continue even after the divorce has been finalised, especially in cases where one of the parents is also still seeking to achieve reconciliation.

3.2.5.1.7 Poorer academic achievement

Children from divorced homes have been generally found to display poorer academic performance than children from intact families (Lansford, 2009; Amato & Keith, 1991).

3.2.5.1.8 Taking on parental roles

Children have also been known in some cases to take on parental roles when it appears to them that their parent/s are unable to cope and have become unable to fulfil their own unique parental roles during the divorce process (Amato & Keith, 1991).

3.2.5.1.9 Creating distance from abusive parents

Amato (2000) explains that according to the divorce-stress-adjustment model the notion that divorce may have been beneficial is consistent with the model, for example in cases where women (and frequently children) feel relieved and better off following divorce from an abusive husband and father. This is especially relevant in those cases where parental conflict could have escalated to physical violence and/or in cases where the abuse of illegal substances and alcohol had been part of the process, especially for husbands and/or fathers.

3.2.5.1.10 Developing a closer relationship with custodian parent

A qualitative study conducted by Arditti (1999) indicates certain beneficial consequences of parental divorce for some children in that a large number of children, especially girls, from divorced families report developing intense emotionally close relationships with their custodian parents following the divorce.

3.2.5.1.11 Relief

In addition to the above, Amato, Loomis and Booth (1995) as well as Hanson (1999) determined that children who had been exposed to high levels of parental conflict during their parents' marriage appear to be better off on a number of outcomes once their parents are divorced. These include feelings of release from

the tension and/or anticipation of parental conflict, a more stable environment and new routines which bring about a sense of relief.

3.2.5.2 Adolescence

Louw et al. (1999) indicate that adolescence refers to the years between the ages of eleven and thirteen until the ages of seventeen to twenty one. These are also the years that usually coincide with high school in South Africa. According to Van Rensburg (2001) divorce during these years could be extremely difficult as the adolescent is already confronted with a sense of confusion during this important developmental phase of life, particularly surrounding identity.

Adolescents further require a strong and stable family structure to provide them with boundaries, support and guidance to allow them to effectively develop their own unique identities. Divorce holds the potential to cause a sense of either a too rapid development or a delayed development of maturity and independence (Van Rensburg, 2001). Some of the effects that may commonly be found among adolescents during and following parental divorce, are discussed below.

3.2.5.2.1 Sense of loss

Similar to the period of middle childhood, the adolescent also experiences a sense of loss if parental divorce occurs during this phase of life. This loss also revolves around the loss of the non-custodian parent who has moved away as well as the custodian parent, who in numerous cases needs to spend more time at work in an effort to cope with financial obligations as a single parent (Van Rensburg, 2001).

3.2.5.2.2 Anger

Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that children who experience parental divorce during middle childhood, experience intense, conscious anger with their parents. Denzin (1984) indicates that during adolescence the family environment provides adolescents with an environment of privacy, security and continuity. Furthermore, the family is often regarded as a taken-for-granted milieu that enhances a sense of belonging, which is of particular importance during this phase of life. When inter-parental conflict and especially violence occurs, the home and the family cease to provide the safe environment described above. This destroys the norms, trust and predictability that used to characterise family relationships.

The aforementioned may have numerous effects on the adolescent within this environment. The parents themselves in this situation ordinarily become so engrossed with their relationship dynamics and conflict that adolescents experience them as emotionally unavailable. They may also experience their parents as threatening or helpless as opposed to individuals who provide security and stability. As adolescents are usually unable to leave this situation, they may regard themselves as trapped and start to experience intense feelings of anger towards their circumstances and their parents (Denzin, 1984).

3.2.5.2.3 Sense of helplessness

In addition to feelings of anger described above, children and adolescents often experience a sense of helplessness during parental divorce. They feel that their circumstances are out of their control and that they are unable to leave that environment. In cases where inter-parental violence occurs, this situation could be amplified, especially if the violent parent forces his or her definition of the situation on the children and other family members. Children and/or adolescents may start to doubt whether they are able to manage their lives. These feelings of

helplessness could escalate if they are unable to stop the conflict or violence between their parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

3.2.5.2.4 Fear of stigmatisation

According to Louw et al. (1999) adolescence is a period characterised by a heightened awareness of the environment, especially in terms of how the adolescent feels that he or she is being perceived by the environment. This is also fuelled by the strong need for acceptance that adolescents experience during this stage of their lives, in particular from their peer group. As a result, a sense of shame and fear of stigmatisation often occurs following the parental divorce and may further lead to situations whereby the adolescent attempts to conceal the event from others.

3.2.5.2.5 Lowered levels of empathy with parents

Related to the significant feelings of anger that adolescents often experience during parental divorce, they may also develop decreased levels of empathy for their parents due to the parental divorce.

3.2.5.2.6 Divided loyalties

In comparison with children during middle childhood, adolescents have developed to a point where they become more active, have a broader range of coping strategies and view difficulties from a range of different perspectives (Seiffge-Krenke, 2000). As a result they often become more engrossed in the conflict and circumstances surrounding the divorce of their parents and in doing so, experience intense conflict concerning loyalty towards both parents. When they are with the one parent they often feel concerned and guilty about the other parent and vice versa, which culminates in them feeling that they no longer belong anywhere.

3.2.5.2.7 Ambivalence concerning morality

Reber (1995) defines morality as “a quality of an act such that, according to a particular moral code, is deemed to be right and proper or not” (p. 469-470). A moral code may be influenced by multiple factors such as religion. In cases where one parent has for example been unfaithful in the marriage, this event could have created much turmoil for the adolescent concerning morality. In other situations where the parents of the adolescent agree on a divorce following the deterioration of for example the communication in their relationship, the adolescent may feel that by opting for the divorce they had acted morally wrong. This in turn may also contribute to intense ambivalence and internal conflict concerning morality for them.

3.2.5.2.8 Withdrawal and isolation

As described under earlier sections the anger, divided loyalties, sense of loss and other contributing factors may lead to a situation where the adolescent has grown to feel so overwhelmed that he or she may start to withdraw and isolate themselves. This could be potentially devastating, as indicated in the previous chapter (Vorster, 2003; 2011), since there is a direct link between the mental health of human beings and the quality of their interactions, including their interpersonal relationships with the environment. In cases where adolescents start to withdraw and isolate themselves, they therefore run the risk of experiencing high levels of anxiety, depression and ultimately to become at risk of suicide.

3.2.5.2.9 Low self-esteem

As was indicated to be the case among children during middle childhood who had been exposed to parental divorce, so too adolescents have been known to

experience lowered levels of self-esteem following their exposure to parental divorce. The reasons which contribute towards these lowered levels of self-esteem may, however, differ when considering that adolescents have been found to be more aware of social values and to take more part in the family dynamics than younger children (Frydenberg, 1997). Therefore, it can be concluded that many of the aforementioned effects, such as feelings of helplessness, fear of stigmatisation, fear of the future and withdrawal, contribute to lowered levels of self-esteem for the adolescent exposed to parental divorce.

3.2.5.2.10 Rapid development of adulthood

Associated with the taking on of parental roles, adolescents often develop into young adults at a more rapid pace in comparison with other adolescents who have remained in intact families. As was determined by Amato and Keith (1991) adolescents and children during middle childhood have often been found taking on parental roles during parental divorce. This is especially true among adolescents, due to them having grown more independent and mature than children during middle childhood. The custodian parent often relies on them more from an emotional and practical perspective to cope with the divorce. Examples of adolescents taking over the care of younger siblings, doing grocery shopping, preparing meals, consoling the custodian and non-custodian parents and other siblings and managing the household finances, are commonly found and indicate that adolescents rapidly develop towards adulthood due to this effect.

The long-term effects of this occurrence could potentially have detrimental effects as the adolescent is deprived of undergoing the expected developmental challenges associated with adolescence, due to being consumed with the aforementioned duties that had to be addressed out of necessity at that time. Identity confusion, suppressed anger and depression could therefore result from this effect in addition to relationship difficulties and feelings of mistrust by the adolescent.

3.2.5.2.11 Poorer academic performance

Adolescents from divorced homes generally display poorer academic performance than children from intact families. When considering the effects of rapid development of adulthood and the amount of time that adult duties consume, they understandably have fewer resources than adolescents from intact families, such as adequate time for their academic work (Amato & Keith, 1991; Davis & Carlson, 1987).

3.2.5.2.12 Creating distance from abusive parent

As is indicated by Amato (2000) to be the case among children during their middle childhood years, adolescents who are able to create distance between themselves and an abusive parent, will also benefit from parental divorce. This is mainly due to the re-stabilization of the environment by the removal of a consistent threat in cases where the abusive parent threatens either the other parent alone, or in some cases the children within the family as well.

Eisikovits, Winstok and Enosh (1998) report that within a violent family situation, instead of developing flexible boundaries between themselves and the environment and feeling competent to shape their own lives, adolescents are required to channel their energies towards defending themselves from abuse and even violence, as well as having to conceal the family secrets from the environment. Following the parental divorce and the abusive parent leaving, the adolescent can therefore benefit from this return towards a stable environment without that threat being present.

3.2.5.2.13 Developing a closer relationship with custodian parent

Another beneficial effect of parental divorce among adolescents could also occur if they develop a stronger bond with the custodian parent following the divorce. In accordance with the findings of the study by Roux (2007) children have also reported that their relationship with the non-custodian parents often improved as a result of the divorce, in comparison to these relationships prior to the divorce.

3.2.5.2.14 Relief

In line with the removal of the threat of an abusive parent described above, adolescents have also been known to feel a sense of relief once the parental divorce has occurred, especially in cases where numerous conflict situations had occurred between their parents prior to their divorce. Research findings by Amato et al. (1995) and Hanson (1999) reveal that children and adolescents who have been exposed to high levels of parental conflict during their marriage, appear better off on a number of outcomes once their parents have finally divorced. These include feelings of relief from the tension and/or anticipation of parental conflict, a more stable environment and new routines, which bring about a sense of relief for the affected children and adolescents.

3.2.5.3 Long-terms effects of parental divorce

Regardless of whether parental divorce occurs during middle childhood or adolescence, literature further indicates that certain long-term effects of divorce have been found to affect these children and adolescents during later phases of their lives.

3.2.5.3.1 Sleeper effects

Differing views have been presented by various authors regarding the long-term effects of parental divorce. Some authors refer to these long-term effects as “sleeper effects” and describe them as certain difficulties with the management of the parental divorce, which may only surface at later stages of an individual’s life. Of relevance are the findings by Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989), which show that especially females tend to experience difficulties within their own intimate relationships later on in their lives if they had been exposed to parental divorce during their childhood years. This was also found by Amato and Keith (1991) who state that numerous long-term effects appear to surface among individuals who had experienced parental divorce as children.

Some more recent studies that were identified from the literature appear to confirm the existence of “sleeper effects”, including a study conducted by Jonsson, Njardvik, Gudlaug and Gretarsson (2000) on the long-term effects for children regarding mental health, family relations and adult sexual behaviour following parental divorce. Results from this study indicate that in comparison to adults whose parents had remained married, those of divorced parents report more negative emotional experiences and also experience looser family ties later on in life. The participants further reported having experienced a larger number of brief love affairs, having had their first love affairs at younger ages and having had a greater number of sexual partners than those adults whose parents had remained married.

In a similar study conducted by Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge and Bates (2010) it was found that marital conflict and divorce are closely associated with a poorer quality of parent-adult-child relationships in later years, for those who had been exposed to parental divorce during their childhood or adolescence. Findings by Cartwright (2006) who conducted life-story interviews with 40 young adults between the ages of 19 and 29 years (who had all experienced parental divorce

during their childhood or adolescent years), reveal that the majority of them felt that they were still experiencing negative effects related to the divorce of their parents at that stage of their lives. Furthermore, the minority of them reported that they felt positive about their decision to divorce and the majority of them reported that they were experiencing difficulties in their everyday lives, such as their intimate relationships, relationships with family members and especially relationships with their parents at that time.

The research findings of Huurre et al. (2006) referred to earlier in this chapter, also found that females from divorced families reported more psychological difficulties and interpersonal relationship difficulties later on in their lives, although these findings were not made among males. Shorter education, unemployment, divorce, more high risk health behaviour and negative life events were found to be common among both genders with a background of parental divorce. This study that was done in Finland is particularly significant, as it had included large sample sizes of 317 adults at the age of 32 years who had experienced parental divorce prior to the age of 16, that were compared with 1069 subjects from non-divorced two-parent or intact families on the basis of their psychological well-being and life trajectories at the time.

Despite the above findings that make a compelling argument for the existence of long-term “sleeper effects” of parental divorce, it appears that other authors have found differing results, such as Dunlop and Burns (1995) who were unable to confirm the existence of “sleeper effects” in their own research. Amato (2000) also importantly notes that people’s reactions vary considerably in the face of divorce. Some people appear to have benefitted from it, some have fallen into a downward spiral from which they never recover, while others have experienced only temporary decrements in their well-being as a result of it.

3.2.5.3.2 Resilience

In Chapter 2 the construct of resilience was defined and discussed in the context of the field of positive psychology. Steiner and Markantoni (2013) say that resilience entails the ability of an individual to continue to function in a similar manner during times of change, in comparison to his or her functioning prior to the onset of the change. As such, the ability of a person to absorb disturbances related to change, the ability to self-organise in the face of these disturbances and finally to learn and adapt, are all encapsulated in the construct of resilience. In the context of parental divorce Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) indicate that children possess the resilience to manage parental divorce, but that factors such as the age at which the divorce occurs, as well as the factors that existed prior to the divorce, may either allow or disallow these children to develop resilience in accordance with the description of Steiner and Markantoni (2013), and thereby to equip them to manage the effects of the divorce more effectively.

This appears to be confirmed by more recent research findings of Lansford (2009) that children who had displayed adjustment difficulties prior to the divorce, also appeared more affected by the parental divorce than those who had not, and that in cultures where divorce is more stigmatised children also display poorer adjustment following parental divorce.

3.2.5.3.3 Factors influencing long-term effects of divorce

In addition to the age at which the divorce occurs, research findings by Lansford (2009) that focus on children's long-term and short-term adjustment following parental divorce, found the following factors to influence the long- and short-term adjustment of children: timing of the divorce; demographic characteristics; the children's externalising behaviours; academic achievement; social relationships; pre-divorce functioning; financial income; parental conflict; parental well-being;

child support and custody. Parental well-being and income were found to be particularly relevant in the long-term adjustment of children, as discussed next.

- **Parental well-being and income**

With regards to the parents' personal well-being and income, according to the findings of Lansford (2009) it was determined that these factors could also worsen the post-divorce adjustment of children. It was determined that economic difficulties which may have necessitated changes such as moving to poorer neighbourhoods and new schools, could lead to behavioural and emotional difficulties for those affected children.

A study by Guidubaldy and Cleminshaw (1983) shows that although financial difficulties play a strong part in the impact of parental divorce on children, it is not accountable for the complete effect on these children's adjustment. They found that children's functioning often deteriorates following remarriage, despite the increase in financial resources added by the remarriage. These results appear to indicate that despite its important role, decreased financial resources alone do not contribute to children's adjustment following parental divorce.

- **Parental conflict**

Other factors such as inter-parental conflict appear to play a more prominent role in children's adjustment following parental divorce than age and finances. Lansford (2009) notes that vast amounts of research into this aspect show that high levels of inter-parental conflict bring about long-lasting detrimental and negative effects for children's adjustment. It could therefore contribute towards the inability of these children to develop resilience, as referred to earlier in this section. However, that would need to be verified by further research.

From the aforementioned it can be seen that numerous factors appear to play a role in determining what the effects of parental divorce could be on children. This also appears to question whether “sleeper effects” will automatically be present among individuals who had experienced parental divorce during their childhood or adolescent years.

It appears from the aforementioned research findings that every case needs to be seen within its own context in order to determine whether sleeper effects or resilience may result in later life. Van Rensburg (2001) also adds that there appears to be a lack of research on the development of resilience and adjustment to parental divorce in the literature, and that there exists a lack of consensus among authors concerning the long-term effects of parental divorce. This status quo appears to have remained unchanged at the time when this research study was conducted.

3.2.5.3.4 Mediators of long-term effects

When considering research that investigated what could mediate the apparent long-term effects of parental divorce, Louw et al. (1999) indicate that although it is generally accepted that all children are adversely affected by divorce, these children’s reactions to their parents’ divorce are determined by factors such as the degree of hostility that existed prior to the divorce; the extent to which the child’s life has been changed by the divorce; the nature of the parent-child relationship prior to and during the divorce and the age of the affected child when parental divorce occurs. This implies that these aspects could either have worsened the detrimental impact on children or have mediated them, depending on each unique situation.

A research project which appears to confirm the aforementioned and which focused on how young adults attempt to cope with the divorce of their parents during their childhood years, was conducted by Luecken and Fabricius (2003).

This project investigated the physical health vulnerability in adult children from divorced and intact families by comparing samples of 253 young adults from divorced families and 552 from intact families. The results indicate that participants from these divorced and intact families were equivalent on all health-related measures.

Furthermore, within the intact families group it was found that parental conflict and low parenting care were associated with high levels of hostility, somatic symptoms and illness reports, while within the divorced group, negative feelings about the divorce were associated with high levels of hostility, somatic complaints and illness reports. These results suggest that parental divorce itself did not appear to increase long-term vulnerability to illness, but rather that the negativity of the experience was found to be associated with vulnerability (Luecken & Fabricius, 2003).

3.3 Coping with parental divorce

In the previous chapter the concept of coping and its related constructs were discussed. In this section (3.3) attention will be paid specifically to how research suggests children attempt to cope with parental divorce both internationally and in South Africa, during middle childhood and adolescence.

3.3.1 Coping with parental divorce during middle childhood

As was stated previously, middle childhood refers to the period of life between the ages of six and twelve (Louw et al., 1999). The following section will focus on research findings of how children attempt to cope with parental divorce during middle childhood.

- **Progression of time**

As also became clear from the previous discussions in this chapter, divorce entails a process that spans over a particular period of time, which may vary. Some studies indicate that time is a healer when it comes to coping with divorce.

According to the crisis perspective described in the divorce-stress-adjustment model, it was also suggested in line with this view that children from divorced families are distressed for a certain period of time only and that they show improvements in their functioning during the years that follow. The study by Frost and Pakiz (1990) confirms this view by identifying that children, who have developed behavioural difficulties resulting from parental divorce, display a decline in these difficulties over time.

Other research studies have, however, indicated the contrary, such as the longitudinal study conducted by Cherlin, Case-Landsdale and McRae (1998). This study found that the gap between the psychological well-being of children from divorced parents as opposed to those children whose parents had remained married, seems to grow larger over time. Amato (2000) adds that a large amount of research also indicates that parental divorce appears to be a major risk factor for psychological difficulties during adulthood, such as low socio-economic status, marital difficulties and for these children to have divorced themselves as adults. This appears to question whether time alone acts as a sufficient coping mechanism for children to adjust to parental divorce and similar to the chronic strain view, as was also outlined in the divorce-stress-adjustment model.

Amato (2000) adds that the aforementioned appears to be the case because most parents struggle financially following divorce, which may lead to situations where the children are not able to continue their education for example at universities, thus resulting in a lower socio-economic status. Furthermore, having been exposed to parental conflict as children may also cause children from

parental divorce homes to struggle with satisfactory intimate relationships of their own as adults. These factors suggest that even if children display improvements in their functioning within a year or two following parental divorce, delayed or sleeper effects of the parental divorce could still present themselves during adulthood for the first time, as circumstances had not yet yielded their emergence up to that time (Amato, 2000).

- **Utilising social support**

Amato (2000) states that the:

...quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children's behaviour and well-being. Several within group studies show that either a conflicted relationship with the custodial parent or inept parenting on the part of the custodial parent are linked with a variety of negative child outcomes, including lower academic achievement, internalising problems, externalising problems, reduced self-esteem, and poorer social competence (p.1280).

Amato (2000) notes further that, when referring to specific coping resources, the study by Sandler and Tein (1994) found that children during their middle childhood years who attempt to make use of active coping skills, which included the gathering of social support and specifically problem solving, cope more effectively than children who make use of avoidance or distraction in an attempt to cope with their parental divorce.

- **Voicing opinions**

A more recent research project in this field in South Africa was conducted by Roux (2007) in which children's coping with divorce was explored from a phenomenological perspective. According to Roux (2007) divorce is described as one of the most stressful life events that a child would have to cope with and it has frequently been found that children are mostly negatively or adversely

affected by it. Roux (2007) continues to state that while the effects of divorce have been researched extensively, the results from her findings appear somewhat contradictory and that it was suggested by some of the latest research that children have not always been adversely impacted upon by their parents' divorce. As a result she conducted a study which employed a grounded theory methodology in order to allow data from interviews with 41 children from white, middle-class families to highlight their perspectives and thereby enable a new understanding of children's coping within the context of parental divorce to be developed.

Roux's (2007) results found that similar to the findings of Louw et al. (1999), children need to develop a personal understanding of their parents' divorce and be given the opportunity to voice their opinions in developing a sense of consistency in their lives in order to be able to cope effectively with their parental divorce. Furthermore, Roux (2007) found that the children's expressed desire to have a voice on matters pertaining to themselves; the need for co-parenting and "equal time"; and the value of involvement of significant other individuals in their lives, were all found to be of significant assistance to children in coping with divorce (Roux, 2007).

Mediators of the impact of parental divorce on children have also received much attention from a research perspective and have confirmed numerous similar findings to the recommendations by Roux (2007).

3.3.2 Coping with parental divorce during adolescence

As was stated in the previous chapter, adolescence according to Louw et al. (1999) refers to phase of life between the ages of eleven and thirteen until the ages of seventeen to twenty one. It was also noted that this is a very important and potentially challenging phase of development for human beings. In the

following section specific references will be made to research findings on how adolescents attempt to cope with the divorce of their parents.

- **Emotion-focused coping strategies**

Mullis, Mullis, Schwartz, Pease and Shriner (2007) investigated the relation between parental divorce, identity status and coping strategies of university aged women who had experienced parental divorce during their adolescent years. For this purpose they included 240 women between the ages of 18 and 23 years, whom they requested to complete the Coping Strategies Inventory and the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status-II assessments.

Their findings indicate that identity diffusion in the interpersonal domain is associated with emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas identity achievement in both sets of domains is associated with greater use of problem-focused coping strategies. The reader can refer to the previous chapter for a more comprehensive description of these coping strategies. Furthermore, structural equation modelling analysis found that for both the ideological and interpersonal identity domains, divorce is positively related to emotion-focused coping and negatively related to both diffusion and foreclosure. From these findings it appears that the majority of the participants opted to utilise emotion-focused coping strategies to deal with their parents' divorce (Mullis et al., 2007).

- **Seeking therapy/counselling**

The role of counselling also appears to be a coping strategy that research suggests to be effective in coping with parental divorce. Graff-Reed (N.D.) conducted a research project in this respect that investigated the positive effects of stressful life events by specifically focusing on psychological growth following divorce. 140 participants who had experienced parental divorce during their adolescent years completed questionnaires measuring demographic variables as

well as appraised stress, perceived social support, adjustment to divorce, coping styles and posttraumatic psychological growth. Findings from this research indicate that amongst others, the amount of time since the divorce as well as the counselling related to it, moderate the effects of appraised stress on divorce adjustment.

Furthermore, a new relationship moderates the effect of appraised stress on posttraumatic growth and women report higher levels of perceived support than men as well as higher levels of posttraumatic growth following divorce, as opposed to men. These findings appear to highlight that seeking counselling may be deemed a valuable coping strategy utilised by some adolescents following the divorce of their parents.

- **Adopting an optimistic outlook**

In South Africa a study was conducted by Spalding and Pretorius (2001) to determine the way in which the effects of divorce surface during the developmental period of young adulthood. This study provides insight into the long-term effects of divorce. A qualitative study was conducted by means of in-depth unstructured interviews as part of a therapeutic process with three young adults who had experienced parental divorce during their adolescent years. The findings indicate that divorce is a process that influences development and also contributes in the shaping of who individuals become during later years.

It was further found by Spalding and Pretorius (2001) that the divorce process includes negative, detrimental aspects as well provides options in which the individual could alter and adjust these effects in a way that is meaningful and optimal. From this it appears that by adopting a more positive attitude and to seek positive meanings resulting from the divorce of his or her parents, an adolescent could also cope more effectively with parental divorce, despite the negative implications that it may hold.

- **Religion**

Another important aspect of attempting to cope with parental divorce, involves religion. As numerous people around the world strongly rely on their religious beliefs and practices to attempt to cope with everyday stresses and other difficult situations in their lives, this also appears to have been the case in parental divorce. Shortz and Worthington (1994) explored this phenomenon in the United States by investigating the recall of young adults' religiosity, attributions and coping with parental divorce.

They included 131 undergraduate psychology students as participants in their research who were affiliated with numerous religious denominations and had experienced parental divorce between the ages of 11 and 25. The participants were requested to complete the 31-item Religious Coping Activities Scale as originally developed by Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen, Reilly, Haitsma and Warren (1990) and the Non-Religious Coping Activities Scale adapted by Pargament et al. (1990) from Billings and Moos (1984) as referred to in Shortz and Worthington (1994). The participants were questioned on how important religion had been in their lives at the time of parental divorce, how frequently they had attended religious services during the period of their parents' divorce and also at the same time, to what extent they had been of the belief that their parents' divorce had been caused by themselves, by chance, by God's purpose, God's anger, God's punishment, God's love, their parents' personalities, external stressors or other causes.

The results from their research indicate that religiosity significantly predicts religious coping activities, which implies that for many religious people their religion becomes a guiding principle in most of their actions, behaviour and/or cognitive attributions. The behaviours utilised by religious individuals to cope with

stressful life events are frequently found to be religious in nature (Shortz & Worthington, 1994)

Furthermore, Shortz and Worthington (1994) found that retrospective religious causal attributions predict coping activities, particularly religious coping. To religious people negative life events are often attributed to God and these attributions guide their subsequent behaviours. Attributions to God's anger predict religious discontent and pleading coping activities. In cases where religious individuals are of the belief that a stressful life event such as their parents' divorce occurred as a result of God's anger, they appear to have become angry, turned away from the church or to plead for a miracle (or both). Furthermore, attributing the divorce to a perceived lack of God's love appears to have contributed to pleading in an effort to cope with the event by the participants.

The research findings further indicate that spiritually-based activities are attributed to God's will, as those religious individuals who view their parental divorce as having been part of God's plan, appear to have actively used religion in an effort to cope with the event. This is clearly in conflict with the aforementioned finding of those who attributed their parental divorce to God's anger, which subsequently led to religious discontent for them. Furthermore, attributions to other causes appear to have made a significantly negative contribution towards predicting positive-focusing activities, so attributing the parental divorce appears to have predicted a low likelihood that the individual would make use of positive-focusing activities.

Positive-focusing activities therefore appear to be linked to attributions of known causes and specific causal attributions, therefore appear to be related to types of coping behaviours (Shortz & Worthington, 1994).

The aforementioned study highlights how religion is utilised in an effort to cope with parental divorce. However, this study does not indicate how effective this form of coping has been in order to effectively cope with parental divorce.

- **Active-cognitive, active-behavioural and avoidance coping strategies**

In a different study by Armistead, McCombs, Forehand, Wierson, Long and Fauber (1990) conducted in the United States, they investigated the coping methods that had been utilised by adolescents in order to cope with parental divorce. For their research they focused on three distinct methods as proposed by Billings and Moos (1981), namely active-cognitive, active-behavioural and avoidance. Based on these approaches by Billings and Moos (1981), active-cognitive and active-behavioural approaches indicate that the individual had at least attempted to cope with the particular stressor, in this case parental divorce. They were also related to reducing the stress experienced as a result of a stressor as opposed to the avoidance approach, which was found to impair individuals' functioning.

Armistead et al. (1990) attempted to determine which of the three coping methods referred to above were mostly employed by adolescents following divorce and to determine if there had been any differences with regards to the gender of the participants. Next, the researchers also aimed to determine how these findings related to the functioning of adolescents in three domains, namely externalising of problems, internalising of problems and the presentation of physical complaints.

Results indicate that participants mostly employed the active-cognitive method, followed by the active-behavioural and avoidance methods. Armistead et al. (1990) indicate that it was suspected to be the case as the majority of these adolescents most likely came to realise that they were not going to be able to change their parents' divorce through behavioural means.

In addition to the above, no gender differences were found from the participants with regard to which methods they had utilised. Furthermore, although avoidance was found to have been the approach to be employed the least by the participants, it displayed the strongest relationship to functioning, in particular for female participants. This appears to indicate that the more adolescent girls rely on avoidance in an attempt to cope with parental divorce, the more impaired their overall functioning is found to be (Armistead et al., 1990).

According to Armistead et al. (1990) the research findings highlight the need for intervention from a clinical perspective to focus on educating adolescents, especially girls, in active coping strategies for dealing with parental divorce. Programmes which have already been empirically validated by Pedro-Carrol, Sterling and Alpert-Gillis (1987) such as problem-solving and the identification of divorce-related difficulties that are solvable as opposed to those considered as unsolvable, should be advocated as it is believed that these programmes could facilitate the coping of adolescents in the face of parental divorce.

These findings are similar to those made by Sandler and Tein (1994) who found that children who attempt to make use of active coping skills that include the gathering of social support and specifically problem solving, cope more effectively than children who make use of avoidance or distraction in an attempt to cope with their parental divorce (Armistead et al., 1990). Although the aforementioned research study highlights the ineffectiveness of avoidance as a method of coping with parental divorce, it does not highlight how effective the other approaches had actually been for these adolescents.

- **Education**

Another important aspect identified from literature to assist children and adolescents in coping with parental divorce, is education. Based on the literature

review conducted by Kelly and Emery (2003) it was determined that the use of divorce related education in interventions when assisting children or adolescents of divorce, could be beneficial.

According to Kelly and Emery (2003) children and adolescents who had received divorce education appear to have been more able to cope effectively with the divorce of their parents than those who had not.

3.4 Conclusions

Research indicates that divorce is one of the most stressful life events a person could experience. The children of parents undergoing divorce are also shown by literature to be affected, either in a detrimental or beneficial way, depending on the particular circumstances of their family.

It was further found that the children of parents undergoing divorce attempt various methods of coping with this stressful life event. However, the research does not clearly indicate specific techniques and in particular how effective they are considered to have been by the children themselves.

Certain research studies that did touch on coping with parental divorce during childhood, were further found to be quantitative by nature and as such bound by specific constructs and theories as had been selected by the researchers. An in-depth qualitative study from a phenomenological perspective could not be found, particularly within a South African context.

The aforementioned led the researcher to conduct the present research project in an attempt to fill the apparent void within the literature. With the review of literature and discussion of relevant concepts in the previous two chapters, the author attempted to create an appropriate context for the chapters to follow. The

following chapter will discuss the study that was conducted and the research procedure that was followed for this particular research project.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the structure of the present research project will be set out. This includes the aim of the study as well as discussions on qualitative, phenomenological and retrospective research designs. Other important aspects such as the research procedure that was followed, ethical considerations and trustworthiness related to the present study, the method of data analysis and ethical considerations will all be discussed in detail in this chapter.

4.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research

Social science research can mainly be classified into two broad paradigms, namely qualitative and quantitative research. Whereas quantitative research mainly focuses on quantity of measurements such as in statistics, qualitative research entails more of a focus on the quality or nature of aspects being researched (Berg, 2004). These two forms of research encompass a different outlook, which influences the manner in which the research is done. Where quantitative researchers ordinarily view reality as consisting of a measurable, fixed phenomenon, qualitative researchers ordinarily view the environment as socially constructed and therefore as consisting out of numerous constructions and interpretations of reality. Furthermore, these views are relative to each individual and can change over time according to this perspective (Merriam, 2002).

According to Neuman (1997) quantitative research relies primarily on the positivist approach towards science. Within social science a number of methodologies have emerged. According to Reber (1995) a methodology refers to “the formulation of systematic and logically coherent methods for the search of

knowledge” (p.457). As such, it is not so much concerned with the accumulation or understanding of knowledge, but rather with the methods and procedures that were utilised to obtain such knowledge and understanding. Research methodology is what in fact makes social science scientific and social scientists select from differing approaches towards science. Each different approach is based on its own unique philosophical underpinnings that lead to its own unique approach towards research. Some of the most well-known methodologies as indicated by Neuman (1997) include positivism, interpretive social science and critical social science.

Neuman (1997) indicates that positivist social science, as the most widely used form of social science, is simply put the approach of the natural sciences as applied within social science and many people regard this approach as science itself and as such do not consider any other approaches. It also encompasses numerous forms. Researchers who make use of this approach tend to prefer exact quantitative data which often entails statistics, surveys and experiments. Their aim is to obtain rigorous, precise measures and “objective” research. They further tend to test hypotheses and measure their value to reliability and validity. They often aim to predict general patterns of human activity based on their findings (Neuman, 1997).

Qualitative research can be described as being concerned with meaning and depth in a general sense. This implies that it focuses on how individuals view situations from their unique perspectives while excluding “common sense” notions, scientific explanations or any other interpretation to come to that understanding as is commonly found within the positivist approach. It considers the unique knowledge or “truth” of the world from the unique points of view of individuals, as well as how these individuals engage with that knowledge. Qualitative research therefore seeks to find subjective understandings of data as opposed to seeking an “objective truth”, which it abandons (Donalek, 2004).

As such, in comparison with positivist quantitative knowledge, qualitative knowledge takes a more in-depth and subjective view of the phenomenon under investigation. This form of research, from a practical perspective, tends to be more labour intensive to obtain data and as such ordinarily comprises smaller sample sizes as opposed to typical quantitative positivist research. It further tends to provide more rich and comprehensive data as opposed to that of quantitative positivist research findings (Willig, 2001).

Ragin (1994) also describes quantitative research methods as data condensers so as to allow the reader to see the bigger picture. In contrast, qualitative data research methods are regarded to be data enhancers that attempt to make the key aspects of a case under investigation more clearly visible to the reader. It is important to add at this juncture that no value was assigned to either quantitative or qualitative research by the researcher in the present study and as such neither was regarded as being “good”, “bad”, “right”, “wrong”, “better” or “worse” than the other. Despite the unfortunate ill will and long-standing debates that have emerged between followers of each of these styles of research, similar to the views of Neuman (1997), they are regarded by the researcher as two different forms of research with their own unique strengths and limitations. The nature of the phenomenon that is to be researched, as well as the personal preference of the researcher, should in the view of the current author dictate which method needs to be utilised.

The present study had not sought to obtain an “objective truth” but rather the unique subjective experiences and understandings of the phenomenon under investigation. As such, it appeared to have been more aptly suited to qualitative phenomenological research, as opposed to the positivist quantitative research approach. As a result qualitative research appears to allow the specific research question of this project to be more effectively answered. Specifically, a qualitative phenomenological approach that is concerned with “meaning-making” and a detailed discussion and understanding of the topic, was therefore selected for the

purpose of this study in that the focus of this study is on the unique subjective experiences of the participants. It was further attempted to gain richer and more detailed information from the participants on how they had made their own subjective meanings of the topic under investigation and as such qualitative phenomenological research appeared to be the most suitable research method to utilise in this project. Phenomenology and its related concepts will be discussed in more detail in the following section (Willig, 2001).

4.3 Phenomenology

In its broadest sense it could be said that phenomenology originates from a philosophical tradition, since it refers to the study of “phenomena” as they appear within human experience. Phenomenology therefore refers to the *meaning* that “things” have in every human being’s experiences (Smith, 2008). The following sections will provide a discussion of the origins of phenomenology in order to contextualise it. This will be followed by a definition of phenomenology, which will be followed by a discussion of some key concepts before more attention is given to phenomenology as a research framework.

4.3.1 Historical background

The term phenomenology was originally coined by Immanuel Kant and was derived from the Greek word meaning “to appear”. By the end of the nineteenth century Edward Husserl was credited with transforming phenomenology into a method of inquiry. One of his goals for phenomenology was for it to become a rigorous science that made no unsubstantiated or guaranteed claims. He held the belief that all knowledge was derived from experience and so he aimed to develop a scientific method for identifying the essential structures of consciousness (Priest, 2002).

According to Merleau-Ponty (1967) phenomenology further arose in an effort to solve a philosophical crisis at the time within the human sciences that positivism was not able to resolve, as instead of focusing on causal explanations for phenomena, phenomenology sought to describe the phenomena as they manifested themselves (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). By the beginning of the twentieth century phenomenology had begun to spread into the field of psychiatry in the works of Karl Jaspers and Ludwig Binswanger (Embree, 2001). During this same period several existentialist thinkers also started to utilise Husserl's (1970) phenomenological approach as a point of departure to formulate their own existential phenomenology that included Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Ortega (MacDonald, 2001).

4.3.2 Defining phenomenology

In defining phenomenology Smith (2008) indicates that phenomenology entails the study of phenomena. More specifically the appearances of "things" or phenomena as they emerge from human experiences. Phenomenology therefore refers to the subjective meanings that phenomena possess within each individual person's experiences. According to Polkinghorne (1989) it eradicates the necessity of locating external sources of experiences and instead focuses on what can be found to be present in awareness. As such, it attempts "to elicit naive descriptions of the actuality of the experience as it is lived rather than to collect embellished and narrated accounts that are based upon what the participant believes is expected by the researcher" (Osborn, 1995, p.171).

Phenomenology according to Giorgi (1983) may be defined as:

...the study of phenomena of the world as experienced by conscious beings and it is a method for studying such phenomena. When a phenomenologist uses the term 'phenomena' he means that whatever is given in experience is to be understood simply as the correlate of an act of consciousness and it should be described precisely as it presents itself. In other words, the existential claim of

what is presented is withheld and this frees the phenomenologist to examine what is given more closely. Thus, a 'phenomenon' in phenomenological parlance, shortly speaking, is precisely what is given to consciousness as a person experiences it (p.144-145).

Reber (1995) defines phenomenism as “the philosophical point of view that knowledge and understanding are limited ‘appearances,’ the ways in which objects and events are perceived, that true reality outside of that which is phenomenological is unknowable” (p.563). This definition was also selected to form the working definition of the construct for this research project, in that it highlights the subjective realities of each of the participants, as was also encountered within this project.

4.3.3 Key concepts related to phenomenology

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of phenomenology the concepts of being-in-the-world; *lebenswelt*; consciousness; intentionality; ontological guilt; anxiety; perception, meaning and intentionality will be discussed next.

4.3.3.1 Being-in-the-world

From a phenomenological perspective, human beings are seen as having no existence apart from people and the world. So it is thought that through the world and other people the meaning of existence emerges for a particular individual as well as for other individuals. According to Valle, King and Halling (1989) the world and individuals are mutually dependent on one another for their existence and so, according to phenomenological thought, existence would imply “being-in-the-world”. A part of this “being-in-the-world” is further linked with an individual’s *lebenswelt*.

4.3.3.2 *Lebenswelt*

Lebenswelt (or life-world) refers to the experiences that a person encounters on a daily basis. It refers to a pre-reflective life-world from where scientific knowledge emerges (Thevenaz, 1962). This life-world refers to the beginning, as naive experiences are not yet based on anything and are pre-reflective in nature. As such, life-world does not entail causal thinking theories or hypotheses as they are rather higher order derivatives of life-world (Valle et al., 1989). Linked to an individual's life-world and experience of being-in-the-world, are consciousness and intentionality.

4.3.3.3 Consciousness and intentionality

The nature of consciousness forms another critical concept of phenomenology as Valle et al. (1989) explain that there "is no world without a consciousness to perceive it and, similarly, no consciousness without a world to be conscious of" (p.11). So Valle et al. (1989) suggest that all objects are held and sustained by the constituting power of consciousness. In consciousness phenomena are exposed and made present. Furthermore, existential psychologists indicate that consciousness doesn't merely exist but that one is rather always conscious of something, it always has an object. In that sense consciousness is regarded by Valle et al. (1989) as intentional in nature. As such intentionality refers to the on-going work of consciousness. It is by means of consciousness that human beings are able to know and consciousness allows the "intended" object to make it "known" to human beings (Segal, 1999).

Rather than perceiving an individual as an object in the world made up of things, an individual according to Husserl is viewed as an intentional being who is relating to his or her environment (Segal, 1999). Intentionality further suggests that all perceptions have meaning. Intentionality is, therefore, considered to be the essence of perception, awareness, experience and attention.

Intentionality refers to the content of consciousness, its direction and the manner in which consciousness deciphers that which it perceives (Owen, 1994a; 1994b). Intention is therefore considered to be an act of consciousness, more specifically it is the direction of consciousness in order to understand the world (Sadala & Adorno, 2003). As Thomas (2005) explains, human beings are never to be regarded as being simply passive but rather as constantly engaged in the life-world and directing their attention towards phenomena. As such, it is the purpose of research or the researcher to examine both his or her own intentionality as well as the intentional experience of research participants (Rapport & Wainwright, 2006).

4.3.3.4 Perception

Perception forms a central aspect of Merleau-Ponty's (1967) thoughts as it is regarded as the most immediate and fundamental medium to access the world. Perception opens up reality (Smith, 2005). Furthermore, Thomas (2005) explains that all knowledge occurs only within the horizons that are opened up by perception and that all meaning is also generated through perception.

Perception, however, not only refers to an observer's account, it is rather an active, embodied process, always generative of meaning and influenced by an individual's history (Roberson, 2002). Understanding a phenomenological research participant's experience, therefore originates at the source of all knowledge, experience of the world. From there a phenomenological researcher aims to describe, analyse and interpret the phenomenon and in doing so gains understanding of the phenomenon's structure (Sadala & Adorno, 2003).

4.3.3.5 Meaning

Merleau-Ponty (1967) emphasises Husserl's (1970) proposition that for an individual to have a world and as such to "be", implies dealing with meaning.

People can, therefore, not escape meaning as there is not a human word spoken or gesture made, even one, which is due to habit that lacks meaning. Merleau-Ponty (1967) adds that a variety of angles may exist from which understanding of meaning can and should be sought and that all of these views will be true as long as they are not isolated (Merleau-Ponty, 1967; Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2004).

4.3.4 Phenomenology within the context of research

In accordance with the previous section it may be deduced that within the context of research, phenomenological research methods are employed to obtain direct exploration of human experience. As such the origin of such data is ordinarily located among verbal or written accounts of human experiences. Sampling in this form of research tends to be purposive so as to seek out the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon to be researched (Osborn, 1995). Upon locating these individuals, Creswell (1994) indicates that phenomenological research entails intense interaction for example by means of interviews with these specifically selected individuals with the aim of identifying patterns, themes and relationships of meaning. This and other aspects relating to phenomenology within the context of research, such as reliability and validity, data collection and data analysis within phenomenological research, will be discussed in greater detail the following sections.

4.3.4.1 A form of qualitative research

Struwig and Stead (2001) note that qualitative research concerns itself with approaches such as phenomenology, ecological psychology, ethnography, symbolic interactionism and post-modernism. Phenomenological research can therefore be described as a descriptive form of research wherein the focus lies on describing phenomena as opposed to making causal links. Expressed more simplistically, it could be stated that it focuses on understanding the *what* rather than the *why* about phenomena under investigation. As such it is evident that it

forms part of qualitative rather than quantitative research within a broader sense (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999)

With reference to the above discussion about the nature of phenomenological and positivist approaches to social research (compare 4.2), phenomenological research and most qualitative research still appear to be largely misunderstood by many individuals, according to Lester (1999) who warns that most individuals expect similar parameters to apply to it, as would be the case for quantitative types of research. As a result it could for example be misunderstood or doubted that a single figure sample could still be valid, because a larger sample size is commonly misconceived to provide statistically more reliable results. Another similar challenge in this respect could be that it may be difficult to gain access to participants for more than a single session and as phenomenological research methods are often effective at raising deep-seated issues and making the voices of participants heard, this does not always sit comfortably with all people, particularly when it exposes taken-for-granted assumptions or the status quo of challenges (Lester, 1999).

4.3.4.2 The aim of phenomenological research

Phenomenological research aims to explore awareness, so as to obtain an understanding of experience. As such it involves direct investigation and explanation of phenomena as experienced consciously by individuals. It also excludes theories about their causal explanations and is therefore free of presuppositions and preconceptions (Spielberg, 1970). The research phenomena under investigation, as far as the phenomenological researcher is concerned, have not previously been explored. As such, questionnaires containing pre-formulated categories (often used in positivist research) may possibly conceal aspects of an individual's experience about which the phenomenological researcher is not yet aware.

Within phenomenological-based research the researcher attempts to develop a methodology tailored for the creation of a clear understanding of the selected phenomenological experience in question. As such the aim of phenomenological research is “to elicit naive descriptions of the actuality of experience as it is lived” (Segal, 1999, p.86).

4.3.4.3 Reliability and validity within phenomenological research

Rosnow and Rosenthal (1999) indicate that reliability refers to the “extent to which observations or measures are consistent or stable” (p.439) and validity as the “degree to which what was observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured” (p.442). As discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter, this study was not conducted from a positivistic, quantitative research methodological framework. As such, it was not subjected to the traditional empirical conditions of reliability and validity which traditionally form part of that approach to research.

Within the context of qualitative, phenomenological research the terms reliability and validity are not applicable, as they belong within another framework, namely quantitative, positivist research. Within the qualitative, phenomenological research framework it could be more appropriately stated that it is important for a study which follows such an approach, to display scientific rigour. This would imply that the research as it had been described demonstrated suitable integrity and competence, also referred to as trustworthiness by some researchers who make use of this particular approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Alternative criteria to evaluate scientific rigour in qualitative studies that were subsequently proposed by Malterud (2001) include credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. According to Malterud (2001) these criteria correspond with traditional criteria as found in quantitative, positivist research as credibility could be regarded as relating to internal validity, confirmability with

objectivity and transferability with generalisability. Whitehead (2003) explains further that credibility is established when a researcher describes and interprets his or her experience. Furthermore, according to Priest (2002) dependability is displayed when the researcher is transparent by disclosing his or her personal orientation and context within the findings of the research. Also, the researcher can display confirmability as well as further credibility by linking any interpretations within the research findings with verbatim examples from the research data collected for the research project. Koch (1994) also reports that transferability refers to the “fittingness” of research. This means that the context requires a thorough description with sufficient detail to allow readers to accurately judge the transferability of the research.

Following the aforementioned discussion of how phenomenological research designs, establishes and maintains sufficient rigour, the specific methods of data collection within this research approach will be described in the next section.

4.3.4.4 Data collection within phenomenological research

Struwig and Stead (2001) indicate that a variety of phenomenological research methods can be utilised to collect data. These include the following.

- **Participant observation**

As a form of research commonly used by ethnographers and frequently found within the field of cultural anthropology, participant observation entails differing descriptions within the literature depending on its use and focus by various researchers. This could differ for example in the degree to which researchers are deemed to participate and observe. According to Agar (1996) the term is utilised as an all-inclusive term referring to all of the observations and participation, including formal and informal interviewing that researchers such as anthropologists would engage in while conducting research. As such, it could

invariably be used as a method to gather data within the scope of phenomenological research.

According to Bernard (1995) participant observation requires to be distinguished from pure observation and pure participation. From his perspective pure observation, as commonly utilised by sociologists and psychologists, aims as far as possible to remove the researcher from actions and behaviours under observation, so as to avoid influencing them. In contrast pure participation refers to becoming part of the phenomenon under investigation (Bernard, 1995).

- **Action research**

Action research refers to a particular approach towards research. Its underpinnings and basis is, however, so closely related to phenomenological research that it could be regarded as an approach towards gathering data within the framework of phenomenological research. Action research is defined by Reason and Bradbury (2001) in Minkler and Wallerstein (2008) as:

...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory world view. It seeks to reconnect action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people. More generally, it grows out of a concern for the flourishing of individuals and their communities. (p.226)

According to Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire (2003) action research was formed by multiple influences and is still in the process of evolving. It rejects the idea of a value free and objective approach to knowledge generation in favour of an explicitly political, socially engaged and democratic practice towards it. It holds that human systems are only open to true understanding and change when the members of the system are involved in the inquiry process itself.

Brydon-Miller et al. (2003) add that action research holds that theory can and should be generated through practice, and as such be integrated. From the aforementioned it becomes evident that action research as a research approach aims to generate knowledge that is both valid and vital to the well-being of individuals, communities and the promotion of large-scale democratic change. It further clearly challenges the positivist research approach which holds that in order to be credible, research must remain objective and value free. Instead action research embraces the notion of socially constructed knowledge. In recognising that all research is embedded within a particular system of values that promotes some model of human interaction, it focuses on an approach to research which challenges what is regarded to be unjust and undemocratic social, economic and political systems and practices (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003).

- **Focus group meetings**

Focus group meetings refer to the qualitative counterpart of quantitative surveys, as is typically utilised in qualitative research to obtain a broad range of information about events. They ordinarily consist of minimally to moderately structured, open-ended interviews with groups (Sandelowski, 2000).

- **Individual interviews**

According to Bogdan (1975) individual interviews can be linked to conversations that take place within the context of a relationship, such as a therapeutic relationship (compare 2.3.2.1). These interviews offer a rich data source of the human structure of experience. Individual interviews, similar to focus group interviews, can consist of minimally to moderately structured, open-ended interviews with individual participants (Sandelowski, 2000).

The aim of individual research interviews as a method of data collection is to ultimately obtain shared meanings. This is done by evoking a vivid picture of the

lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation from the participant while conducting the interview (Clarke & Iphofen, 2006). Furthermore, according to Wimpenny and Gass (2000) individual research interviews provide the basis from which participants' descriptions of their experiences can be explored, highlighted and probed in a gentle manner.

In semi-structured research interviews, as also utilised within the current research, only broad questions are asked of the participants. While conducting the interview it is vital that the interviewer utilises effective interviewing skills such as those used within the context of Client Centred Therapy that communicate openness, genuineness, empathy and unconditional acceptance on the part of the interviewer towards all participants (Rogers, 1961; 1978a). According to Whiting (2008) adhering to these interviewing skills will stimulate participants to speak more openly and freely about their experiences, thereby enhancing the quality of the research.

- **Reviewing of personal texts**

Another method for gathering data within phenomenological research advocated by Reissmann (2000) involves reviewing personal texts or narratives. One example of personal texts is autobiographies, which can be analysed according to the same steps of phenomenological data analysis as for example recorded interviews. These steps are described in the following section.

Struwig and Stead (2001) note that the various methods utilised to collect data within phenomenological research could be regarded as interdisciplinary, multi-paradigmatic and multi-method. Whatever method is used by the researcher, as a general guideline Lester (1999) recommends that it should have minimum structure and maximum depth so as to attempt to obtain a balance between maintaining focus on the research issues and avoiding undue influence by the researcher. As is also recommended by Bogdan (1975) high levels of empathy

and rapport are emphasised, especially during individual and focus group interviews in order to obtain such depth of information while interacting with research participants (Lester, 1999).

4.3.4.5 Data analysis within phenomenological research

Following a review of various methods of data collection, the following section will pay specific attention to the analysis of the data after being collected within the phenomenological research framework. Due to large volumes of data being generated within this approach the data according to this research method could be vast, complex and time consuming to analyse. However, this form of research conversely allows the researcher in most cases to make more detailed comments about individuals who do not always lend themselves to direct generalisation in the same manner, as is sometimes the case in the positivist, quantitative survey type research (Lester, 1999).

Different specific approaches to the analysis of data within phenomenological research were identified from the literature, such as the method originally developed by Giorgi (1975), which was further developed by Schweitzer and set out in the paper by Devenish (2002). Giorgi's (1975) original method involved four steps, firstly the division into natural meaning units (NMUs) followed by what is referred to as unit analysis. Next in the process came the situated structure statement that was followed by the final step in the process, namely the general structure statement (De Castro, 2003).

This process as refined by Schweitzer and described by Devenish (2002) was expanded to a two stage model: stage one consisting of the Idiographic Mode within which a single understanding was made and stage two referred to as the Nomothetic Mode, where a more integrated and general understanding is made. Stage one consists of the following steps (Devenish, 2002):

1. Initially analyse a single transcript in order to locate the categories of meaning.
2. Construction of a research key that will expand as more transcripts are analysed.
3. Identify and isolate NMUs.
4. Number the NMUs in accordance with categories within the research key.
5. Sort the NMUs into the research key using computer software.
6. Remove extraneous items in an effort to formulate abbreviated NMUs.
7. Select the central themes by taking note of multiple references.
8. Write a phenomenological comment on each of the central themes.
9. Organise phenomenological comments and central themes into numbered boxes for “ready reference”.
10. Write a brief sub-narrative relating to the interpretive themes selected.

Stage two consists of the following steps (Devenish, 2002):

1. Collate sub-narratives and interpretive themes.
2. Group interpretive themes together into related themes using a concept map.
3. Use formulas such as frequency multiplied by intensity equals priority in order to rank the identified themes.
4. Collate the lesser interpretive themes around prioritised themes to enable them to feed into one another. This will result in meta-themes, also referred to as explicative themes.
5. Reflect on own experience of interpretive themes and also reflect on relevant literature.
6. Form explicative themes using a phenomenological attitude and free variation.
7. Create a final phenomenological description to conclude the research.

A later section in this chapter will describe in detail how the researcher adapted this process within the present study in a step by step manner. Following a discussion on phenomenological research the next section will focus on retrospective research within a phenomenological context, which this study also utilised. The following section will therefore provide a discussion on retrospective research and its related concepts.

4.3.4.6 Retrospective research within the context of phenomenological research

According to Vogt and Johnson (2011) retrospective research involves the use of information which had been drawn from the past in order to draw conclusions and is most widely used when the topic under investigation is long term, which makes longitudinal or prospective studies impractical.

4.3.4.6.1 Definition of retrospective research

According to Jupp (2006) retrospective research simply refers to the collection of data about past events. This also served as the working definition for this research project. Jupp (2006) further explains that retrospective research designs would ordinarily be employed to measure and understand change and also to include a time dimension to the collected data, thereby to identify causal factors contributing to any observed changes. An important element of this form of research, namely the ability of a retrospective study to detect change and determine causes for it, depends largely on how effectively the researcher has been able to reconstruct the past from the vantage point of the present.

4.3.4.6.2 Features of retrospective research

The main aim of this form of research is to collect retrospective data as a means of measuring change for descriptive or explanatory purposes. Jupp (2006) identified certain distinctive features of this form of research as described below.

- **Recalling information**

This form of research relies on participants recalling past information, however they may vary with regards to the extent to which they rely on such recall. An oral history such as was obtained in this research project relied fully on participants to recall the past. In other cases past information that was recalled may have been compared to some information in the present, for example where adults were requested to describe their marital satisfaction at the time (say 5 years after having had children) as well as to recall their marital satisfaction prior to having had children. Retrospective data may be collected to form part of a research project where contemporary data are collected, or to serve as the initial phase of a longer term prospective research study described earlier (Jupp, 2006).

- **Implicitly cross sectional**

A large number of cross sectional studies contain some retrospective questions. According to Rosnow and Rosenthal (1999) this refers to a design that takes a slice of time and examines several age groups during one period. Gravetter and Forzano (2009) explain this differently, namely that the term cross-sectional longitudinal designs may appear internally contradictory. However, certain research projects are accurately referred to as such. Many research studies compare results obtained from separate samples (like a cross-sectional design) that were obtained on different occasions (such as a longitudinal design). In most cases such a design examines the development of a variable other than the aging of the individual.

An illustration of the aforementioned is the study by Pope, Ionescu-Pioggia and Pope (2001) who evaluated how illegal drug use and lifestyle had changed over a 30 year period. In conducting that project the researchers returned to the college every 10 years to measure first year students' attitudes and behaviours in relation to these aspects. Retrospective studies can, however, be distinguished from cross-sectional and prospective designs in that prospective studies collect information about the present and subsequently track cases forward in time while collecting new, contemporary information on each occasion to identify measures of change. Furthermore, in its purest format cross-sectional designs collect information only about the present and are unable to construct any measures of change at all (Jupp, 2006).

4.3.4.6.3 Strengths of retrospective research

Jupp (2006) explains that possibly the most beneficial aspect of retrospective research is that it is a fast and efficient method of providing measures of change and construction of life histories, while avoiding the cost implications and time related to waiting for change to occur. In some cases the relevant data were not collected at a particular point in time, which leaves no other alternative to obtain it than utilising retrospectively obtained information to investigate patterns of change. Jupp (2006) adds that obtaining information about significant past occurrences can be highly reliable. In such a way retrospective research can be highly valuable in constructing life histories about particular past events, as was also the case in this research project.

4.3.4.6.4 Limitations of retrospective research

As is the case with any form of research, retrospective research also contains certain limitations. The most significant challenge highlighted by Jupp (2006) in this regard is that the participant may not accurately remember what the

researcher may be inquiring about. As such, faulty memory poses a significant limitation to this form of research as the participants may simply misremember, or the possibility of “telescoping” or “reverse telescoping” may emerge. “Telescoping” or “reverse telescoping” is a problem related to time, for example what an individual may remember as having occurred five years earlier may in fact have occurred two years earlier. It may also have occurred seven years earlier (Jupp, 2006).

Jupp (2006) elaborates that in remembering the past, those individuals may in some instances, particularly where subjective states are being recalled, reconstruct these states in the light of present circumstances. Furthermore, selective remembering may also pose a threat, such as where the recollection of the quality of a marriage prior to divorce may often differ from what the same individual would have provided prior to the divorce. This could lead to a situation where certain aspects or occurrences may be remembered and seen as significant, while others may have been forgotten or re-interpreted.

By strongly relying on an individual’s existing memories and ability to recall them, it is highlighted above that retrospective research is not without its limitations or challenges. It is vital that special care is taken when using this form of research, particularly when investigating subjective states or less memorable events, as was also the case in this research project. Despite the aforementioned, retrospective research designs play a valuable role in social science as Jupp (2006) remarks that retrospective studies are ordinarily best suited to the construction of sequences of significant events. From this perspective retrospective research can provide valuable insights into the sequence of events in the lives of human beings or into changes at aggregate level. As such it was also found to be well suited for this particular research study.

4.4. Research methodology of the present study

Following the above discussion of phenomenological and retrospective research designs, the following sections will outline how these aspects specifically relate to the current research study.

4.4.1 Motivation for the use of a phenomenological research design within the present study

In relation to what was discussed earlier in this chapter on the nature of phenomenological research (compare 4.3.4), Lester (1999) explains that the main purpose of phenomenological research is to illuminate the specific. In addition phenomenological research also aims to identify phenomena as they are perceived by participants in a given situation. This ordinarily involves obtaining detailed information and perceptions from those involved by making use of inductive, qualitative methods such as discussions, participant observation and as used in the present study, by means of interviews. These interviews were represented from the perspective of the research participants. The investigation of their subjective experiences on a deep and detailed level was therefore at the core of this procedure, as phenomenological research is concerned with the study of experiences from an individual's unique point of view.

Lester (1999) adds that phenomenological research approaches are focused on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity that emphasises the importance of the personal perspective and interpretations of individuals. This makes it a highly effective method for gaining insight into the motivations and actions of human beings, while avoiding the clutter of assumptions and so-called conventional wisdom. Husserl (1970) further explains that in its most pure form phenomenological research seeks to describe rather than explain with its point of departure to be free of hypotheses or preconceptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research allows it to be utilised as the basis for

practical theory and to inform, support or challenge policies and actions. When considering the aforementioned, the phenomenological research framework was deemed the most appropriate research framework by the researcher to achieve the aim of the study discussed in the following section.

4.4.2 Aims of the present study

The focus of the present study fell on how young adults between the ages of 19 and 35 years had coped with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescence years. As such the aims of the present study were:

- To investigate and obtain a clearer understanding of young adults' coping with divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years.
- To determine if there were factors that played a role in coping with parental divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to the parents of children undergoing divorce.
- To determine what recommendations could be made to children while undergoing parental divorce.

The research questions that were used in the present study for the aforementioned purpose included:

- How did young adults cope with the divorce of their parents during their childhood and/or adolescent years?
- Were there factors that played a role in their coping and if so, what were the factors?
- What would they recommend to the parents of children during and after divorce?
- What would they recommend to children during and after parental divorce?

4.4.3 Research hypotheses

In accordance with the phenomenological and exploratory nature of this investigation, no hypotheses were made upon the aims as set out above.

4.4.4 Participant selection

Participant selection within phenomenological research entails different considerations than those found in other research approaches such as the quantitative, positivist research approach (Polkinghorne, 1989). In the aforementioned research method participants are commonly selected randomly from a population under investigation in order to generalise the findings to the entire population. Phenomenological research focuses on describing the structure of experience of participants. As such, participants are selected in phenomenological research that may generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analysing the phenomenon.

Phenomenological research uses non-probability sampling procedures where participants are included because they have certain knowledge of the phenomena (Gibbins & Thomson, 2001). One form of non-probability sampling entails snowball sampling. The selection of the participants in the present study entailed snowball sampling as young adults were allowed to nominate acquaintances whom they believed may also be willing to participate in the research until data saturation had taken place (Whitley, 2002). Through snowball sampling young adults, either married or divorced, were therefore selected who had experienced the divorce of their parents at least 5 years earlier and during either their middle childhood or adolescent years.

Nolte (2002) describes young adults as individuals between the ages of approximately 18 and 25 years who have completed schooling or who are in the process of completing it. Furthermore, these individuals are regarded to be in the

process of furthering their qualifications or alternatively engaging into the labour market. Nolte (2002) however added that it is difficult to assign a specific age time limit to describe early adulthood due to the unique and subjective circumstances that accompanies all human beings. Louw et al. (1999) describes early adulthood from a developmental psychology perspective as the period of life that lasts from the age of 20 until 39 years and middle adulthood from 40 until 59 years. Louw et al. (1999) however also warned that these age limits should not be applied too rigidly as multiple factors may influence people such as their unique contexts and their levels of personal maturity. In an effort to avoid confusion the present study aimed to include a wide range of individuals and so regarded young adults as individuals between the ages of 19 and 35 years.

Interviews were further not limited to a certain number but rather continued until data saturation had taken place in order to deepen, enrich and complete categories, themes and concepts as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

With a clearer understanding of how the respective participants had been selected, attention will be given to the data collection phase as utilised in this research study.

4.4.5 Data collection

Within phenomenological research original data will contain “naive” descriptions obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. Following this the researcher describes the structure of the experience based on reflection and interpretation of the participants’ responses. The aim is to determine what the experience means for people who have undergone the experience and from there general meanings are derived (Moustakas, 1994).

Because a phenomenological methodology attempts to describe the meaning of participants’ experiences and does not attempt to offer explanations of behaviour,

this method was utilised within this study (Lester, 1999). In the current study it was aimed to describe and understand young adults' experiences in coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence. The nature of the research question led the researcher to conclude that non-directive, personal research interviews conducted personally by the researcher would be the most appropriate method to gather the information (compare 4.3.4.4).

After written, informed consent had been obtained the interviews commenced. The interviews followed the guidelines of Polkinghorne (1989) and Colaizzi (1978) that suggest both an open-ended as well as semi-structured format. The purpose for this was to attempt to gather information on specific situations and action sequences related to the topic under investigation, as opposed to simply obtaining general opinions. The semi-structured interviews were further not prescribed in terms of duration but instead to last until it appeared to the researcher that all of the topics had been covered and no further concepts were being revealed.

In summary, upon meeting with candidates the purpose of the study was first explained to each of them and their anonymity assured. The participants were then offered the opportunity to ask any questions. The voluntary nature of the study was also confirmed, after which those who agreed to continue with participation completed the informed consent document formulated for this study (Appendix A). Next the relevant phenomenological interviews were conducted by the researcher personally until data saturation had taken place.

4.4.6 Method of data analysis

According to Polkinghorne (1989) analysis aims to determine and reveal structures, logic and interrelationships that occur within the phenomena under investigation. This forms a very important phase within phenomenological research as a description of the essential features of the experiences of the

participants is obtained from naive descriptions. In order to achieve this, the following steps as advocated by Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1997) and Van Kaam (1969) were adapted and followed by the researcher.

- **Phase 1: Reading of protocols**

The researcher reads through the protocols to obtain a holistic view of the content.

- **Phase 2: Division of transcripts into natural meanings units (NMUs)**

After having obtained a holistic view of the contents of the transcripts, the researcher divides them into units that appear to communicate a self-contained meaning, also referred to as natural meanings units (NMUs). This is achieved by means of “bracketing” whereby preconceived ideas of what is known about the phenomena under investigated are suspended by the researcher. The divisions into NMUs takes place as they occur naturally within the text and not according to when or how it is expected by the researcher.

- **Phase 3: Linguistic transformation**

All the selections of the previous phase are next reduced and linguistically transformed into more accurate and descriptive terms. In doing so the researcher aims to explicitly express the implicit psychological aspects of the meaning units. The researcher further focuses on moving from the raw data obtained from the participants to the hidden meanings, while not severing all connections with the original data. In doing so, sections that are not regarded as intrinsically part of the experience under discussion as well as all elements that blend several parts, are removed from the reduced list. This process is also referred to as the first order profile as it is the first transformation of the participants’ words to those of the researcher.

- **Phase 4: Integration of natural meaning units (NMUs) with related themes**

In this phase each meaning unit is integrated with its relevant theme in terms of the topic under investigation. The research problem is then put to each unit and its related first order profile as derived from the previous phase. This is done in an attempt to obtain a second transformation or second order profile wherein the researcher aims to generate the essence of that situation for the participants in respect to the phenomena under investigation. In this process further redundant elements are removed from the profile.

- **Phase 5: Synthesis**

Once the natural meaning units have been transformed into psychological terminology, the researcher attempts to synthesise them into descriptive statements of essential and non-redundant psychological meanings.

- **Phase 6: Development of a general description**

Following the descriptions made for each individual participant, the researcher will develop a general description by focusing on all aspects that are regarded as trans-situational or descriptive of the phenomenon in general. The transformed natural meaning units from the various individual descriptions are therefore synthesised into a final general description of the structure of the phenomenon under investigation. It is then evaluated again by the researcher in order to determine whether it either lacks relevant critical aspects related to the experience being described, or contains more aspects than the required components of the topic.

Next, the hypothetical description will be revised to either reduce or expand its elements appropriately and will be done repeatedly until the researcher has

determined that the hypothetical description embodies the inherent elements in the structure in a new random sample of protocols. Subsequently the hypothetical description is considered to represent a valid identification and description of experience. The validity will endure until new cases of the experience, which do not correspond to the constituents in the given formula, are documented.

Throughout the steps outlined above the elements of phenomenological theory serve as a broad framework for the structuring, organisation and categorisation of the data. Awareness of the process of data collection, participant selection and the procedure of the study were discussed in the preceding sections. The next sections indicate how the important aspects of trustworthiness and ethical considerations were considered and managed by the researcher in the current study.

4.4.7 Trustworthiness

Working within any particular framework lends itself to criticism from those who view that work from a different perspective. In this regard the criterion utilised in this research was made explicit according to the purpose and orientation of this research to enhance credibility (Patton, 2002). The findings and methods which were utilised were all grounded in both relevant and applicable theoretical frameworks.

According to Polkinghorne (1983) four qualities can be utilised to help the reader evaluate the power and trustworthiness of phenomenological accounts, namely vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance. This research aimed to generate a sense of reality and a personal recognition of the phenomenon through precise and rich description. Furthermore, it was attempted to present the data poignantly in order to encourage engagement with the descriptions.

The researcher also aimed to suspend any former personal assumptions in order to maintain an open approach towards the phenomenon as it presented itself. In addition to this the researcher also engaged in active and sustained reflection during the data interpretation process. Systematic readings of the transcript were undertaken by focusing on the phenomenon (by means of immersion and reflection) while obtaining verification of transcripts of data followed by the description of emerging structures, themes and components. This was done to attempt to ensure quality and to highlight the complexity of the participants' experiences (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The documentation was further conducted in such a manner so as to allow other researchers to follow the investigative process. A peer review group consisting of three other registered psychologists was also requested to critically examine the researcher's analyses in an effort to overcome any possible intrinsic bias and to ensure that no important themes or other information may have been missed (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Throughout the data analysis phase, in addition to continuous checking for representativeness of data and fit between coding categories and data, critical awareness of the limitations of data analysis further reduced bias and increased this study's trustworthiness (Smith, 2007). This important element of the study closely links with ethical considerations as discussed in the next section.

4.4.8 Ethical considerations

Rosnow and Rosenthal (1999) indicate that the nature of phenomenological research which entails accessing an individual's unique life-world, could be intrusive. Furthermore, the sensitivity of the topic exacerbated this aspect and as such the researcher was committed to first and foremost accept the responsibility in this study to protect the rights, needs, values and wishes of all of the participants (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999).

In an effort to uphold this responsibility the researcher followed the safeguards suggested by Cresswell (1994) that include clearly and articulately explaining the research topic and objectives to each participant. Furthermore, the voluntary and anonymous nature of the information obtained by participants was highlighted within the introductory letter that all of the participants received.

Participants were also requested to complete an informed consent document compiled for this study while being verbally reminded of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the content of their interviews prior to commencing with them. The participants were further assured that the research project had been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of North-West University (Potchefstroom campus) number: NWU 00103-11-S1. Steps were further also taken throughout the research process to protect the anonymity of the participants by ensuring that only the researcher conducted the interviews personally and that all of the documentation completed by the participants was securely guarded in a safe place so as to ensure confidentiality.

No participants suffered any pain or harm of any kind throughout the research process. As was foreseen, due to the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation, it may have been emotionally distressing for participants. In those cases where it was found by the researcher that a participant may be in need of any further assistance in whatever form (psychological treatment) the appropriate referrals were made to a qualified specialist without delay. The differing cultural beliefs of the participants, specifically cultural beliefs about the values associated with divorce that impacts on all aspects of social life in any given culture, were also carefully considered. The study was also conducted under the close guidance and supervision of a promoter from the North-West University (Potchefstroom campus) with experience and knowledge in the field of PhD research (Eagle, 1998).

4.5 Conclusions

Proper planning and the execution of that plan forms one of the most fundamental and crucial elements of conducting useful, accurate and ethical research.

This chapter outlined how this particular research project was planned and executed. It revealed the objective of the study, the sampling procedure and the trustworthiness of the results. It explained how after the process of analysing the words, phrases and sentences of the interview transcripts, thereby breaking up the data into distinct parts, the concepts relevant to the exploration of adults' coping with their parents' divorce during childhood or adolescence, were identified.

Furthermore, ethical considerations were also discussed in Chapter 4. These concepts were subsequently connected, forming various themes followed by sub-themes. All of these concepts and themes are discussed as part of the findings of the present study in Chapter 5, where each theme is named and explained, indicating and describing the concepts that have been connected to that particular theme or sub-theme.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

The data collected from the interviews with the young adult participants who had participated in the current study, were analysed using the retrospective phenomenological methodology as discussed in Chapter 4. In this chapter the results of the study will be discussed and related to other research findings.

5.2 Biographical information

Table 5.1 sets out the biographical details of the young adults who took part in the present study and who will from here on be referred to as the participants.

Table 5.1: Gender, race, age, occupation and educational qualification/s of the participants

	Gender	Race	Age	Occupation	Highest qualification
Participant 1	Female	White	30 years	Counselling Psychologist	Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology
Participant 2	Female	White	23 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 3	Male	White	24 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 4	Female	White	20 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 5	Male	White	28 years	Entrepreneur	Grade 12
Participant 6	Male	White	21 Years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 7	Female	White	22 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 8	Female	White	19 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 9	Female	White	22 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 10	Male	Black	21 Years	Student	Grade 12

Participant 11	Male	White	34 years	Business Consultant	Bachelor of Engineering
Participant 12	Female	White	21 years	Student	Grade 12
Participant 13	Female	Black	22 years	Student	Bachelor of Arts
Participant 14	Female	White	31 years	Teacher	Bachelor of Arts
Participant 15	Male	White	23 years	Student	Bachelor of Theology

5.2.1 Sample size

A total of fifteen participants were interviewed for the purpose of the present study. In accordance with the recommendations by Straus and Corbin (1998) the researcher continued to interview young adults until it was perceived that data saturation had been achieved.

5.2.2 Age

The mean age of the participants was twenty four years at the time of interview. The youngest participant was twenty years old and the eldest participant was thirty four years of age. As discussed in Chapter 4, the present study regarded young adults as individuals between the ages of nineteen and thirty five years. Therefore, the participants fell within the age group of young adults in the early adulthood phase of their development and as such the present sample met with that requirement. Furthermore, this means that the aim of consulting with individuals in early adulthood for the present study had been achieved.

5.2.3 Gender

Of the fifteen participants interviewed, nine (60%) were female and six (40%) were male. This means that the sample is fairly representative in terms of the genders of the participants with a slightly higher percentage of females as opposed to males.

5.2.4 Race

Out of the fifteen participants thirteen (86%) were white and two (14%) were black.

5.2.5 Occupations

Of the fifteen young adults interviewed eleven (73.3%) were full-time students while four (26.7%) were employed – as a counselling psychologist, entrepreneur, primary school teacher and business consultant respectively.

5.2.6 Educational qualifications

Ten (66.7%) of the participants held a grade twelve certificate as their highest educational qualification. Importantly all ten of these participants were in the process of completing tertiary qualifications at the time. The remaining five (33.3%) of the participants had already completed a tertiary qualification, namely a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology; a Bachelor of Theology; two Bachelor of Arts and one Bachelor of Engineering degree respectively.

5.2.7 Passage of time since parental divorce

There was a wide variance with regard to the duration between the time of parental divorce/separation and the interviews, with the mean amount of years in this regard having been fifteen. This means that all of the participants in the present study met the criteria for participation in the study in that at least five years had elapsed since the parental divorce until the date of the interview.

5.2.8 Home language

All of the participants were either English (26.7%) or Afrikaans (73.3%) speaking. They were each interviewed in their home language, namely either Afrikaans or English.

5.3 Findings of the present study

All of the following concepts in the findings of the present study are those formulated from the data and identified by the researcher as relevant to the aims of the study, as outlined in Chapter 4. The concepts have been grouped into themes and sub-themes which have all been named so as to identify them. They will be discussed in detail in the next sections of this chapter according to the following.

- Table 5.2 will display a list of the various themes and sub-themes relating to adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence.
- Table 5.3 will display a list of the various factors that were identified to hinder the themes and sub-themes identified by the participants named in Table 5.2.
- Table 5.4 will display themes relating to recommendations for parents regarding coping with divorce.
- Table 5.5 will display themes relating to recommendations for children regarding coping with parental divorce.

Pertinent vignettes from the interviews will be offered to illustrate the data that support the theme identified and the sub-themes created. These are, however, mere examples of the concepts as it would be impractical to report all of the examples. Where participants are directly quoted their words are printed in italic.

Furthermore, where interviews were conducted in Afrikaans the words used by the participants were translated into English in the following discussions.

Table 5.2: Summary of themes and sub-themes relating to adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence

Themes:	1. Cognitive coping strategies	2. Communication as coping strategy	3. Distraction and avoidance as coping strategy	4. Spiritual coping
Sub – themes:	1.1. Persistence 1.2. Re-appraisal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance and personal growth • Reframing 1.3. Problem solving	2.1. Choice to communicate 2.2. Effective communication in the following relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships • Parents • Extended family members • School teachers • Psychotherapists /Counsellors • Romantic partners 		

5.3.1 Themes and sub-themes relating to adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence

All themes identified from the participants in the present study relating to coping with parental divorce during childhood or adolescence will be discussed in the following sections. The themes were divided into four main themes, namely cognitive coping strategies, communication as coping strategy, distraction and avoidance as coping strategy and spiritual coping. These themes were found to be similar in certain respects to other findings from the literature, such as proposed by Sorensen (1993) discussed in Chapter 2, namely the cognitive-behavioural, cognitive-intra-psychic and interpersonal-coping-behavioural domains. The main themes of the present study will be discussed in the following

section with references to those themes identified by Sorensen (1993) as well as other similar findings from the literature that were discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Responses from the participants were quoted where applicable to validate the findings from the various themes.

5.3.1.1 First theme: Cognitive coping strategies

The concepts and strategies identified within this theme are all regarded to be aspects related to the participants' personal cognitive coping strategies, which included purposeful decisions they had made in an effort to cope with the divorce of their parents. As such they excluded communication, avoidance, distraction and spiritually-based coping strategies, which were included in the other main themes.

This theme was found to be very similar to the cognitive-behavioural domain described by Sorensen (1993) as being characterised by internal-focused, emotional and intellectually focused coping behaviours, with the present theme excluding emotional aspects relating to coping. As descriptions of the subsequent themes and sub-themes follow, it will become evident that a number of them appear to be closely related and to overlap in certain respects. As such, some of the same statements by participants were at times utilised to highlight different themes and sub-themes. The categorisation of the themes depicted in Table 5.2 is nevertheless regarded by the researcher as the most descriptive and appropriate for the present study:

5.3.1.1.1 First sub-theme: Persistence

Persisting throughout the change and associated impact of parental divorce was a purposive cognitive coping strategy employed by a number of the participants in the present study. A number of them felt that their ability and decision to persist through the stressful change associated with the divorce of their parents

had greatly assisted them to cope with the event during that time of their lives. Reber (1995) states that “persistence suggests an admirable striving against opposition” (p.554). The process of persisting in the face of parental divorce mostly entails accepting that the event is taking place as well as accepting that its effects will subside with the passage of time.

A number of participants directly and/or indirectly referred to persistence, such as participant 3 who stated that he had “*just tried to carry on and to adjust*” during the process of his parents’ divorce. Similarly participant 1 stated that “*I just had to learn to carry on*” as well as participant 13 who said “*I just continued day to day, last out things*”. Participant 11 agreed with the previous participants by stating that “*I just carried on*”. Furthermore, when asked how effective this approach had been as a coping strategy at the time, participant 11 answered that “*it is effective*”.

Deciding to persist throughout the changes associated with parental divorce, had therefore assisted the participants to cope with parental divorce. The sub-theme of persistence appears to be closely related to the sub-theme of enduring, as suggested by Sorensen (1993) who explains that within this framework enduring refers to the strategy of acceptance and bearing of circumstances.

5.3.1.1.2 Second sub-theme: Re-appraisal

A number of participants reported instances of having made use of the re-appraisal coping strategy in different forms. Acceptance and personal growth as well as reframing were found to be the most prominently reported examples of re-appraisals.

- **Acceptance and personal growth**

Participant 9 indicated how acceptance of her parents' divorce had brought about relief and in the process had assisted her to cope by focusing on the benefits to her life following their divorce as opposed to the apparent detrimental effects it had brought about in her life at the time: *"I believe how I handled weekend visits was the most effective. Once I accepted okay this weekend we are going to visit my father, we are living there, we adjust to his circumstances and then we go back to my mother and adjust there again. That worked quite well."* Furthermore, participants 5, 11 and 15 all stated that *"you just have to accept it [the divorce]"*. From the aforementioned it is clear how these participants' choice to accept the change in their circumstances brought about by their parents' divorce, had assisted them to cope effectively with the event.

Participant 5 also indicated how his personal growth had assisted him not only to cope more effectively with the divorce, but also to grow more determined to achieve his personal goals: *"There is a lot of stuff that has happened [throughout the divorce], but its okay. I am through it now and still focused, and I know where I am going and who I want to become. So yes, none of those things [relating to the divorce] had.... Actually I think it had made me stronger and more driven to achieve my goals."*

Participant 3 agreed with participant 5 as he explained that through having had to frequently move with his mother following his parents' divorce he had grown stronger: *"We moved a lot and it was a lot, all those changes, after some time it however doesn't become a factor anymore because it happens so often that you grow stronger from it in the process."* Participant 1 explained how her parental divorce had contributed to her personal growth in becoming a psychologist later in life by stating: *"I think I learned empathy there, you know to... How to process all of the things that they (her parents) had said to me at the time."*

Re-appraisal is referred to as cognitive re-defining by Sorensen (1993) who states that it refers to intellectual or emotional attempts to alter thoughts, perceptions and/or self-talk. This is also in accordance with the findings of Spalding and Pretorius (2001) as referred to in Chapter 3, who found that by adopting a more positive attitude and seeking for positive meaning from a parental divorce, adolescents were able to cope more effectively with the divorce of their parents. With respect to resilience Roux (2007) also notes that promoting resilience in the pre- and post-divorce phases, contributes to children's effective coping with the divorce process.

- **Reframing**

Another form of re-appraisal coping is referred to as reframing. This technique had also been utilised by a number of the participants in the present study. According to Haley (1967) relabeling or reframing entails viewing an event or a problem from a different perspective, almost like when the same picture is given a new frame and the picture appears different because of it. This frees an individual to think and behave differently in a new context that offers new alternatives not seen before. Examples of reframing that had been utilised by the participants in the present study included absolving themselves of guilt, utilisation of humour, forgiving parents and developing empathy for parents during the process of the divorce.

In the present study one form of reframing that was reported came in the form of changing perceptions through absolving oneself of guilt for the parental divorce. Most of the participants explained that this had been a vital part of their coping processes, as explained by participant 9 who said: *"The biggest thing is just don't feel that it is your fault, it isn't... That is a way to cope."* Participant 6 agreed by saying: *"Realise it is not your fault. This is a difficult one to believe for a child as a child will still feel that it is his fault in some way."* Similarly participant 11 also explained that when children are experiencing the divorce of their parents it

would be important for them *“to see that the divorce is something between the mother and father, so that they do not feel responsible”*. Furthermore, participant 1 also stated that it had assisted her in coping to remind herself that her parents’ divorce was *“not my fault”*.

Another example of reframing entails the use of humour. Participant 2 explained how she had used humour in her approach to reframe the detrimental effects of her parents’ divorce in an effort to cope more effectively: *“I also learnt how to handle conflict then, and learnt to handle things that a lot of my friends don’t know how to handle because I saw my mom handle them, or not [laugh].”*

Another form of reframing referred to by a number of the participants in the present study entailed forgiveness – in particular forgiving parents for the divorce and its associated effects. In this regard participant 12 explained that in her parents’ situation her father had initiated the divorce proceedings and had started a new relationship with another partner prior to the finalisation of the legal divorce. She explained that prior to the finalisation of the legal divorce: *“I had written off my father for approximately three months, I had no communication with him.... I... He was just money to me.... I know it sounds bad but that’s how it was, I had resented him”*. She however added later: *“And then I learned to forgive my father because I ultimately realised that I have also done so many things in my life which my father had needed to forgive me for”*. From this example it becomes evident that re-appraisal by means of the reframing approach of forgiveness, significantly assists children and adolescents to cope with their parents’ divorce.

Related to forgiveness, empathy for parents’ experience of the divorce also refers to a form of reframing that had assisted a number of the participants in the present study to cope with their parental divorce. Vorster (2011) explains that empathy entails understanding another individual from that individual’s own perspective or frame of reference in a manner that makes that person feel

understood. Participant 1 explained how developing empathy by placing herself in her parents' position has been an effective coping strategy: *"I think I learned empathy there, you know, to... How to process all of the things that they [her parents] had said to me at the time"*.

Similarly and intertwined with absolving himself of the responsibility for his parents' divorce, participant 11 explained that when children experience parental divorce they need to develop empathy and forgiveness as an effective coping strategy under these circumstances: *"[children need] to see that the divorce is something between the mother and father, so that they do not feel responsible... but also to help them to directly see their parents in an empathic light, rather than viewing them in a judgemental light... Or I would try to explain to them that it is incredibly difficult for their parents to go through it [the divorce]... That it is incredibly painful for them as well, not only for the children, it is for the parents like losing an arm or a leg... You know, maybe in this way by casting their parents in that light, instead of people who are doing something wrong in their lives it would be easier for children to deal with it [parental divorce]"*.

The re-appraisal coping strategy closely resembles behavioural reframing, which refers to instances where children or adolescents attempt to change their perceptions of the stressor or to minimise it (Sorensen, 1993). Furthermore, within the field of positive psychology, re-appraisal is referred to as positive reappraisal and resilience. Positive reappraisal is described in the literature as when people attempt to reappraise a given situation in order to view it in a different, more optimistic or "positive" perspective (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

5.3.1.1.3 Third sub-theme: Problem solving

On a more pragmatic level parental divorce often brings about new problems and difficulties in the lives of children affected by it, such as financial concerns and having to adjust to new and changing environments. From the present study a

number of the participants explained that solving or contributing to solve some of these problems had significantly assisted them to cope. A number of examples were presented that were at times closely related to distraction and avoidance discussed in the previous sub-theme. Participant 10 stated that immediately following the divorce of his parents he and his siblings had stayed with their mother who experienced significant financial stress. However, his attempts to subsequently assist himself as well as his mother to cope with these financial stresses had greatly benefited him, as he explained: *“Financially it was a huge struggle... So I did like you know funny things to earn money at school like I made lemonade and sold lemonade.... I think it helped my mom out a lot... it helped me do silly things like pay for civvies day”*.

Similarly participant 14 explained how she had assisted her mother in particular to address the financial problems during her parents' divorce: *“There was immediate financial pressure and we struggled financially when my mother moved out with us [during the divorce process]. So I think from that point of view, my sister and I started to deliver newspapers [to earn extra money]”*.

In attempting to solve the problem of her younger sister's exposure to their parental conflict participant 9 reported that she had attempted to protect her younger sister by keeping her away as far as possible from conflict situations between their parents: *“I simply tried to stay out of the house, I always heard a fight between my parents and so I just tried to stay away from it and to keep my sister away from it”*. In doing so she adopted the role of protector of his sister, which also assisted her to cope more effectively in the process. Similarly participant 1 reported that over time she had learned how to solve the problem of continued parental conflict in her presence by avoiding situations where her parents had to be in each other's presence. In her resolution of this problem she experienced significant relief, which also assisted her to cope more effectively in the process: *“Just keep them away from each other... I didn't have a wedding*

with them there because I have learned to keep them away from each other and that made it much easier for me”.

Sorensen (1993) refers to problem solving as instances where a stressful situation is addressed directly. This form of coping strategy is referred to by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as problem-focused strategies according to which an individual attempts to gain a clear understanding of a problem at hand so as to seek the most optimal solution for that particular problem. Vorster (2011) describes this type of coping strategy as the variable of problem-solving skills when evaluating the pattern of interaction that an individual holds in relation to his or her particular environment. Vorster (2011) explains that according to this variable an individual may either hold a sufficient or inefficient repertoire of problem-solving skills to address a particular problem. In cases where it is not sufficient, the individual may either hold or not hold the capacity to acquire these required skills based on a multitude of factors.

5.3.1.2 Second theme: Communication coping strategies

Following a discussion of the participants' cognitive coping strategies that they had personally employed during the divorce of their parents, the following theme entails communication-based coping strategies that were revealed by the participants in the present study. This involves elements relating to interpersonal relationships and in particular communication with others, which they had found beneficial in coping with parental divorce, such as communicating effectively in friendship, parental, romantic and extended family relationships. They also refer to open and effective communication with school teachers and in cases where counselling or psychotherapy had been sought, with their respective counsellors or psychotherapists. Although this theme also entails the *choice* to communicate, the emphasis falls on the *quality* of the actual communication between the child and the other after the choice had been made to communicate.

Communication coping strategies identified in the present study appear to be strongly related to what Sorensen (1993) describes as the interpersonal-coping-behavioural domain of coping. Sorensen (1993) primarily emphasises support from the environment, and in particular social support. This approach towards coping is also referred to by Phelps and Jarvis (1994) as active coping, whereby individuals engage in behaviours that include making use of social support available to them. This theme, however, differs from social support as referred to by Sorensen (1993) and frequently by other authors in the literature (Amato 2000; Hobfoll, et al., 1994a; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos, 1994; Ntoumanis et al., 2009; Schaefer & Moos, 1992). In the present study communication refers to the actual quality of the communication that is taking place between individuals, as referred to by Vorster (2011). The communication in the relationship therefore involves more than only social support.

5.3.1.2.1 First sub-theme: Choice to communicate

Almost all of the participants indicated that choosing to express feelings regarding their experiences of the parental divorce had served as a highly effective coping strategy for them, regardless of whether that expression took place in the company of a trained psychotherapist/counsellor, friend, family member or other source of support such as a school teacher. Examples of statements to support this finding include that of participant 9 who recommended that during parental divorce children should *“not be scared to talk to their parents, go straight to them and tell them listen here, I am scared, I don’t know what’s going on”*. Similarly participant 12 explained: *“I really think that if your parents are going through a divorce you have to talk to someone who is not your parents.”*

Participant 13 agreed with participants 9 and 12 that what had made it easier for her to cope with her parental divorce, had been *“my mother and her support and also speaking to like friends, only particular people who knew about the divorce”*. Participant 10 explained that it is vital for children in this situation to *“have*

someone to express how they feel” to. On the other hand participant 13 explained that she had chosen not to share her feelings with others and to suppress it, which had led to long-term difficulties for her as she explained: “I bottled a lot of things up, so only life, the volcano only erupted later in my university life... I think... Ja... So during it, I feel like I was okay, I was doing what a normal kid should do. I played sport and other things, etc. But I didn’t address the situation. Only when they got divorced did things really hit home type of thing.” When inquiring from her what she would recommend to children who are undergoing parental divorce, participant 13 recommended: “They must also talk about how they feel... or make the children talk as much as possible about the divorce because bottling up, like I did, for eight to nine years, it sucks. It’s not going to help you, and it’s going to take you an extra twelve years in the future to work through it.”

From the aforementioned examples it appears evident that regardless of whom they express their emotions to, it is strongly advised by the participants that a child whose parents are in the process of divorce should decide to express their emotions about the event to another person in order to assist them to cope. In cases where they opt not to do so they would probably experience long-term difficulties as a consequence.

This particular coping strategy is also referred to as emotional expression by Sorensen (1993) who explains that it refers to behavioural manifestations of emotions according to that framework. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) refer to this coping strategy as an emotional-focused strategy, which involves one individual talking to another about a stressor in an attempt to obtain emotional support to cope with it. In doing so, the individual aims to relieve the discomfort caused by the particular problem or stressor. According to Von Wielligh (2003) this strategy is referred to as emotion-focused coping, according to which emotions are released through communication in the form of social support. In this process the

individual ordinarily makes him or herself vulnerable by talking about the stressor to another supportive individual and thereby releasing it.

5.3.1.2.2 Second sub-theme: Effective communication in relationships

- **Friendships**

Spending time in the company of friends and sharing feelings and thoughts with friends in an effective manner concerning the divorce of their parents, were frequently mentioned by the majority of the participants in the present study as having been a highly effective coping strategy. Participant 1 explained: *“I had lots of friends, I was part of a large group, I think that was another coping mechanism that I used to have... My best friend and I, we were so close to each other for four years and that was incredible. I believe that my friendship with her had made it much easier for me [to cope]... I believe it was my interaction, my close communication and relationships with other people that had made it much easier for me [to cope].”*

In her effort to cope participant 8 explained that she had instinctively decided when her parents divorced that she was going to *“try to remain amongst friends as much as possible.”* She also added that having done so had been effective for her to cope at the time. Similarly participant 2 suggested that children whose parents are getting divorced should *“get friends, find another support system because you can tell parents enough, to say that they need to support their children, but it’s obvious they’re very concerned about their own lives and sometimes it’s nice for children just to have a fun friend”*. Participant 13 remarked that *“having a close friend that you can spend time with and talk to about what is going on helps a lot”*. In this manner the important role of friendship was emphasised as a coping skill during parental divorce.

Participant 14 stated that following the divorce of her parents she felt more comfortable to invite friends to her home, which had assisted her to improve on her friendship relationships: *“There was a complete turnaround at that stage and for the first time we could really start to invite people over.”*

In a similar fashion Pretorius (2003) and Roux (2007) both found friendship to serve as a vital source of emotional support for children when their parents are in the process of divorce. In this manner difficult experiences could be normalised through sharing them with friends or by receiving advice from a friend.

- **Parents**

Open and effective communication between parents and children were identified to promote effective coping with parental divorce in the present study. In this respect participant 13 explained: *“My mother was very, I don’t know if I should say supportive, but she, she did try and provide as much support about the situation as possible, because she would talk to us about people get[sic] divorced, but it doesn’t mean that the parents hate each other.”* When asked what had made it easier for her to cope with the parental divorce participant 13 answered: *“My mother and her support and also speaking to like family friends, only particular people who knew about this divorce.”* In this manner receiving support from parents could assist children to cope more effectively with divorce.

Participant 9 indicated how another form of effective communication in the form of receiving frank and honest information about the divorce from her mother had significantly assisted her to cope more effectively in the process: *“My mother showed us the divorce settlement so that we could at least know what was going on.”* She recommended that parents be frank and honest in their communication with their children, which will assist them to cope more effectively: *“I think that they [parents] should just be open and honest [with their children] from the beginning, then the child will be able to cope much better and accept it [the*

divorce] much easier.” Effective communication for participant 1 involved asserting herself more in the communication with her parents, stating that this had assisted her to cope more effectively: *“In time I learned to talk [to her parents] about what I experienced and to say what I am thinking. You know, I wouldn’t just allow my father to talk badly about my mother any more or to allow my mother to just talk badly about my father any more so they both stopped doing it... This helped a lot [to cope].”*

From the aforementioned it is evident how effective communication with parents as well as with other significant individuals referred to under this particular theme, can greatly assist effective coping with parental divorce. However, in instances where ineffective communication exists between children and parents, this could significantly hinder coping among children during the divorce process. The present study yielded numerous examples among the participants of this, as will be highlighted in the section of factors which hinder effective coping later in this chapter. In the study by Roux (2007) optimal communication with the non-custodial parents is also highlighted as a factor that promotes effective coping among children during parental divorce.

- **Extended family**

Spending time in the company of extended family and sharing feelings and thoughts with them is another form of interpersonal support that almost all of the participants indicated as having been significantly helpful to cope with the divorce of their parents. Participant 2 indicated in this regard: *“I had a gran and an aunt who I was shipped off to, sort of in terms of coping when I was little, that’s where I coped and I had at least an extended family to go to.”* Participant 2 added that the value of the support from her extended family, particularly when she experienced her father as absent following the divorce, was invaluable for her at the time. This was particularly evident in situations where there still existed conflict between her parents and her, as she explained: *“What made it easier as*

well? Ja, it was having Gran and my Aunt ... if it was my Dad's weekend to have us, but he couldn't, instead of my mom getting more time and then complicating the routine, I would just go to my Aunt or my Gran, so the routine would stay the same. My Dad would just miss out because of his own business and stuff, or golfing stuff, ja... So it was nice to have a third bedroom you could say. Having a brother also helped."

Similarly participant 4 also described the value of effective communication resulting in support from her extended family members as she explained that while her parents were in the process of their divorce: *"I reached out to my grandparents a lot, my grandfather because I really looked for a male figure and I can say this, I had this problem since about the age of nineteen. It is when I actually realized the male figure isn't actually as important as what I thought it was before because I continuously tried to get my father's attention, well into my teens and it just never happened. So I think from that perspective, my grandfather died when I was eleven so that was quite significant in itself that I have[sic] lost another male figure. My father wasn't around and my brother didn't prove to be much of a male figure. So my idea of male figures were[sic] just, you know. So but I did reach out to my grandfather and he was very helpful in my coping strategies. He was probably the one person that actually understood where I was coming from."*

Participant 10 also added: *"My mom used to take us a lot to my grandfather's house. We used to stay there a lot of nights. I think, ja it was nice just to be around other people."* Similarly participant 1 noted that: *"I held a close bond with my extended family and I used to see them a lot which helped a lot [to cope]."*

From the aforementioned it becomes evident that communication resulting in support from the extended family, particularly grandparents, had been found to be an effective coping strategy for the participants in the present study. From the literature similar findings are identified by Roux (2007) who found that the support

provided by both grandparents and relatives is imperative for children to cope effectively with their parents' divorce. Furthermore, Sandler, Tein and West (1994) refer to this coping strategy as the active coping strategy of gathering social support from others. They further indicate that children who make use of this strategy cope more effectively with parental divorce, as was also determined in the case in the present study.

- **School teachers**

Spending time in the company of empathic and supportive school teachers and sharing feelings and thoughts with them was identified by the participants as having been extremely helpful in assisting them to cope. In this light participant 8 indicated that despite the support she had received from her mother, her school teachers were also highly supportive and had assisted her greatly to cope: *"My mother was relatively supportive and teachers at school were also supportive. Particularly one teacher, my English teacher."*

Similarly participant 6 stated that although he was not experiencing his family as being of much support at times during his parents' divorce, the support that he received at school during that period had greatly compensated in this respect and had assisted him to cope, as was evident from his statement: *"At least I had a very big support system from school."* For those participants who had experienced a strong support system from school it appeared to have served as a significant source of support to cope with the divorce of their parents.

On the other hand participant 2 described her school environment as not having been supportive in her situation and mentioned that it had actually contributed to the difficulties she had experienced at that time: *"They still feel so much sympathy for you in schools and the teachers always want to mother you because they think you don't have a mother or they gossip amongst themselves about you. They separated us, they asked us in front of everyone whose parents*

were still together. They made it quite obvious in pairing, like parents' evenings because they'd have all their sessions out in the open. So you'd see only that Dad went, or only that Mom went and that made it difficult, as the schools made it obvious that your parents weren't together." From this statement it becomes evident how ineffective communication between a teacher and child could hinder coping rather than assisting the child during a time of parental divorce. This factor is referred to again later in the chapter when factors that hinder coping will be discussed. This coping strategy is also underscored by Roux (2007) who found that teachers play an important role supporting children in divorce.

- **Psychotherapists/counsellors**

Undergoing individual and/or family therapy with psychotherapists/counsellors and receiving psycho-education from psychotherapists/counsellors were indicated by the majority of the participants as having been particularly beneficial to them to cope during their parents' divorce. Participant 10 explained that he greatly benefitted from effective communication between himself and a psychologist: *"I remember after my parents got divorced I went to see a psychologist... as I kept going, I don't know my mind sort of matured to the fact that you know I was hurt, you know when my psychologist would ask me a few questions about my father. Like I would cry, but I wouldn't know why. So subconsciously I was hurt a lot by my father leaving."*

Participant 10 added how he had gained both insight and relief from seeing a psychologist who had assisted him to cope: *"I think all the kids should go to a psychologist... I think it is very important that they do, it will help them emotionally. I mean like for me subconsciously then it gave me a better grasp on how I was feeling about the situation that I didn't know. You know because I became reasonably angry and more secluded by myself and going to a psychologist made me realise what I was doing."* Participant 1 noted that *"it also helped me to talk to a psychologist while everything was going on [referring to the*

divorce]". Similarly participant 2 added that: *"Seeing a psychologist also helped me to deal with their [her parents'] divorce."*

On the other hand ineffective communication with a psychotherapist/counsellor appeared not to promote effective coping. Participant 14 said: *"My mother took our whole family for pastoral counselling...personally I also went to see a psychologist."* Her experience was, however, that it had not been beneficial for her to cope. When asked how effective this had been to assist her she indicated: *"If only I had left the pastoral psychologist."* Participant 5 remarked that he had not benefitted from his interactions with psychologists, especially as he regarded them to have become part of the conflict between his parents: *"When I was with my father I went to a psychologist who would question me and all sorts of things. And my father told me to say certain things [to the psychologist]. And when I went to my mother then I went to another psychologist and then they told me to say different things again.... That made it harder and didn't help."*

From the aforementioned examples it is evident that undergoing counselling or psychotherapy greatly assisted the majority of the participants to cope, while for some it had not. The quality of the communication between the psychologist/counsellor and the child/adolescent therefore appears to determine how much it assists the child/adolescent to cope with parental divorce. This is also apparent in all of the other subthemes of this theme. Graff-Reed (ND) as well as Roux (2007) found that seeking counselling/psychotherapy is an effective coping strategy to cope with parental divorce.

- **Romantic partners**

For those participants who were adolescents and in romantic relationships at the time of their parents' divorce it appears that spending time in the company of the romantic partner and sharing feelings and thoughts with him or her had served as a significant source of support at the time. Participant 7 indicated that her

romantic partner at the time had greatly assisted her to cope with her parents' divorce in the form of offering her both a distraction as well as support: *"Most of the time I visited family, and especially my boyfriend at the time."*

Similarly participant 6 added: *"At that stage I was in a relationship and they, the parents of my girlfriend just felt that it was bad for me at the time to be at home. They had an extra room in their home and I moved in with them... And for me just to get out of the house at the time was a good thing. At least it took me out of that situation and there was less confrontation."* Respondent 15 noted that *"talking to my girlfriend then and other girlfriends later helped me [to cope with the divorce]"*.

5.3.1.3 Third theme: Distraction and avoidance as coping strategy

Similar to emotional expression discussed in the previous sub-theme, avoidance and distraction while parents were undergoing divorce appear to have been a very commonly utilised approach by the majority of the participants in the present study. Examples in the present study include the child or adolescent escaping to his or her room or by distracting him or herself by focusing on academics, hobbies, sports and other extra mural activities at school. Furthermore, escape into fantasy, listening to music and moving in on a temporary or permanent basis with another family member, friend or romantic partner, were also indicated by the participants in the present study. Physical exercise was also noted to be a highly effective form of coping strategy used to distract a number of the participants within the present study.

In support of the aforementioned, participant 13 explained: *"I just continued day to day ...I kept busy a lot, like I did all the counsel stuff at school, I did all the sport things at school."* Participant 9 agreed with participant 13 as she explained that she tried to *"stay out of the house"* in a similar manner to what participant 6 had done as he mentioned that he had tried as far as possible to *"stay out of"* his parents' divorce. Participant 7 indicated how she had decided not to think about

the divorce in her attempt to avoid it: *“I think I had tried to cut out a large part of it (from her memory).”*

Participant 8 indicated that she had attempted to distract herself by stating that she *“tried to stay as much as possible in between friends and tried to work harder on school work and sports”*. In another example of the use of avoidance and distraction to cope, participant 14 explained that she, her mother and siblings had moved *“to stay with my grandmother”*, as had also been the case for participant 2 who said that *“I had a Gran and an Aunt who I was shipped off to, sort of in terms of coping when I was little, that’s where I coped and I had at least an extended family to go to”*.

Furthermore, participant 9 indicated that when children’s parents are in the process of divorce they should: *“Try to get it out of your head, just think about other things, and listen to music or something just so you can get your head away from it. Keep your head with your work, your school work or whatever. Forget about your parents’ problems at that stage, it isn’t your problem it’s theirs.”* Similarly participant 15 indicated that: *“I had expected it long before it occurred [the divorce] so there was a measure of avoidance that took place with my parents... In other words I tried to distance myself or not to get involved with it.”* Similarly participant 1 stated that: *“I escaped a lot as well... you know, I would simply lie and dream for hours about anything.”*

Participant 7 indicated that physical exercise greatly assisted her to distract herself and in doing so cope more effectively during her parents’ divorce: *“I enjoyed exercise, especially netball because I found it to be an enjoyable group sport, so I did it a lot... I still see that it helps me to be physically active and distract me from things that worry me in the here and now, to manage it and to just allow my body to relax a little.”*

This view was also shared by participant 1 who stated: *“I did a lot of sport, a lot of public speaking and cultural activities and participated in competitions while also doing very well academically.”* When asked how effective this strategy had been participant 1 confirmed by stating: *“It was relatively effective, I think I expressed myself though sport, I was good at sport and even with cultural activities.... I think it helped me to get to know myself separately from them [her parents], because if I had to have come to know myself simply by looking at them or through their opinions of each other that would not have been a good place to be... So I believe it worked well for me to get to know different parts of myself and to express it.”*

From these and numerous other examples from statements by the participants in the present study, it appears that distraction and avoidance in any form was an important strategy that a number of them had implemented in an attempt to cope at the time with the divorce or their parents. Most of the participants agreed that avoidance and distraction had greatly assisted them to cope at the time, particularly during the initial stages of their parents' divorce, as explained by participant 6: *“For me just to have gotten out of the house was you know a good thing. So it at least took me out of that situation, the confrontation was less.”* On a similar note, when asked how effective avoidance and distraction had been for participant 8 as a coping strategy, she answered: *“I think relatively effective as my school work did not suffer.”*

This coping strategy is referred to as avoidance by Sorensen (1993), who indicates that it refers to instances where the child or adolescent will purposefully attempt to avoid a particular stressor. Furthermore, Phelps and Jarvis (1994) refer to this coping strategy as avoidant coping and explain that it entails denial that a certain stressful life event had occurred and that it had impacted on the individual. They add that it is particularly employed among adolescents who attempt to remove themselves from a particular situation at times by harmful

means such as abusing illegal substances in an attempt to “escape” from the reality of their circumstances.

5.3.1.4 Fourth theme: Spiritual coping

Some of the participants in the present study referred to how they had made use of their spiritual beliefs to assist them to cope with the divorce of their parents. As spirituality is a multifaceted form of coping, which involves both cognition and emotion it was decided to refer to it as a separate theme in the present study. Some of the participants in the present study noted that relying on their spirituality to not only make sense of their parental divorce but also to depend on their religion, in particular led to relief and even personal growth. In this manner it greatly assisted them to cope with their parental divorce.

Participant 3 in particular noted: *“A big thing that I took on [during the parental divorce process] was the religious aspect. It is something that I held on to very strongly and I also grew a lot in my religious beliefs [during the process of his parents’ divorce].”* Participant 12 agreed that she had also relied on and grew from a religious perspective during the divorce process which had greatly assisted her to cope: *“Religion is everything to me. It is something that you have to consistently pray about [the divorce].”* Participant 6 stated that *“it also helped me a lot to pray about everything that was stressing me at that time about the future, especially about what would happen after the divorce”*.

From this perspective it is evident how reliance on their spiritual beliefs had assisted those participants to find solace and comfort during their parents’ divorce and as such served as an effective strategy to cope with that event at the time.

Similar findings were made by Roux (2007) who found that the church played a significant role in supporting children and adolescents who experience parental

divorce. Furthermore, spiritual support is identified by Roux (2007) to be an effective coping strategy for those children who hold strong religious beliefs.

5.3.2 Factors hindering coping

Following the above discussion on the various coping-related themes identified in the present study, the following section will identify certain factors that were highlighted by the participants, which hindered the use of the themes and subthemes identified in Table 5.2. It will also be shown that the more such factors are present and the more intense they are experienced by the participants, the more they appear to hinder their attempts to cope effectively. All of these factors are summarised in Table 5.3 and discussed in the following section.

Table 5.3 Factors hindering coping

	Factors hindering coping
Factor 1	Parent-child communication difficulties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties relating to effective communication with custodial parent • Difficulties relating to effective communication with non-custodial parent
Factor 2	Environmental disruptions
Factor 3	Parental conflict
Factor 4	Lack of parental coping

5.3.2.1 Factor 1: Parent-child communication difficulties

As indicated earlier in this and other chapters of the present study, Vorster (2011) explains that the quality of the interaction between individuals and their environments directly correlates to the degree of those individuals' mental health. From that perspective communication plays a vital role to ensure that such interaction is optimal. When communication is not optimal or effective, it leads to situations wherein an individual does not maintain optimal interactions with his or

her environment, which subsequently has a detrimental effect on that individual's levels of mental health (Vorster, 2011).

The same applies to the context of parental divorce. Where the communication is found to be ineffective, from parent to child and/or from child to parent, this could have detrimental effects on all parties concerned. Effective communication in relationships therefore leads to effective coping, whereas ineffective communication in relationships leads to ineffective coping. Examples of ineffective communication in the context of parental divorce could be where one parent belittles the other parent in the child's presence, or where a parent relies on the child for emotional support and shares details with the child relating to the divorce, despite it being a process considered to be beyond the scope of a child's coping abilities from a developmental perspective. This could occur in the communication with the custodial as well as the non-custodial parent. Louw et al. (1999) also note that although it is generally accepted that all children are adversely affected by divorce, these children's reactions to their parents' divorce are determined by a wide range of factors, including the nature of the parent-child relationship.

- **Difficulties relating to effective communication with custodial parent**

In the case of participant 2 she explained how ineffective communication between herself and her custodial parent hindered her coping: *"My mom doesn't have a lot of friends, so she leant on me in places that she probably shouldn't have. So I saw a lot of her emotional effect and that was a bit difficult."* In a similar manner participant 1 explained that prior to her parents' divorce when she was ten years of age: *"My mom and I had a very open relationship, she used to speak to me about what was going on at the time. A bit too much detail for a ten year old at the time, so then I told her it is the right thing to do to divorce my father... Look I had to resolve a lot [after the divorce] because they were both much too honest with me."* She explained what the long-term impact of this

ineffective communication had been on her: *“You know, it feels bad when you as child sit and think that this parent hates the other and can only speak badly of him or her and the other does the same... it is actually terrible because you come from both of them, that that implies that you must be bad.”*

From the aforementioned examples it is evident that sharing too much detail with a child during parental divorce or belittling the other parent in the child's presence, constitute examples of ineffective communication, particularly from the parent to child. This has detrimental effects on the child or adolescent and will hinder his or her attempts to cope.

Participant 10, who was six years old when his parents divorced, stated that details were discussed with him by his mother – the custodial parent – such as that his father was not paying maintenance for him and his siblings and that his mother had to find alternative employment to support the family financially. The impact of these messages on him had left him feeling extremely concerned about the financial well-being of his mother, himself and their entire family as well as resenting his father with whom he continued to have a poor relationship up to the time of the interview during the present study. He explained this situation by stating: “I became more conscious about money, I wouldn't ask for anything for my birthday... I would just want a nice cake, and I knew my mom would bake the cake... So I didn't actually even ask my mom for money when I was younger... I still don't.” From these examples it becomes evident that ineffective communication between the parent and child in the context of divorce hinders coping on behalf of the child, in particular as it often impacts on the child to create long-term detrimental effects such as feelings of intense anger.

This was also found by Van Rensburg (2001) who reports that anger commonly manifests as animosity and defiance towards the parent that the child blames for being the “guilty” party in the divorce process. Francke (1983) also reports that fear is a commonly experienced emotion which children experience during

parental divorce, particularly in instances where one parent who has served as a source of security until that time in the child's life, leaves the home. Amato and Keith (1991) found that by taking on parental roles children and adolescents often develop very rapidly into adulthood, which could have potentially detrimental long-term effects for them.

- **Difficulties relating to effective communication with non-custodial parent**

When children experience difficulty to communicate effectively with their non-custodial parent, it can constitute a significant hindrance for them to cope effectively with the divorce process. This can occur in numerous forms such as not having any contact with the non-custodial parent, experiencing a lack of privacy when visiting or communicating with the non-custodial parent, experiencing difficulties during hand-overs for visitations from custodial parent/s to non-custodial parent/s, experiencing discomfort when both parents have to attend functions together and experiencing pressure from either parent to say or act in a certain manner, especially during divorce proceedings where the custody of the children is still a point of dispute. This factor closely links with the factor of parental conflict, which is discussed separately later in this chapter.

Participant 5 explained how he had tried to manage the pressure by his parents during psychological evaluations for psycho-legal purposes and the detrimental impact it had left him with: *"It was terrible, it was funny scenarios and emotions that I needed to try and deal with and I don't know if I should have been manipulated like that at that stage... But it was always the case, because there was a constant battle about who was going to get the children. So when I was with my dad he used to take me to a psychologist and then he or she questioned me, and my dad told me that I should say certain things. And then, when I visited my mother I had to go to another psychologist and then she told me to say certain things. And then there were the lawyers and I don't know what else."*

Similarly participant 2 explained the impact of confusion and frustration that she was left with as a result of ineffective communication between her and her custodial and non-custodial parent: *“School stuff was difficult, because they [her parents] would not talk to each other. So you sit in between your own parents at parents’ evenings and you are the contact between those two because they won’t talk to each other, which gets really annoying because sometimes you just wish that these two people would talk to each other and you couldn’t have been that bad that you can’t talk to each other. So that is annoying, it makes like a lot more complicated, when it shouldn’t have been but ja, very confusing because your parents don’t let you know what’s happening when they are going through a divorce. So you kind of... It’s like a different way of living, I didn’t know if I should pack myself today, what I should take to school and then if the parents have a fight, if they take it out on you.”*

For participant 4, the influence of ineffective communication with her parents relating to contact with her non-custodial parent became evident from the following account: *“My mom always says to me, I was a very sad child before the divorce and I suddenly became very happy after the divorce, which is quite a change around, in the sense that I never actually got along with my father as a child. I actually still don’t get along with my father but as an adult now, I can obviously see the whole pattern.”*

She also explained how the lack of communication with her non-custodial parent, which represents one form of ineffective communication, had hindered her coping with her parents’ divorce as it had left her with long-term difficulties relating to and trusting males: *“I reached out to my grandparents a lot, my grandfather because I really looked for a male figure and I can say this, I had this problem since about the age of nineteen. It is when I actually realized the male figure isn’t actually as important as what I thought it was before because I continuously tried to get my father’s attention, well into my teens and it just never happened. So I*

think from that perspective, my grandfather died when I was eleven so that was quite significant in itself that I have[sic] lost another male figure. My father wasn't around and my brother didn't prove to be much of a male figure. So my idea of male figures were just, you know."

On the other hand Roux (2007) found that maintaining positive relationships with family members, particularly where an improvement in the relationship with the non-custodial parent develops following the divorce, will greatly assist children to cope with the parental divorce. As such, it becomes clear from the findings of the present study as well as those from the literature that effective communication with the non-custodial parent contributes to coping, whereas ineffective communication with the non-custodial parent hinders coping with parental divorce.

Amato (2000) adds that conflict in relationships between parents and children has been linked with numerous detrimental outcomes for children, including lowered self-esteem and ineffective social interactions. More detailed discussions of these findings were included in Chapters 2 and 3. In the examples highlighted in the present study it becomes clear how the ineffective communication that some of the participants had been exposed to, had hindered their attempts to cope at the time of their parental divorce and had also left them with long-term detrimental effects.

5.3.2.2 Factor 2: Environmental disruptions

Changes in the child's life as a result of parental divorce could further hinder the child's attempts to cope with the divorce of his or her parents. Some of these changes reported by the participants in the present study include physical changes such as moving into a new home, entering a new school and adjusting to parents re-marrying. The majority of participants referred to how much these changes had hindered their attempts to cope at the time, such as participant 3

who explained how he had eventually grown emotionally blunted by all of the changes relating to his parents' divorce: *"I found that after a while you just become blunted by all the change, because my dad remarried a few times after the divorce. We also moved a lot and that was a lot of changes, so after a while it isn't a factor anymore because it happens so much."* Similarly participant 9 described the impact of having to adjust to the changes surrounding her father's new partner and the intense anger she experienced associated with it: *"My dad brought the other woman home. That was... I was just twelve years old at the time. You don't really understand yet who this strange woman is with your father. I think what bothered me the most was, she knew where we used to live [in the house] and I had to give up my old room for her and her sons and they once stole one of my watches and some of my other jewellery."*

Participant 2 added how environmental changes had strained her attempts to cope with the divorce of her parents, particularly due to her having to move on a frequent basis at the time: *"I think what made it easier was, initially my Mom stayed in the same area as my Dad. So moving from, because initially from what I was told, it was a complete separation and my Dad never saw us for a while but then eventually we saw him every second weekend and holidays. So what made it easier was that they lived close together. Then my Mom got remarried and we moved, and that made it a lot more difficult because I'd have to take my luggage to school and then explain to people why I had luggage at school. And then my Dad would pick that luggage up and there'd be confusion as to school times, and then they'd complain about the traffic. So living further away from each other made it more complicated, made it more difficult, especially when both of them had traumatic stuff for me. To run from one house to the other, it was a lot harder. When they lived in, both lived in Benoni, I could get my Gran to pick me up from one house and take me to the other, whereas when my Mom lived in Edenvale and my Dad lived in Benoni, if something bad happened at my Mom's, I had to sit through it. I couldn't have someone pick me up because everyone else was on the other side. So that made that side of the divorce quite difficult."*

Participant 2 also explained further how she encountered embarrassing situations at school relating to the changes associated with her parents' divorce: *"So being the generation where divorce is... they still feel so much sympathy for you in schools and the teachers always want to mother you because they think you don't have a mother or they gossip amongst themselves about you. They separated us, they asked us in front of everyone whose parents were still together. They made it quite obvious in pairing, like parents' evenings because they'd have all their sessions out in the open. So you'd see only that Dad went, or only that Mom went and that made it difficult, as the schools made it obvious that your parents weren't together."*

In another example of how environmental changes had hindered coping for the participants in the present study, participant 5 explained that there were also a number of disruptions in terms of frequent moving and also having lost both of his parents later on in his life following their divorce, which had been very difficult for him to cope with: *"My mom married a man I believe simply to make us, or her appear stronger in court. And when my father passed away then we moved in with them and then it was two or three years when things fell apart again. Then she remarried another man. And from there it was soon all over again. And then she fell ill and divorced him as well before she also passed away. And from there I stayed with my grandparents, however I also had to board with one of my friends for a few years because my grandparents were unable to take care of me. So yes, it was a rough life."*

Effective communication with friends was found to be an effective coping skill in the present study as well as in other studies identified from the literature. However, for participant 3 the disruptions associated with his parents' divorce with respect to weekend visitations with his father had contributed to strained relationships with his friends and as such hindered him from utilising this coping skill: *"And also my relationships with friends became somewhat more strained*

because at times it became complicated. If I for example wanted to visit one of my friends over the weekend it depended on with which parent I was spending that weekend. Also, that they would have to take me there, to fetch me and was it far to drive etc.? So that the logistics is a bit more complicated.” On the other hand he later on explained that fewer disruptions in other respects of his life relating to his parents’ divorce had contributed to his coping: *“I think what also really helped a lot for the fact that my mother, because I stayed with her and for the most part she had remained in Centurion. So there was never, although he moved around somewhat, there was not a big move in terms of our geographical location.”* As a result he had remained in the same school.

Participant 14 stated that where fewer disruptions occur it is easier for children and adolescents to cope with parental divorce: *“We didn’t move far. We literally moved two blocks up the road and I stayed in the same high school and the same church so that didn’t change. We moved in with my grandmother, so that was also a home that we knew.”*

Similar findings identified by Roux (2007) also indicate that maintaining a stable environment and belongingness for children, while also maintaining continuity in their lives during their parents’ divorce, will contribute to their coping with the event. Louw et al. (1999) note that although it is generally accepted that all children are adversely affected by divorce, these children’s reactions to their parents’ divorce are determined by a wide range of factors including the extent to which the child’s life changes as a result of the divorce.

5.3.2.3 Factor 3: Parental conflict

Most of the participants in the present study highlighted how continued conflict between their parents had made it particularly difficult for them to cope with the divorce, especially where they were directly involved in the conflict or in cases where it had occurred in their presence. Participant 6 explained in this regard:

“There used to be lots and lots of conflict. And I coped with it by... I was the only child so I didn’t have any brothers or sisters to argue with, so the conflict really got me down at times... During the divorce things were very difficult... I... the house changed into four walls for me. It was extremely bad for me to go home.”

Similarly participant 9 remarked that she had tried to avoid the conflict by distancing herself as far as possible from it: *“Before the divorce I simply tried to stay out of the house, I always used to hear a lot of fighting at that time so I just tried to stay away from home and to keep my sister away from it.”* When commenting on how effective this approach had been to cope with the parental conflict she answered that: *“My attempts to cope before their [her parents] divorce was not very effective as just as you come back into the house then you just hear the conflict all over again.”*

Participant 2 described her accounts of her parents’ conflict and the associated impacts of confusion and frustration it had caused her: *“School stuff was difficult, because they [her parents] would not talk to each other. So you sit in between your own parents at parents’ evenings and you are the contact between those two because they won’t talk to each other, which gets really annoying because sometimes you just wish that these two people would talk to each other and you couldn’t have been that bad that you can’t talk to each other. So that is annoying, it makes like a lot more complicated, when it shouldn’t have been but ja, very confusing because your parents don’t let you know what’s happening when they are going through a divorce. So you kind of... It’s like a different way of living, I didn’t know if I should pack myself today, what I should take to school and then if the parents have a fight, if they take it out on you.”*

These findings confirm those of Lansford (2009) who explains that a large volume of research has shown that high levels of parental conflict lead to long-term detrimental effects for the children involved and as such significantly hinder their coping with parental divorce. Furthermore, Roux (2007) notes that parental conflict is the factor which contributes to more psychological difficulties for

children affected by parental divorce than any other factor. From the aforementioned examples in the present study as well as from the literature, it is evident that continued parental conflict, particularly in the presence of the child or adolescent, significantly hinders coping with parental divorce for those children and adolescents that are exposed to it. Louw et al. (1999) note that although it is generally accepted that all children are adversely affected by divorce, these children's reactions to their parents' divorce are determined by a wide range of factors such as the degree of hostility present prior to the divorce.

5.3.2.4 Factor 4: Lack of parental coping

From a number of accounts by the participants the personal coping of their parents was also highlighted as an aspect which could either assist or hinder the coping of adolescents and/or children during parental divorce. Where parents appear overwhelmed or unable to effectively cope on a personal level themselves this appears to hinder the children to cope with the divorce process. An example of this was presented by participant 5 who explained how his parents both divorced and remarried on a number of occasions: *"If I think back my father was the stronger and right one as opposed to my mother because my mother was actually not competent to raise children. My grandfather had to fight my mother's battles. So I believe it would have been better, I would have had less[sic] problems and had a more comfortable life [had his father been his custodial parent]."*

Similarly participant 2 described how her mother's lack of coping had led her to share information with her at an early age that was very difficult for her to hear and ultimately hindered her coping: *"My Mom told me everything, even the things she shouldn't have, like: 'I'm depressed, and I'm suicidal, and I drink too much'."* Hearing this from her mother greatly concerned her as a child and hindered her coping during her parents' divorce. Furthermore, in describing her mother's personal self-isolation and the ramifications of it on their relationship, participant

2 added: *“And that was, ja, again difficult, because your parents are so focused on what’s happening with them, that they kind of almost forget about... well, your relationship with them lessens in terms of how much involvement they have with you. They, also if they don’t have friends. My Mom doesn’t have a lot of friends, so she leant on me in places that she probably shouldn’t have. So I saw a lot of her emotional effect and that was a bit difficult.”*

Participant 10 described how his concern for his mother’s personal financial well-being had led him to feel extremely worried about her and his entire family’s future: *“I tried, I guess I just tried not to complain a lot just about things. Financially it was a huge struggle. I mean there were times, like my mother she had been a teacher at the time, she was not earning a good salary. So we were, so she still had to go find a job like that would pay more. She had the qualification which is nice. So and then she got a job at Ceasar’s Casino. So she would have a lot of late nights you know and she would work on weekends. I mean she had, she didn’t have days off.”*

The long-term effects of him feeling worried about finances and which had hindered his coping at the time, became evident when participant 10 added the following: *“I got more concerned about money, so I did like you know funny things to earn money at school like I made lemonade and I sold lemonade you know, from a movie I watched that. I thought it would be a great idea, which it worked out because we have a lemon tree at our house. So ja, but financially it changed me. So I think I became more conscious about money and I would, I wouldn’t ask for anything for my birthday.”*

Similarly participant 14 explained the concerns she had felt about her mother’s financial well-being following the divorce and the efforts she and her siblings had made to assist her: *“Financially we struggled a bit when my mom moved out with us [participant 14 and her siblings]. So from that point of view I think... well my sister and I had started to deliver newspapers and so on.”*

In accordance with the above findings, Lansford (2009) states that the personal and financial well-being of parents following divorce could hinder the adjustment of their children following the divorce where parents are not coping themselves in these respects. Roux (2007) also adds that when parents undergo personal counselling or psychological interventions during the divorce process it significantly assists them with respect to their own personal well-being and as such will benefit their children indirectly. In this regard, when parents cope effectively on a personal level, it assists children to cope, whereas when they do not cope effectively, it hinders their children to cope as well.

5.3.3 Recommendations for parents

In addition to exploring coping and factors that influence the coping of young adults experiencing parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence, the present study also aimed to obtain recommendations from the participants for parents and children to assist others in coping with parental divorce in future. A number of these recommendations entail the opposite of the factors that hinder coping as discussed in the previous sections. The following section will identify certain recommendations that were made by the participants for parents to assist their children in coping effectively with divorce. These factors are summarised in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Recommendations for parents

	Recommendations for parents
Recommendation 1	Maintain effective parent-child communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-assure children • Provide information to children within limitations
Recommendation 2	Maintain effective communication with other parent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid conflict in the presence of children • Maintain civil communication with other parent
Recommendation 3	Maintain stability in children's lives
Recommendation 4	Refer children counselling/psychotherapy

5.3.3.1 Recommendation 1: Maintain effective parent-child communication

A set of recommendations that involves communication between the parent/s and their children during divorce was made by the majority of the participants. These recommendations mainly involve providing children with re-assurance as well as keeping children informed, albeit within the limitations of their developmental level at the time of the divorce.

- **Re-assure children**

Most of the participants indicated that children would greatly benefit from re-assurance by their parents on a number of matters such as their continued love towards them as well as absolving them of responsibility for the divorce. Participant 1 recommended: *“Assure the child that it [the divorce] is not his or her fault.”* Similarly participant 8 stated: *“Re-assure children that it [the divorce] was not their fault.”* Participant 9 said: *“Tell them [children] it [the divorce] is not their fault.”* Participant 13 recommended that children should be told by parents: *“Your parents are divorcing because of this, but they still love you equally, and will still provide for you.”* Similarly participant 14 stated: *“Always re-assure your children of your love for them and that you will still take care of them no matter what.”*

From the above it seems to be vital for children to receive verbal confirmation from their parents regarding their continued love, support and the fact that children bear no responsibility for the divorce, so as to avoid feelings of guilt and to assist them to cope more effectively. This appears to confirm the findings of Vorster (2011) that receiving confirmation from the environment plays a vital part in the promotion of optimal mental health among all human beings.

- **Provide information to children within limitations**

In addition to providing re-assurance the participants in the present study also advised that children be informed about the divorce and its possible effects on their family, especially for their future. Participant 13 stated: *“They [parents] must talk to them [children] about it, make them understand as best as possible why it’s [the divorce] happening.”* Similarly participant 8 said: *“Always inform the child what is happening [in terms of the divorce].”* Participant 9 stated: *“Be open with a child [about the divorce].”* The participants, however, cautioned that this should be done within limits as sharing certain information could also be detrimental to the coping process, particularly if they are not equipped from a developmental level to handle it. In this regard participant 1 explained: *“Always inform the child and explain the divorce to the child but consider the emotional level of the child, don’t give the child too much detail.”*

Participant 2 stated: *“Don’t share things with them [children] that aren’t in their own capacity to handle.”* In her explanation of what she referred to in this respect the participant elaborated by saying: *“My Mom also had stuff that wasn’t, it wasn’t appropriate for me to hear at that age. All her boyfriend stories and all her sexual stories and all her, what my father did and what my mother did. Those type of things you don’t say [to children], you don’t gossip and you don’t share things that aren’t appropriate for the age of your child. Teaching them though, a sense of personal skills, that’s great but things that aren’t appropriate, don’t share. It rocks your [children’s] beliefs a lot more than it should.”* Participant 7 stated: *“Don’t share too much details with children, like over finances.”*

Keeping children informed about the divorce was also found by Roux (2007) to assist children in developing a clear understanding of the divorce. The aforementioned recommendation appears to echo the findings of Louw et al (1999) who note that that the quality and nature of interactions between a parent and child are vitally important for the future functioning and coping of the child. In

instances where an emotionally supportive and involved relationship is maintained between the parent and the child, regardless whether it is the custodial or non-custodial parent, the detrimental effects of divorce for the child are decreased (Louw et al., 1999).

5.3.3.2 Recommendation 2: Maintain effective communication with other parent

Most of the participants made recommendations pertaining to the communication between the parents to assist children in coping more effectively with divorce. These recommendations primarily involved avoiding conflict situations in the presence of children and maintaining a civil form of communication between them as far as possible.

- **Avoid conflict in the presence of children**

Section 5.3.2.3 explained how continued parental conflict, particularly in the presence of children, significantly hinders their efforts to cope effectively with parental divorce. As a result, the participants also advised that parents should refrain from engaging in conflict situations with each other in the presence of their children. Participant 12 said: *“Try to keep the fighting as minimal as possible in front of your children.”* Similarly participant 7 stated: *“Keep children out of the conflict.”*

Participant 3 explained that his parents’ efforts to avoid conflict in his presence had greatly assisted him to cope more effectively: *“I think to keep the child out of the conflict is very important... One of the things my parents did right is they decided when I was younger to keep their fights for themselves and so I didn’t know about it which helped me a lot.”* Participant 5 stated: *“I would say that the children should be kept out of the story [parental conflict] completely, that they shouldn’t be used for manipulation or anything else for that matter.”* Participant 4

said: *"Take your children out of that situation, especially if there is screaming and shouting and you know, because a lot of the times you put your kids on the fence and they don't know whose side to take and your parents expect you to take a side and it is not actually fair on the child to expect them to take a side. So I would say take them out of that situation."*

- **Maintain civil communication with the other parent**

In relation to avoiding conflict in the presence of children, the participants further recommended that parents strive to maintain a civil form of communication between them as far as possible, especially in the presence of their children. In this respect participant 1 suggested to parents: *"Just keep civil communication with each other... remember you have the child in common so just consider your communication with one another. You know, you are going to have to talk to each other about the child and the child's life. There are also going to be occasions where you are going to have to meet for the child's sake so maybe it would be a good idea to try to build a new relationship within this new context, maybe you could call it a divorced context... this has a huge impact on the child."*

Participant 3 stated: *"Parents should at least still remain decent with each other, especially when they have to be together at the same place for the child."* Participant 6 said on this point: *"I think parents should behave like adults. Everyone can get through this [divorce] if they behave themselves. At the very least just show respect to one another in front of the children, you know, try to separate in peace."* The findings of Roux (2007) also stress that when parents manage pre- and post-divorce conflict effectively this assists children to cope more effectively with the divorce.

5.3.3.3 Recommendation 3: Maintain stability in children's lives

In addition to the aforementioned communication-based recommendations, the participants strongly advised that parents should aim to maintain as much stability in the child's life as possible, especially following the divorce. As participant 15 stated: *"Keep children's environments as stable as possible and avoid disruptions; that would make it much easier for them."* Similarly participant 14 stated: *"Always give children stability, like staying in the same home and school as far as possible."* Participant 11 remarked on this point that maintaining stability assists children to cope effectively with divorce: *"[Parents] should just attempt to keep their children's lives as stable as possible; the divorce is already hard enough as it is to deal with. I believe that would definitely help them [the children]."*

As indicated in section 5.3.1.2.2 Roux (2007) also found that maintaining a stable environment and belongingness for children will assist them to cope more effectively with parental divorce. Furthermore, Louw et al. (1999) note that although it is generally accepted that all children are adversely affected by divorce, these children's reactions to their parents' divorce are also influenced by the extent to which the child's life changes as a result of the divorce.

5.3.3.4 Recommendation 4: Refer children for counselling/psychotherapy

The participants in the present study recommended that parents refer their children to undergo counselling/psychotherapy to assist them in coping more effectively. Participant 15 stated: *"Therapy for a child is very important when his or her parents get divorced."* Similarly participant 10 advised parents when they divorce to *"send your child to a psychologist"*. This participant also said: *"I think it will really benefit children to see a psychologist if their parents divorce, as therapy with someone who is not involved will definitely help them with the whole"*

process.” Graff-Reed (ND) and Roux (2007) both emphasise the benefits of counselling for children and adults during divorce.

5.3.4 Recommendations for children

The following section will explore certain recommendations for children that were made by the participants in order to assist them to cope effectively with parental divorce. All of these factors are summarised in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Recommendations for children

	Recommendations for children
Recommendation 1	Encourage self-distraction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on personal interests • Focus on academic work • Participate in sport
Recommendation 2	Encourage communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships • Family members • Counsellors/psychotherapists

5.3.4.1 Recommendation 1: Encourage self-distraction

Participants in the present study strongly recommended that children should attempt to distract themselves during parental divorce by primarily focusing on their own personal interests, their academic work and participating in sports and/or other extra mural activities.

- **Focus on personal interests**

One form of distraction from parental divorce recommended by the participants for children is to focus on what they regard to be personal interests. Participant 1 said: *“Children should investigate what attracts them and what interests them and to focus on that rather than focusing on what is happening there [between their*

parents] during divorce.” Similarly participant 2 advised children to focus on their own interests in the form of their own emotions rather than rebelling against their parents: *“Don’t give your parents a hard time, it’s hard enough as it stands. Focus on your own emotional issues.”*

Participant 7 stated: *“I would advise them [children] to try new things and activities. If they don’t really have new things or activities, then they must just do something that they enjoy, you know something that will distract them for a while.”* Similarly participant 9 advised children: *“Just try keep it out of your head. Just think about other stuff, listen to music or do something else so that you can just get your head away from it [the divorce].”*

- **Focus on academic work**

The participants further advised children to distract themselves by keeping their focus on their academic work. Participant 7 warned children not to disadvantage themselves during parental divorce by allowing their academic work to suffer: *“Focus on your school work, don’t let it fall behind.”* Similarly participant 9 advised children to *“keep your head with your school work and your studies”*.

Participant 10 added that he would tell children when their parents divorce to always *“do your homework”*. Participant 6 advised children to avoid letting their school work suffer and disadvantage themselves in the process: *“Don’t cut of your own nose to spite your face... what I mean is I know there is[sic] a lot of children who rebel against divorce by starting to drink and to let their school work suffer.. So I would say don’t do that, don’t mess up your own life that way just because they are messing up theirs.”*

- **Participate in sport**

The participants further advised children to distract themselves from their parents' divorce by participating in sport. Participant 1 said to "*do sports*" as well participant 10 who stated that children should "*take part in sport, it helps a lot*". Similarly participant 8 recommended that children should "*take part in any sport*". Roux (2007) also indicates that participation in extra-murals has been found to be of assistance for children in coping with parental divorce.

5.3.4.2 Recommendation 2: Encourage communication

Another important recommendation made by the participants in the present study involved encouraging children to communicate with others in their environment, in particular with their friends, extended family members and counsellors/psychotherapists.

- **Friendships**

Spending time and communicating with friends about aspects, thoughts and feelings regarding the parental divorce were strongly advised by the participants. In this respect participant 10 said he would tell children to make sure that "*you see your friends*". Participant 1 advised that children "*should spend time with and talk to their friends about it [divorce]*".

Similarly participants 6 and 7 both said that children should strive to "*talk to friends*" during parental divorce. In section 5.3.1.2.2 friendships were described as a vital source of support that assists children's effective coping with parental divorce (Pretorius, 2003; Roux, 2007).

- **Family members**

A number of the participants advised children to spend time and communicate with family members to assist them in coping effectively with parental divorce. Participant 10 suggested: *“If they have siblings I would tell them to stick very close to and talk to their siblings, and spend as much time as they can with them. I mean because obviously your parents are separated now or being separated. So you won’t see all, both your parents together a lot of the time. So it is probably best to stay together with your siblings.”* Participant 7 also suggested that children should *“talk to someone, like other family members, that would help”*. Participant 4 advised children to speak to family members about their experiences pertaining to the divorce: *“Talking to family made a real difference for me, like with my grandfather... So I would say take them out of that situation, maybe put them with the grandparents.”*

In section 5.3.1.2.2 the importance of support from extended family members was emphasised to assist effective coping among children with parental divorce, as also noted by Roux (2007) as well as Sandler, Tein and West (1994).

- **Counsellors/psychotherapists**

Participants recommended talking to a counsellor/psychotherapist as another important strategy to assist children in coping effectively with parental divorce. Participant 13 said: *“It is important to encourage children to talk about it [the divorce] and to see a psychologist.”* Similarly participant 3 suggested that children obtain *“professional help”* to assist them to cope more effectively with their parental divorce. Participant 10 advised that when children experience parental divorce it is *“important for them [children] to talk to a psychologist”* to assist them to cope effectively with the event. In sections 5.3.1.2.2 and 5.3.3.4 it was highlighted that seeking counselling/psychotherapy for children promotes effective coping with parental divorce (Graff-Reed, ND; Roux, 2007).

5.4 Developing an understanding of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence

When a couple with children decide to divorce these children appear to employ a range of coping strategies in an effort to assist them in coping with this life-changing and often highly impactful event. As indicated in Chapter 2, coping strategies according to Reber (1995) refer to “conscious, rational ways of dealing with the anxieties of life” (p.164). According to this definition it is evident that coping strategies entail constantly fluctuating behavioural and cognitive efforts to effectively negotiate environmental demands. Furthermore, they are regarded as being of assistance to children and/or adolescents as their own experiences, perceptions and evaluations are viewed as true and real for them (Roux, 2007).

5.4.1 Individual coping strategies

Children and adolescents' coping with the divorce of their parents is regarded as multifaceted and impacted on by numerous factors. Some of these facets involve the child or adolescent on an individual basis, which excludes interventions or inputs from others within the child or adolescent's environment. For the purpose of creating further clarity this concept can be compared to that of a scientist using a microscope. In describing individual coping strategies, the view of the microscope “zooms” in to only include the child or adolescent and as such includes the processes at work that stem from “inside” the child or adolescent. This would constitute the “intra-psychic” domain as discussed in the following sections (Vorster, 2003).

The themes discussed earlier in this chapter of the present study were divided into four main themes, namely cognitive coping strategies, communication as coping strategy, distraction and avoidance as coping strategy and spiritual coping. The sub-themes identified as relating to cognitive coping strategies

include persistence, re-appraisal and problem solving. The sub-themes of communication coping strategies were identified as the choice to communicate as well as effective communication in relationships with friends, parents, extended family members, school teachers, psychotherapists/counsellors and romantic relationships.

The aforementioned themes and sub-themes appear to be very similar to other research findings identified from the literature such as the coping domains proposed by Sorensen (1993) and discussed in Chapter 2. These coping domains include the cognitive-behavioural, cognitive-intra-psychic and interpersonal-coping-behavioural domains with their respective sub-themes. In line with the aforementioned analogy of a microscope “zooming” in on the individual when referring to individual coping strategies, it was found that individual coping strategies include the cognitive, avoidance and distraction and spiritual coping themes identified from the present study. This is the case as they are regarded by the researcher as pertaining mostly to the individual on a subjective level. They incorporate the subjective or personal facets of the child or adolescent who is experiencing the divorce of his or her parents described in the following sections.

5.4.1.1 Adopting an optimistic perception that facilitates effective coping

An important aspect highlighted by a number of the participants who participated in this study, is adopting an outlook of the parental divorce that facilitates effective coping with the event. This encompasses all the sub-themes from the cognitive coping strategy found in the present study. They were also found to be similar to the sub-themes from both the cognitive-behavioural and cognitive-intra-psychic domains of behavioural reframing and cognitive enduring (Sorensen, 1993). It is regarded by the author that all of these sub-themes relate strongly to developing a subjective perception that promotes effective coping by the child or adolescent during the parental divorce process.

These findings are in accordance with the findings of Roux (2007) who states that a child or adolescent first needs to develop a cognitive understanding of the divorce as a first step in developing a perception that facilitates effective coping with the actual event. The next step based on the findings of the present study entails adopting an optimistic perception. It was found that accepting the divorce, enduring the changes related to it and subsequently attempting to maintain an optimistic view relating to the changes by focusing on perceived improvements brought about by the event, would promote coping under these circumstances.

5.4.1.2 Implementing specific behaviours that facilitate effective coping

Another aspect that was highlighted by the participants in the present study involves specific forms of behaviour that were found to have been effective to cope with parental divorce. The first of these include making use of distraction and avoidance.

- **Distraction and avoidance**

A specific form of behaviour that facilitated coping for a large number of the participants in the present study, relates to the theme of distraction and avoidance. Sorensen (1993) explains that avoidance entails occurrences when a child or adolescent will purposefully attempt to avoid the stressor, for example by withdrawing to his or her room or by distracting him or herself by focusing on academics, hobbies, sports and other extra mural activities at school. This corresponds with findings by Roux (2007) who states that children in her study reported that participation in extra mural activities served as a distraction that assisted them to cope at the time.

Some of the participants in the present study also remarked how their focus on academic demands as a way to avoid what was occurring between their parents

or to distract them from the events surrounding their parents' divorce, had in fact greatly assisted them to cope with the event. Some of them even remarked that their academic results had improved as a result of the aforementioned during the divorce of their parents. This is in contrast to the findings of Lansford (2009) and Amato and Keith (1991) who found that children from divorced families tended to display poorer academic results in comparison with children from intact families. These contrasting results of the present study may, however, have been influenced by the fact that the majority of the participants interviewed in the present study had either completed or were in the process of completing tertiary education qualifications at university level.

These findings are also in contrast to the findings from a study by Armistead et al. (1990) discussed in Chapter 3, who attempted to determine which of the three coping methods proposed by Billings and Moos (1981), namely active-cognitive, active-behavioural and avoidance were mostly employed by adolescents following parental divorce. They also tried to determine if there had been any differences with regards to the gender of the participants. Among the findings of that particular study it was determined that avoidance was the approach to be employed the least by those participants and that they displayed the strongest relationship to functioning, in particular for female participants. This appears to indicate that the more adolescent girls rely on avoidance in an attempt to cope with parental divorce, the more impaired their overall functioning has been found to be (Armistead et al., 1990).

In the present study the majority of the participants reported that they had made use of a range of avoidance coping approaches such as focusing on sports, academics, extra mural activities and/or spending time with significant others to avoid and distract themselves from their parents' divorce, with mostly optimal results especially where they had also chosen to express their thoughts and feelings to others relating to the divorce.

- **Dependence on spiritual beliefs**

Those participants in the present study, who held spiritual beliefs, reported that by relying on these beliefs had assisted them to cope with the divorce of their parents as identified as a coping theme in the present study. This was found to correspond with the findings of Shortz and Worthington (1994) discussed in Chapter 3, as well as with the findings by Roux (2007) who determined that support from the church and its associated spiritual support had assisted the participants in that study who held religious beliefs to cope with the divorce of their parents.

5.4.2 Effective interpersonal communication with significant others in the environment

In keeping with the analogy of the microscope first mentioned under section 5.4.1 when considering interpersonal coping strategies the lens is regarded to “zoom out” to include other individuals in the child or adolescent’s immediate environment. These individuals include parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, school teachers, religious ministers, counsellors, psychologists, social workers and medical doctors, to name but a few. The focus in this context no longer falls on what the individual attempts to do from an individual perspective in an effort to cope with parental divorce, but rather on interaction with others within the environment in an effort to cope with the event. According to the divorce-stress-adjustment model proposed by Amato (2000), interpersonal resources serve as mediators to the effects of divorce on children and adolescents and thereby assist them to cope with the event more effectively. This was also found to be the case in the present study as discussed in the following section.

When focusing on interpersonal interactions between human beings, communication forms the primary focus point as it is impossible for human beings

not to communicate. Even in cases where one individual is refusing to speak to another, that individual is communicating a message to the other that he or she does not wish to interact with him or her. In that sense he or she is still communicating, even by not speaking and avoiding interaction with the other individual. As such, it is impossible for human beings not to communicate and therefore all human beings are constantly communicating within their environments.

It is also through this communication that human beings foster relationships. Romanis (2011) explains that for any person the communication is the relationship and the relationship is the communication; they are in essence one and the same. Therefore, communication forms a central focus point of interpersonal coping strategies as stated by Vorster (2011) that from an interpersonal perspective a direct correlation exists between the nature and quality of an individual's interpersonal relationships and that individual's degree of mental health. According to Romanis (2011) communication forms a central part of human functioning as it has been found that human beings spend a very large amount of time communicating in various ways and forms on a daily basis. Without effective communication with others any individual would therefore experience mental health related difficulties. Coping with parental divorce, as it forms the focus of the present study, is no exception. It is important to emphasise that the key word in this instance is *effective*. In the context of the present study and in keeping with the findings of Vorster (2011) it can thus be postulated that *ineffective communication will hinder effective coping* whereas *effective communication will promote effective coping* in any situation, including instances of parental divorce.

In the present study the participants frequently referred to how effective communication in the relationships with their significant others had greatly assisted their coping with the divorce of their parents. They also described how ineffective communication in relationships with their significant others, such as by

refraining from sharing their difficulties with them or isolating themselves with their thoughts and feelings regarding the divorce, had hindered their coping. This communication entailed more than social support. The choice to communicate as well as the different relationships and interactions with others as described by the participants in the present study, are discussed next.

- **Expressing thoughts, feelings and opinions**

In choosing to express their subjective thoughts, emotions and opinions about their parents' divorce the participants indicated that it had provided a sense of relief and in such a manner assisted them to cope with their parents' divorce. In accordance with this findings from the study by Roux (2007) indicate that, similar to the findings of Louw et al. (1999), children need to be granted the opportunity to voice their opinions in order to assist them to develop a sense of consistency in their lives during the process of their parents' divorce.

The aforementioned not only assists children and/or adolescents to feel a sense of relief by simply expressing themselves but also allows them the opportunity to have their voices heard in relation to the events that directly affect them as a result of the divorce. This in turn also grants them a sense of some control over these events and in doing so promotes effective coping (Roux, 2007).

- **Effective communication with parents**

The participants reported how effective communication between themselves and their custodial parent had greatly assisted them to cope with the divorce process. Similarly Arditti (1999) found that that a large number of especially females from divorced families had reported developing an extremely close emotional relationship with their custodian parent following the divorce. This could only have come about where effective communication had taken place between the parent and child. In contrast, however, some participants reported certain

ineffective communications with their parents, such as where their parents had become so overwhelmed with their own difficulties relating to the divorce that the children experienced them as emotionally unavailable. This is in accordance with the findings of Denzin (1984) who explains that under such circumstances these children and adolescents begin to experience their parents as threatening or helpless as opposed to individuals who offer support, security and stability.

As these children and adolescents are ordinarily unable to leave the situation, they tend to regard themselves as trapped in these circumstances and subsequently start to experience intense feelings of anger towards their circumstances and their parents (Denzin, 1984). This finding corresponds with that of Amato (2000) who states that the “quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children’s behaviour and well-being. Several within group studies show that either a conflicted relationship with the custodial parent or inept parenting on the part of the custodial parent are linked with a variety of negative child outcomes, including lower academic achievement, internalising problems, externalising problems, reduced self-esteem, and poorer social competence” (p. 1280).

In other cases described by the participants in the present study, the custodian parent had started to primarily rely on the child or adolescent as a source of support for their own emotional difficulties, which hindered the child to cope with the event. In certain cases participants described situations where role reversal occurred as a result of the aforementioned and the child had to take on certain roles that the parent ordinarily would have fulfilled. This is also related to the findings of Amato and Keith (1991) who found that children have been known in certain divorce cases to take on parental roles when it appeared to them that their parent/s had become unable to fulfil their own unique roles during the divorce process. These adolescents often develop into young adults at a much faster pace in comparison with other adolescents who had remained in intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991).

- **Effective communication with extended family members**

Support from grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other extended family proved to be a vital source of support for the participants in the present study. A number of them indicated for example that it had greatly assisted them to remove themselves from the situation at home where conflict or other associated detrimental effects of the divorce of their parents prevailed. In particular grandparents, uncles and aunts appear to have been particularly supportive. Roux (2007) confirms that the support from grandparents and other relatives is a highly important source of support that assists children to cope with their parents' divorce. On the contrary, it became evident from the responses of the participants in the present study that ineffective communication with extended family members, such as large distances in these relationships, appears to be detrimental and hinder coping with parental divorce.

- **Effective communication with friends**

Supportive friends were found in the present study to have served as a vital source of support and thereby to promote coping. This was also found to be the case by Roux (2007). Fostering a close friendship and utilising that support by expressing feelings and thoughts within those relationships, appear to assist children greatly whilst their parents are undergoing divorce. Distraction and a sense of consistency in combination with emotional expression appear to lie at the heart of a close friendship relationship and to mediate the possible detrimental effects of parental divorce. This finding correlates with Amato (2000) who refers to specific coping resources from a study by Sandler, Tein and West (1994). This study found that children during their middle childhood years who attempt to make use of active coping skills (including the gathering of social support as in the form of a friendship) cope more effectively than children who

make use of avoidance or distraction in an attempt to cope with their parental divorce.

In cases where no close relationships with friends are formed and the child or adolescent becomes isolated, the opposite appears to occur in that the detrimental effects of parental divorce appear to escalate and become more prevalent, which hinders coping. As indicated in Chapter 3 this could be potentially devastating, since according to Vorster (2003; 2011) a direct link exists between the mental health of human beings and the quality of their interactions, which includes their interpersonal relationships with the environment and friends. From a developmental perspective the peer group of a child or adolescent plays a particularly important role in their personal development, regardless of their parents' marital status (Louw et al., 1999). In cases where children/adolescents become withdrawn and isolated they therefore run a high risk of experiencing high levels of anxiety, depression and ultimately to even become at risk of suicide.

- **Effective communication with school teachers**

In the present study a number of the participants reported that an open and supportive relationship with a school teacher/s can be of significant support during the process of parental divorce. Roux (2007) determined that teachers can play a vital role in supporting children while experiencing parental divorce. In the present study some examples were, however, also reported of cases where participants had felt judged and stigmatised at school as a result of their parents' divorce. In cases where children fear stigmatisation, they may try to conceal the event as reported by Louw et al. (1999), particularly among adolescents. In this sense the quality of the communication between children and their teachers could either be a significant source of support or a hindering factor to cope with the divorce of their parents.

- **Effective communication with psychotherapists/counsellors**

For a number of the participants in the present study talking to a counsellor, social worker or psychologist greatly assisted them to cope with the divorce of their parents. Research findings by Graff-Reed (N.D.) reported in Chapter 3 confirm that counselling related to parental divorce greatly moderates the effects of appraised stress on divorce adjustment for children and adolescents. Furthermore, Roux (2007) confirms that therapeutic interventions for both children and parents greatly facilitate effective coping with the divorce. In this sense, despite optimal relationships with other significant others in the child or adolescent's environment, it is furthermore suggested that they also seek psychotherapy/counselling to assist effective coping.

5.4.3 Environmental factors which facilitate effective coping

In the previous sections of the current chapter specific individual and interpersonal coping strategies were reported and discussed which children/adolescents can implement in order to assist them to cope with the divorce of their parents. Certain factors were, however, also highlighted in addition to the aforementioned that could assist a child to cope while his or her parents undergo divorce, but which he or she cannot in most cases influence directly. These factors directly contribute to the nature of the long-term or sleeper effects on children following the divorce of their parents.

As was highlighted in Chapter 3, for children divorce could result in less effective parenting from the custodial parent, decreased involvement from the non-custodial parent, exposure to continued interpersonal conflict, decline in financial resources and other disruptive life events. These include changing of schools, moving into a new home and additional possible parental divorces and re-marriages. Mediating factors represent the mechanisms by which divorce affects

the functioning and well-being of those involved (Amato, 2000). These mediating factors will be discussed in more detail next.

5.4.3.1 Effective, frequent and continued contact and communication with non-custodial parent

In the present study it was highlighted by the participants that continuous, open and close communication with the non-custodian parent in combination with frequent visitations promoted effective coping with the divorce. Where this is not the case the opposite could most likely occur in the sense that it will hinder effective coping with the event. This was also found by Roux (2007) in a study where children reported that equal time between parents and continued open and close communication with the non-custodian parent greatly assisted children to cope with their parents' divorce.

In addition to the aforementioned findings, Amato (2000) confirms these findings as quoted in Chapter 3 that the "quality of parental functioning is one of the best predictors of children's behaviour and well-being. Several within group studies show that either a conflicted relationship with the custodial parent or inept parenting on the part of the custodial parent are linked with a variety of negative child outcomes, including lower academic achievement, internalising problems, externalising problems, reduced self-esteem, and poorer social competence" (p. 1280).

5.4.3.2 Decreased parental conflict

As discussed in Chapter 3, ineffective communication in marital relationships often results in a process where the two individuals involved become entrapped in an escalating pattern of ineffective communication. This ultimately leads to developing emotional distance between the two individuals and often coincides with conflict between these two individuals. As such, it is often found that two

individuals who are in the process of divorce experience strong feelings of anger and resentment towards the other party and that conflict is often a hallmark of their interactions prior to, during and following the divorce. In cases where this conflict is intense and occurs in the presence of children, it is detrimental to and hindering of coping for those children. Roux (2007) concludes that parental conflict constitutes the factor that accounts for the largest amounts of psychological difficulties among children in terms of coping with parental divorce than any other factor.

The participants in the present study confirmed this finding as those among them who had experienced low levels of parental conflict felt that it had made it significantly easier for them to cope with the divorce, as opposed to those who reported that they had been exposed to multiple conflict situations between their parents both pre- and post-divorce. Similarly the findings of Lansford (2009) indicate that high levels of inter-parental conflict bring about long-lasting detrimental and negative effects for children's adjustment in the later years of their lives. As such, the lower the conflict levels between the marital couple involved in the divorce and the more it is limited to situations where it does not occur in the presence of the children, the more effectively these children can cope with the divorce. Unfortunately in most divorces it appears that this does not occur and that children often become the content surrounding the conflict itself, as was also indicated by a large number of the participants in the present study.

5.4.3.3 Maintaining consistency

In the present study it was highlighted by the participants that where there remains as much as possible consistency in a child/adolescent's life during and following the divorce, it will be easier for this child/adolescent to cope with parental divorce. Roux (2007) found that a sense of continuity for children assists them to cope with their parents' divorce. In the present study examples of this were found where the participants reported that when they were disrupted as little

as possible, this greatly assisted their coping at the time. Examples of this could be if they remain in the same home and/or school following parental divorce. Conversely, those participants who experienced more disruptions such as having to move frequently and having to attend new schools, reported more difficulty to cope with the divorce.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the results of the present study by summarising and grouping them into themes and factors as they were associated with coping with parental divorce and factors which hinder coping with parental divorce. References were also made to similar findings from the literature where applicable. This was followed by a discussion on developing an understanding of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence.

The four main coping themes identified by the participants in the present study were cognitive coping strategies, communication as coping strategy, distraction and avoidance as coping strategy and spiritual coping. The sub-themes identified as relating to cognitive coping strategies included persistence, re-appraisal and problem solving. The sub-themes of communication coping strategies were identified as the choice to communicate as well as effective communication in relationships with friends, parents, extended family members, school teachers, psychotherapists/counsellors and romantic relationships.

All of these coping skills were identified by the participants as having been highly effective for them to cope with parental divorce and were also confirmed by other similar research findings from the literature. The main exception relating to the findings from the present study in relation to other literature findings was, however, the emphasis on effective communication in significant relationships as coping strategy as opposed to only social support.

In addition to the aforementioned coping skills, certain factors were identified from the rich data of the present study which the participants indicated to be hindering to the coping themes and sub-themes referred to above. These factors included parent-child communication difficulties with the custodial and non-custodial parent, environmental disruptions, parental conflict, self-isolation and lack of parental coping. Interestingly these factors often appear to strongly correlate with the coping themes that were also identified from the data, for example where communication was found to be effective with social support systems in the child or adolescents' environment, the levels of effective coping with parental divorce was found to be higher with fewer long-term adverse effects. Conversely, where communication was found to be ineffective, such as where a child or adolescent had chosen to self-isolate themselves and not utilise the available social support from within their environment, the levels of effective coping with parental divorce were found to be lower and more adverse long-term effects to be present.

The data further provided valuable recommendations for parents as well as children to promote effective coping with parental divorce. The recommendations to parents included maintaining effective parent-child communication by reassuring and informing their children within limitations. It was also recommended that parents should maintain effective communication between them by avoiding conflict in the presence of their children as well as maintaining civil communication between them as far as possible. It was also recommended that parents maintain stability in their children's lives wherever possible and refer their children to undergo counselling/psychotherapy to assist them to cope more effectively with the divorce.

With respect to recommendations for children, the participants advised that children be encouraged to distract themselves from their parents' divorce by focusing on their personal interests, their academic work as well as through participation in sport. Furthermore, they were encouraged to communicate with

others in their environment, in particular with friends, family members and counsellors/psychotherapists about their experiences relating to the divorce.

Following a discussion of the results and findings in this chapter, Chapter 6 will evaluate and conclude the present study.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 will present a broad overview of the present study's findings as well as an evaluation of the study with regard to its strengths and limitations. Finally, personal reflections by the researcher and suggestions for further research are also provided to conclude the present study.

6.2 Overview of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence

The literature review of the present study revealed divorce to be a multifaceted phenomenon with far-reaching implications for anyone involved in it. These implications were found to be affected by numerous factors, amongst others how individuals cope with this often stressful event during their lives. Furthermore, it was found that how children in particular attempt to cope with parental divorce, would determine to what extent this event will affect their lives in the future. In investigating how several young adults had coped or attempted to cope with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years, valuable new insights were revealed. These insights were grouped into specific themes and sub-themes commonly identified by the participants with respect to coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence years.

These common themes and sub-themes may be regarded as the essence of the phenomenon under investigation in the present study. The themes were divided into four main themes, namely cognitive coping strategies, communication as coping strategy, distraction and avoidance as coping strategy and spiritual coping. The themes were discussed in detail in the previous chapters and are summarised as follows.

- **Cognitive coping strategies** were all regarded to be aspects related to the participants' personal cognitive coping strategies, which included purposeful decisions they had made in an effort to cope with the divorce of their parents. These strategies included the following:
 - Persisting throughout the parental divorce was reported by the participants to have greatly assisted them to cope with this stressful event.
 - Coping by means of re-appraising the parental divorce through mechanisms such as acceptance, reframing and/or depending on personal resilience.
 - Solving specific problems relating to the divorce of their parents had also promoted effective coping among the participants, for instance by earning their own pocket money to enhance their own independence while also relieving financial stress of particularly the custodian parent.

- **Communication coping strategies** refer to communication-based coping related to interpersonal relationships and communication with others, which had been found to be beneficial in coping with parental divorce. Effective communication in specific relationships was found to promote effective coping, whilst ineffective communication in relationships was related to ineffective coping. Effective communication in relationships can be described as supportive in nature. However, to be therapeutic it should be more than mere social support and should contain three critical ingredients, as described by Rogers (1961; 1978a) namely empathy, genuineness and unconditional acceptance. In these relationships the effects of this form of communication would make individuals feel genuinely supported, heard, understood and accepted without any judgment by the other party. This was highlighted in the present study as a valuable aid to effective coping with parental divorce and included the following:

- Firstly deciding to express their opinions, thoughts and in particular their feelings to significant others in their environment, had greatly assisted the participants in the present study to cope effectively with their parental divorce.
 - Next, effective communication in relationships with friends, parents, extended family members, school teachers, psychotherapists or counsellors and/or romantic partners were all found to be particularly beneficial and to promote effective coping during parental divorce.
- **Distraction and avoidance** in the form of avoiding the situation and distracting themselves by numerous means such as by spending more time away from home or focusing on academic work, sports and/or other extra mural activities, had also contributed to effective coping with parental divorce by the participants in the present study.
 - **Spiritual coping** was another coping strategy utilised by participants who held spiritual beliefs. This mostly entailed a spiritual form of coping through actions such as prayer and relying on support obtained from religious beliefs. This entailed cognitive and emotionally-based coping and as such was referred to as an independent theme of coping in the present study.

In addition to the aforementioned themes and sub-themes, other important and related data from the study revealed factors that hinder coping with parental divorce. These include a range of factors identified by the participants in the present study to have hindered the above set of coping strategies. The more these factors are present and the more intense they were found to be, the more they were likely to hinder effective coping by means of the strategies outlined above for children and/or adolescents during their parents' divorce. These factors were discussed in detail in the previous chapters and are summarised as follows.

- **Difficulties in the communication** between parents and children during the divorce process were found to significantly hinder the children's coping with the divorce. This includes communication with the custodial as well as the non-custodial parent. Examples of ineffective communication in the context of parental divorce could be where one parent belittles the other parent in the child's presence, or where a custodial parent relies on the child for emotional support and shares details with the child relating to the divorce, that may be considered as being beyond the scope of the child's coping abilities from a developmental perspective at that point in the child's life. Ineffective communication with the non-custodial parent was also indicated to be a significant factor that could hinder children and/or adolescents' in coping during parental divorce. An example of this form of ineffective communication is where the child and/or adolescent do not have any contact with the non-custodial parent. Furthermore, in cases where the child does have access to communicate with the non-custodial parent, they may experience a lack of privacy when visiting or communicating with the non-custodial parent. They may also experience difficulties during hand-over for visitations from custodial parents to non-custodial parents. Furthermore, they may experience discomfort when both parents have to attend functions together, or they may feel pressure from either parent to say or act in a certain manner, especially during the divorce proceedings where the custody of the children is still a point of dispute. The above were all found to be examples of ineffective communication that hinder coping for these children/adolescents.
- **Disruptions** in the child and/or adolescent's life associated with the parental divorce were found to hinder effective coping for children and/or adolescents under these circumstances. Some of these disruptions include physical changes such as moving into a new home, entering a new school and adjusting to parents re-marrying.

- **Parental conflict** was one of the most significant factors found to hinder effective coping of children and/or adolescents with parental divorce. It was determined that the more frequent and the higher the intensity of the parental conflict, the more this factor would hinder effective coping. Furthermore, the more parental conflict occurred in the presence of children/adolescents, the more it was found to hinder their coping with the divorce.
- **Lack of parental coping** was another significant factor identified in this study as hindering effective coping among children and/or adolescents during parental divorce. Where the parents, in particular the custodian parent with whom the child would spend the majority of time, had failed to effectively cope with the divorce, this appeared to significantly hamper the child and/or adolescent's coping. An example may be where the custodial parent personally feels overwhelmed, concerned, pressured financially and in a general sense unable to effectively cope with the divorce. This could lead to multiple detrimental effects for the child and/or adolescent involved, such as taking on roles of the parents, thereby hampering the child's personal coping with divorce.

It is important to note that the aforementioned coping themes and sub-themes, as well as the factors hindering coping with parental divorce, are all contextual. This implies that it should be viewed within unique contexts which are influenced by other broader contexts. In keeping with the research methodology of the present study, it may be said that the child and/or adolescent who is experiencing parental divorce is a being-in-the-world with different social, physical and psychological domains. All of these aforementioned different domains contribute to shaping a child and/or adolescent's experiences, the meanings that he or she derives from it and the decisions that he or she makes as a result of them in a unique manner. An example may include a situation where one parent may have

been physically and/or psychologically abusive towards a child during the marriage. Following the divorce decreased communication with that parent may subsequently promote effective coping for that particular child and/or adolescent. In a case where a child had, however, maintained open and effective communication with a parent and following the divorce that parent becomes the non-custodial parent with whom child may no longer be able to communicate freely, that may significantly hinder that particular child's coping with the parental divorce.

6.3 The unique contribution of the study

In Chapter 1 it was indicated that despite numerous research studies identified from the literature on the topic of divorce in South Africa and globally, it appears that the largest volume of research has focused on perceived adverse effects of divorce on children and adults, with the exception of some more recent studies focusing on divorce in a more holistic manner (Amato, 2000; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). This apparent void on specifically *how* individuals have strived to cope with parental divorce, contributed to the motivation to complete the present study.

The unique contribution of the present study lies in the provision of an in-depth exploration of how young adults who had experienced parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescent years, had coped and strived to cope with that particular event in their lives. Furthermore, it was contextualised from a South African perspective and ultimately provided a set of recommended coping strategies for children and/or adolescents as well as adults, based on the present study and the literature. In this manner it also built on the earlier research findings of Roux (2007) who explored children's coping with parental divorce by conducting interviews directly with children whose parents were in the process of divorce.

With respect to the findings of the present study it was highlighted that similar findings had also been made from the literature, apart from the theme surrounding effective communication. In the present study it was highlighted that open and effective communication, and not only social support, significantly contributes to effective coping with parental divorce. This theme was also regarded as particularly important, since it is indicated by Vorster (2011) that the quality of a human being's mental health directly correlates with the quality of his or her interpersonal relationships with others. In the present study this aspect was highlighted as it relates to coping with parental divorce, although it should be regarded as important for all human beings in all contexts of their lives.

It can be concluded that the recommendations that emanated from the findings of the present study, as set out in the final section of the present chapter, would most strongly contribute towards effective coping with divorce by children and adolescents as well as for adults involved in divorce. The findings of the present study and these recommendations have implications for the public with respect to the support and/or therapeutic treatment of individuals affected by divorce, in particular for children and/or adolescents experiencing parental divorce.

The findings of the present study provide an in-depth understanding of how children and/or adolescents experience parental divorce. This enables any individual who supports and/or therapeutically treats a family during a divorce process to assist these families, particularly the children and/or adolescents from these families, to cope more effectively. In addition, the present study contributes to the legal profession, particularly in the context of divorce-related psycho-legal cases to assist and guide members from the legal profession to manage and assist particularly the children and/or adolescents as effectively as possible.

6.4 The limitations of the study

Research in the field of psychology has proven to be challenging for numerous researchers in the past and this investigation was no different. As a result, the findings from the present study also have limitations which expose it to criticism. The limitations of the present study and attempts to control and minimise them by the researcher, were as follows.

- Snowball sampling was utilised because the aim was not to estimate population parameters but rather to develop theoretical insights specific to only a select population, namely young adults between the ages of 19 and 35 years who were either married or divorced. In addition to their ages it was a further requirement for participation in the present study that they had experienced the divorce of their parents at least five years earlier during either their middle childhood and/or adolescent years. As qualitative research is concerned with depth of relationship, fifteen participants from a homogeneous group was considered to be a sufficient sample size (Neuman, 1994).

The sample size of the present study could nevertheless be regarded as relatively small and also as not being representative of the current demographics of the South African population, since it includes mostly white participants who have either completed or are in the process of completing tertiary education at university level. Furthermore, as the responses from the participants reflect their subjective experiences it is not possible for it to be representative of the experience of all children and/or adolescents coping with parental divorce.

- The present study made use of retrospective interviews. The most significant limitation reported by Jupp (2006) with such interviews is faulty memory on the part of the participants. Participants may misremember

and unintentionally make use of “telescoping” or “reverse telescoping” during retrospective interviews. This refers to a problem related to time, for instance what an individual may remember as having occurred seven years earlier may in fact have occurred ten years earlier (Jupp, 2006). It was, however, attempted to control for faulty memory in the present study by only including participants between the ages of 19 and 35 years.

According to Lezak, Howieson and Loring (2004) over time what is forgotten from memory occurs as a result of disuse or interference by more recent experiences or information learned and stored as memory. Interestingly, this may have accounted for the apparent lack of emotionally-based coping strategies reported by the participants, as it was hypothesised that due to the retrospective nature of the present study the participants may already have processed the emotional impact they had experienced at the time of their parents’ divorce, or may even have forgotten about it. Furthermore, on a physiological and metabolic level, the progression of time leads to erosion of synaptic connections in the brain, which leads to memory loss. Other conditions may also impair memory such as amnesia. Given that the participants in the present study were no older than 35 years of age and denied any form of medical condition that may have affected their memory, their accounts of their parental divorce were regarded as not having been impaired by the aforementioned. It was regarded as a relatively recent experience and therefore not influenced by faulty memory.

- The researcher is a subjective individual being-in-the-world, and this may have contributed to bias during the process of analysing the data from the present study. In an effort to prevent bias on the part of the researcher, the following precautions were taken:

- Bracketing of all his presuppositions and theories by the researcher in accordance with the phenomenological method of conducting research.
 - All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim.
 - Validation of the themes and sub-themes as well as the factors identified in the present study, was achieved by means of justification from the data by way of direct quotations.
 - A peer review group of three other psychologists critically examined the researcher's analyses to overcome any possible intrinsic bias.
- In accordance with the above limitations it may be argued that other researchers may have interpreted the data generated from the present study differently. It follows that the findings of the present study may be the product of the researcher's personal interpretations as opposed to a comprehensive perspective on adults' experiences of coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence. To control for this, a peer review group consisting of three other registered psychologists was requested to critically examine the researcher's analyses in an effort to overcome any possible intrinsic bias and to ensure that no important themes or other information may have been missed, in accordance with the recommendations by Marshall and Rossman (1995).

6.5 The strengths of the study

Regardless of the above possible limitations, the present study also entailed a number of strengths that are listed below. These strengths are indicative of the validity, value and applicability of the present study.

- The use of phenomenological research methods provided a rich, broad and in-depth description of the subjective experience in its entirety.

- The findings of the present study were integrated with other previous research findings from the literature. In the process a number of related and correlating findings were identified and indicated, which further consolidated the findings from the present study.
- The theme of effective communication in significant relationships, as opposed to only social support from the environment as it had been referred to in the literature to promote effective coping, was a new and unique contribution that was added by the present study to the existing literature on coping with parental divorce.
- As referred to in the previous section, the researcher was aware of the possibility of potential bias and subsequently aimed to validate the findings from the present study with relevant other research findings, by presenting quotations from the participants' transcriptions and by having a peer review group of three other registered psychologists critically examine the researcher's analysis of the data.
- Despite the fact that the sample consisted mostly of white young adults who had already completed or was in the process of completing tertiary education, it nevertheless contained black participants as well as participants who varied significantly in terms of their ages, fields of study and careers. The sample was also evenly distributed in terms of gender. This diversity provided for a fuller and more in-depth understanding of how young adults cope with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence.

6.6 Implications for further research

Qualitative research provides valuable in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of participants. In the present study it did so according to adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence. Qualitative research, however, does not allow for the quantification of these experiences or for the establishment of correlation between variables which may

be achieved through the use of both quantitative as well as qualitative research methods. In combination, qualitative and quantitative research can provide different kinds of information that may complement one another and thereby provide the most encompassing findings of any phenomenon under investigation.

In accordance with the aforementioned it is recommended that further studies be conducted on the phenomenon of adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence by selecting larger sample sizes as well as more diverse sample sizes than the one which was used for the present study. Follow-up studies can also be conducted in an effort to examine continual patterns and/or newly developing trends, so as to provide a more encompassing perspective of the phenomenon of adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence.

6.7 Recommendations for coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence

To conclude the present study a set of recommendations will be proposed to promote effective coping among adults, children and/or adolescents during divorce.

Roux (2007) proposes a new conceptualisation of children's coping strategies with parental divorce, the first of which involves intentional coping strategies. These refer to those strategies that the child actively, personally and intentionally implements to cope with parental divorce, which resembles the individual coping strategies referred to in the present study. The second set of coping strategies proposed by Roux (2007) involves unintentional coping strategies that children did not initially seek out. This refers to those strategies where the child benefits from a personal choice to co-operate with them.

Based on the aforementioned findings from the literature and from the data presented in the present study, the following set of recommended coping strategies are put forth for parents who are in the process of divorce.

6.7.1 Recommendations for parents

In order to promote effective coping among their children during divorce, parents are recommended to:

- Maintain effective communication with their children by re-assuring them of their continued love and support, emphasising that they are not responsible for the divorce and also by keeping them informed about the divorce within limitations, such as avoiding details that would be potentially detrimental for them at their developmental age.
- Maintain effective communication with the other parent by avoiding conflict at all times in the presence of their children as well as to maintain civil communication with the other parent.
- Maintain stability in the lives of their children as far as possible.
- Refer their children to undergo counselling/psychotherapy.

6.7.2 Recommendations for children and/or adolescents

Following the above set of recommendations to parents in order to promote effective coping among children during parental divorce, children are recommended to:

- Distract themselves from their parental divorce as far as possible by focusing on personal interests, academic work and participation in sports.
- Communicate their thoughts and feelings pertaining to their parents' divorce with others, in particular their friends, family members and counsellors/psychotherapists.

The aforementioned sets of recommendations were set out in an effort to assist children and/or adolescents to cope as effectively as possible with their parents' divorce. It is, however, acknowledged that some of these recommendations may not be possible in certain divorce situations such as where contact between the child and the non-custodial parent are limited as a result of an abusive relationship that had existed in the past.

It is recommended in these and all divorce cases that the recommendations set out above are adhered to as far as possible, also taking into consideration the unique circumstances of every divorce. In this way it is hoped that the detrimental effects of the divorce will be limited as far as possible for all those families, in particular the children and/or adolescents involved.

6.8 Personal reflections

During the writing of conclusions for the present study and while reflecting on the entire process, the researcher came to realise how much he had been impacted by the process. The researcher did not experience parental divorce as a child or adolescent, and experienced mixed feelings ranging from amazement, shock, awe, sadness, frustration, admiration and hope while conducting this research and listening to what the participants shared during their interviews. Their experiences, the pain they experienced and also their abilities to adapt and thrive as individuals in the face of experiencing parental divorce as children and/or adolescents were humbling. It was particularly meaningful on a personal level to identify which factors could potentially hinder the coping of children and/or adolescents when their parents divorce, in combination with the recommendations that were highlighted by the participants to promote effective coping among children and/or adolescents with parental divorce.

It is hoped that this knowledge shall be shared with others; parents who find themselves in a situation where they are divorced or in the process of divorcing,

as well as psychotherapists/counsellors and care providers who see clients affected by divorce. It is hoped that this knowledge will enable them to assist those families and children to cope more effectively with the divorce. In this regard it is hoped that this study will make a meaningful contribution to the profession of psychology.

6.9 Conclusions

The conceptualisation of adults' coping with parental divorce during their childhood and/or adolescence is closely linked with parental coping strategies during divorce. This poses a unique challenge to clearly distinguish between recommendations for children and parents. Existing literature does not clearly distinguish between these sets of coping strategies. For this reason a unique set of recommendations for both parents and children, which integrates the findings of the literature as well as findings of the present study, was put forth in this chapter. These recommendations have implications for all individuals involved in assisting families and particularly children and adolescents affected by parental divorce. This may range from psycho-legal contexts to other therapeutic and supportive relationships. As the divorce rate appears to be increasing in South Africa and abroad, it is hoped that these recommendations would assist all parties affected by divorce to limit long-term adverse effects for children and/or adolescents, in particular for those who find themselves in the midst of a parental divorce process.

This study was approached from a theoretical position in an attempt to explore adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence. This produced a number of concepts, themes, sub-themes, factors and finally recommendations relating to children and adolescents' coping with parental divorce. The present study also highlighted strengths, limitations and the need for further research to be conducted on the topic of adults' coping with parental divorce during childhood and/or adolescence in the future.

Appendix A: Consent form



Introductory Letter

Title of the study:

Adults' experience of coping with parental divorce during childhood: A phenomenological perspective

Dear Participants

You are hereby invited to participate in an academic research study by Kobus Du Plooy, Clinical Psychologist and PhD student from the School of Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences at North West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The purpose of this study is to investigate how young adults who had experienced parental divorce during their childhood or adolescence years had coped with that event?

Please note that the study will be anonymous and that your identity will at all times be treated confidentially. Your participation in this research shall be valued very highly, however you may choose not to participate or to cease your participation at any time without any detrimental consequences. Should you choose to participate, please complete the accompanying document as thoroughly as possible and arrange to meet the researcher for an interview that will last for approximately 30 minutes.

The results from this study will be utilised for academic purposes and may be published in an academic journal. Furthermore, this study has been approved by the Research and Ethics Committee of North West University.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K. Du Plooy'.

Kobus Du Plooy



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOMKAMPUS



STATEMENT CONCERNING PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Name of study:

Adults' experience of coping with parental divorce during childhood: A phenomenological perspective

I have read the information and heard the aims and objectives of this proposed study and was provided the opportunity to ask questions and given adequate time to rethink the issue. The aim and objectives of the study are sufficiently clear to me. I have not been pressured to participate in any way.

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from it at any time and without supplying reasons. I also know that this study has been approved by the North West University Office for Research Support – Ethics Committee. I am fully aware that the results of this study will be used for scientific purposes and may be published. I agree to this, provided my privacy is guaranteed.

I hereby give consent to participate in this study.

.....

Name of participant/volunteer

.....

Signature of participant/volunteer

.....

Place

.....

Date

.....

Witness

Statement by the Researcher

I provided verbal and written information regarding this study. I agree to answer any future questions concerning the study as best I am able. I will adhere to the provided protocol.

Kobus Du Plooy

Pretoria

.....

Name of Researcher

.....

Signature

.....

Date

.....

Place

Information of participant:

Name:..... Date of birth:/...../.....

Contact numbers: Work: (.....) Home: (.....) Cell: (.....)

Home language: Race: Sex:

Physical address:

Postal address:

Current occupation:

Name of company/employer:

Highest educational qualification:

If you are a student, please indicate what course you are currently enrolled in, at which institution and what year of study you are in:

.....

What was your biological age when your parents separated/divorced? (Please tick correct answers:)

0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16 and older

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

Did you have to move to a new home following their separation/divorce? Yes No

If yes, how many times until you left home?

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

Did you have to change schools following their separation/divorce? Yes No

If so, how many times until you finished school?

What effect did this have on your academic performance?

None Improved my academic performance Decreased my academic performance

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Did any of your parents re-marry and/or divorce again? If so, which of them and how many times?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What effect did the separation/divorce of your parents have on your relationships with others e.g. friends? None Improved my relationships Worsened my relationships

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

.....

.....

.....

With whom did you stay following the separation/divorce?

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

.....

.....

How frequently did you see the other parent following the separation/divorce?

.....

If you would like to add any information or explain your answer, please do so below:

.....

Thank you for completing this document and participating in this research project.

REFERENCES

- Agar, M. (1996). Linguistic peace work. *Peace & Change*, **21**(4), 424.
- Amato, P.R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, **62**(4), 1269-1287.
- Amato, P.R. & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, **110**(1), 26-46.
- Amato, P.R., Loomis, L. & Booth, A. (1995). Parental divorce, marital conflict and offspring well-being during early adulthood. *Social Forces*, **73**(3), 895-915.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). Arlington: American Psychiatric Association.
- Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unravelling the mystery of health: How people manage stress and stay well*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Arditti, J.A. (1999). Rethinking relationships between divorced mothers and their children: Capitalizing on family strengths. *Family Relations*, **48**(2), 109-120.
- Armistead, L., McCombs, A., Forehand, R., Wierson, M., Long, N. & Fauber, R. (1990). Coping with divorce: A study of young adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, **19**(1), 79.
- Barlow, D.H. & Durand, V.M. (2009). *Abnormal psychology: An integrative approach*. (5th ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Berg, B. L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. (5th ed.). United States of America: Pearson Education.
- Bernard, H. (1995). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. California: AltaMira Press.

- Bernard, L.C. & Krupat, E. (1994). *Health psychology: Biopsychosocial factors in health and illness*. New York: Library of Congress Catalogue.
- Billings, A.G. & Moos, R.H. (1981). The role of coping responses and social resources in attenuating the stress of life events. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, **4**(2), 139-157.
- Billings, A.G. & Moos, R.H. (1984). Coping, stress and social resources among adults with unipolar depression. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, **46**(4), 877-891.
- Bogdan, R. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods, phenomenological approach towards the social sciences*. New York: Wiley.
- Bohannon, P. (1970). *The six stations of divorce*. New York: Doubleday.
- Bonanno, G.A. (2005). Resilience in the face of potential trauma. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, **14**(3), 135-138.
- Brown, O., Howcroft, G. & Jacobs, T. (2009). The coping orientation and resources of teachers educating learners with intellectual disabilities. *South African Journal of Psychology*, **39**(4), 448-459.
- Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D. & Maguire, P. (2003). Why action research? *Action Research*, **1**(1), 9-28.
- Buys, F. (2010). Stukkende gesin, stukkende land. *Beeld*, Thursday 19 August 2010, p.13.
- Cannon, W.B. (1932). *The wisdom of the body*. New York: Norton.
- Cartwright, C.C. (2006). You want to know how it affected me? Young adults' perceptions of the impact of parental divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, **44**(3/4), 124-143.

- Caruso, D.R., Mayer, J.D. & Salovey, P. (2002). Relation of an ability measure of emotional intelligence to personality. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, **79**(2), 306-320.
- Cherlin, A.J., Chase-Landsdale, P. & McRae, C. (1998). Effects of parental divorce on mental health throughout the life course. *American Sociological Review*, **63**(2), 239-249.
- Clarke, K. & Iphofen, R. (2006). Issues in phenomenological nursing research: The combined use of pain diaries and interviewing. *Nurse Researcher*, **13**(3), 62-74. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://nurseresearcher.rcnpublishing.co.uk/>.
- Colaizzi, P.F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R.S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology*. New York: Oxford University.
- Compas, B. (1987). Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, **101**(3), 393-403.
- Compas, B.E., Howell, D.C., Phares, V., Williams, R.A. & Ledoux, N. (1989). Parent and child stress and symptoms: An integrative analysis. *Developmental Psychology*, **25**(4), 550-559.
- Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Seligman, M.P. (2000). Positive psychology. *American Psychologist*, **55**(1), 5-14.
- Dahlberg, K.M.E. & Dahlberg, H.K. (2004). Description vs. interpretation: A new understanding of an old dilemma in human science research. *Nursing Philosophy*, **5**(3), 268-273. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.

- Davis L.V. & Carlson B.E. (1987). Observation of spouse abuse: What happens to the children? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, **2**(3), 278-291.
- De Castro, A. (2003). Introduction to Giorgi's existential phenomenological research method. *Psicologia desde el Caribe*, **11**, 45-56. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/>.
- Denzin, N.K. (1984). Toward a phenomenology of domestic, family violence. *American Journal of Sociology*, **90**(3), 483-509.
- Devenish, S. (2002). An applied method for undertaking phenomenological explication of interview transcripts. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, **2**(1), 1-20. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://www.ipjp.org>.
- Donalek, J.G. (2004). Phenomenology as a qualitative research method. *Urologic Nursing*, **24**(6), 516-517. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Duhachjek, A. & Oakley, J.L. (2007). Mapping the hierarchical structure of coping: Unifying empirical and theoretical perspectives. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, **17**(3), 218-233.
- Dunahoo, L., Hobfoll, S.E., Monnier, J., Hulsizer, M.R. & Johnson, R. (1998). There's more than rugged individualism in coping. Part 1: Even the lone ranger had tonto. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping: An International Journal*, **11**(2), 137-165.
- Dunlop, R. & Burns, A. (1995). The sleeper effect: Myth or reality. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, **57**(2), 375-376.
- Eagle, G.T. (1998). Male crime victims, the social and personal construction of meaning in response to the traumatogenic events. Unpublished PhD-thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

- Eisikovits-Zvi, Winstok-Zeev, & Enosh-Guy. (1998). Children's experience of interparental violence: A heuristic model. *Children & Youth Services Review*, **20**(6), 547-568.
- Embree, L. (2001). The continuation of phenomenology: A fifth period? *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, **1**(1), 1-9. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://www.ipjp.org>.
- Fereday, J. & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach for inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Method*, **5**(1), 1-11. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Fisher, R.L. (1999). Children in changing families: Results of a pilot study of a program for children of separation and divorce. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, **37**(2), 240-256.
- Folkman, S. & Moskowitz, J. (2000). *Stress, positive emotion, and coping: Current directions in psychological science*. Wiley-Blackwell, **9**(4), 115-118.
- Francke, L.B. (1983). *Growing up divorced*. New York: Linder Press.
- Fraser, M.W., Kirby, L.D. & Smokowski, P.R. (Eds.). (2004). *Risk and resilience in childhood* (2nd ed.). Washington: NASW.
- Frost, A.K. & Pakiz, B.B. (1990). The effects of marital disruption on adolescents: Time as a dynamic. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, **60**(4), 544-555.
- Frydenberg, E. (1997). Adolescent coping: Theoretical and research perspectives. adolescence and society series. *Psychology Press*.
- Gibbins, J. & Thomson, A.M. (2001). Women's expectations and experiences of childbirth. *Midwifery*, **17**, 302-313.

- Gibbs, J. (1977). Kohlberg's stages of moral judgment: A constructive critique. *Harvard Educational Review*, **47**(1), 43-61.
- Gibbs, J.C. (1979). Kohlberg's moral stage theory. *Human Development*, **22**(2), 89-112.
- Giorgi, A. (1975). Convergence and divergence of qualitative and quantitative methods in psychology. In A. Giorgi, C.T. Fisher & E.L. Murray (Eds.), *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology*, (Vol.2). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University.
- Giorgi, A. (1983). Concerning the possibility of phenomenological psychological research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, **14**(1), 129-169.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, **28**(2), 235-241. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Gould, M.S., Shaffer, D., Fisher, P. & Garfinkel, P. (1998). Separation/divorce and child and adolescent completed suicide. *Journal of American Academy Child Adolescence Psychiatry*, **37**(2), 155-161.
- Graff-Reed, R.L. (N.D.). Positive effects of stressful life events: Psychological growth following divorce. Unpublished PhD-thesis, Miami University.
- Gravetter, F.J. & Forzano, L.B. (2009). *Research methods for the behavioural sciences*. (3rd ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Guidubaldi, J. & Cleminshaw, H. (1983). Impact of family support systems on children's academic and social functioning after parental divorce. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, 91st, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983.
- Haley, J. (1963). *Strategies of psychotherapy*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Haley, J. (1967). *Techniques of family therapy*. New York: Basic Books.

- Haley, J. (1976). *Problem solving therapy*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hanson, T.L. (1999). Does parental conflict explain why divorce is negatively associated with child welfare? *Social Forces*, **77**(4), 1283-1314.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1979). Divorce: A child's perspective. *American Psychologist*, **34**(10), 851-858.
- Hetherington, E.M. & Stanley-Hagan, M. (1999). The adjustment of children with divorced parents: A risk and resiliency perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, **35**(4), 26-49.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (2002). Social and psychological resources and adaptation. *Review of General Psychology*, **6**(4), 307.
- Hobfoll, S.E., Dunahoo, C.L., Ben-Porath, Y. & Monnier, J. (1994). Gender and coping: The dual-axis model of coping. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, **22**(1), 49-82.
- Holahan, C.J., Moos, R.H. & Schaefer, J.A. (1996). Coping, stress resistance and growth: Conceptualising adaptive functioning. In M. Zeidner & N.S. Endler (Eds.), *Handbook of coping: Theory, research, applications* (p.24-43). New York: John Wiley.
- Holmes, T.H. & Rahe, R.H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, **11**, 213-218.
- Hornby, A.S. (1995). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English* (5th Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Husserl, E.G. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*. Northwestern University Press.

- Huurre, T., Junkkari, H. & Aro, H. (2006). Long-term psychosocial effects of parental divorce: A follow-up study from adolescence to adulthood. *European Archives Of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, **256**(4), 256-263.
- Jansen van Rensburg, E. (2004). Psigologiese kenmerke van kinders uit intakte en egskeidingsgesinne. Unpublished PhD-thesis. University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Jonsson, F.H., Njardvik, U., Gudlaug, O. & Gretarsson, S.J. (2000). Parental divorce: Long-term effects on mental health, family relations and adult sexual behaviour. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, **41**, 101-105.
- Jupp, V. (2006). *The Sage dictionary of social research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Kail, R.V. & Cavanaugh, J.C. (2007). *Human development: A lifespan view* (4th Ed.). Canada: Wadsworth Thomson.
- Keenan, E.K. (2010). Seeing the forest and the trees: Using dynamic systems theory to understand “stress and coping” and “trauma and resilience”. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, **20**(8), 1038-1060. Retrieved February 29, 2012, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Kelly, J.B. (2000). Children's adjustment in conflicted marriage and divorce: A decade review of research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, **39**, 963-983.
- Kelly, J.B. & Emery, R.E. (2003). Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives. *Family Relations*, **52**(4), 352-362.
- Kobasa, S.C. (1979). Stressful events, personality, and health: An inquiry into hardiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **37**, 1–11.

- Koch, T. (1994). Establishing rigor in qualitative research: The decision. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **19**(5), 976-986. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Lansford, J.E. (2009). Parental divorce and children's adjustment. *Perspectives on Psychological Science (Wiley-Blackwell)*, **4**(2), 140-152.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1966). *Psychological stress and the coping process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1985). The psychology of stress and coping. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, **7**(1-4), 399-418.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1991a) *Emotion and adaptation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1991b). Progress on a cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion. *The American Psychologist*, **46**(8), 819-834.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1993). Why we should think of stress as a subset of emotion. In L. Goldberger (Ed.) & S. Breznitz (Ed.), *Handbook of stress: Theoretical and clinical aspects* (2nd ed.), p.21-39. New York: Free Press.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1996). The role of coping in the emotions and how coping changes over the life course. In C. Magai & S.H. McFadden (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion, adult development and aging*, p.289-306. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Lazarus, R.S. (1999). *Stress and emotion: A new synthesis*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Lazarus, R.S. & Launier, R. (1978). Stress-related transactions between person and environment. *Perspectives in Interactional Psychology*, **287**, 327.

- Lester, M. (1984). *Self: Sociological portraits*. In J.A. Kotarba and Fontana (Eds.), *The existential self in society*. University of Chicago.
- Lester, S. (1999). *An introduction to phenomenological research*. Taunton UK, Stan Lester Developments. Retrieved, August 12, 2012, www.sld.demon.co.uk/resmethy.pdf.
- Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lewis, M.D. (2000). The promise of dynamic systems approaches for an integrated account of human development. *Child Development*, **71**, 36–43.
- Lezak, M.D., Howieson, D.B. & Loring, D.W. (2004). *Neuropsychological assessment* (4th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Louw, D.A., Van Ede, D.M. & Louw, A.E. (1999). *Human Development*. (2nd ed.). Bloemfontein: Kagiso.
- Louw, G. & Viviers, A. (2010). An evaluation of a psychosocial stress and coping model in the police work context. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, **36**(1), 1-11. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://www.sajip.co.za/index.php/sajip/article/view/442/899>.
- Luecken, L.J. & Fabricius, W.V. (2003). Physical health vulnerability in adult children from divorced and intact families. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, **55**(3), 221-228.
- Luthar, S.S., Cicchetti, D. & B. Becker (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, **71**(3), 543-562.
- MacDonald, P. (2001). Husserl's pre-emptive responses to existentialist critiques. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, **1**(1), 1-22. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://www.ipjp.org>.

- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *Lancet*, **358**(9280), 483-489.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G.B. (1995). *Designing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1967). *The phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Merriam, S.B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. United States of America: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, N.E. (1944). Experimental studies of conflict. In J.M. Hunt (Ed.), *Personality and the behavior disorders* (Vol. 1). New York: Ronald.
- Minkler, M. & Wallerstein, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health* (2nd Ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Moenkemeyer, G., Hoegl, M. & Weiss, M. (2012). Innovator resilience potential: A process perspective of individual resilience as influenced by innovation project termination. *Human Relations*, **65**(5), 627-655.
- Moos, R.H. (1994). Conceptual and empirical advances in stress and coping theory. Paper presented at the 23rd International Congress of Applied Psychology, Madrid, Spain. July. 1994.
- Morgan, C.T., King, R.A., Weisz, J.R. & Schlopler, J. (1986). *Introduction to psychology*. (7th ed.). Singapour: McGraw Hill.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

- Mullis, A.K., Mullis, R.L., Schwartz, S.J., Pease, J.L. & Shriner, M. (2007). Relations among parental divorce, identity status, and coping strategies of college age women. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, **7**(2), 137-154.
- Neuman, W.L. (1997). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allan & Bacon.
- Nolte, G.M. (2002). Lewensvaardighede: 'n Bemagtigingsprogram vir vroeë volwassenes. Unpublished PhD-thesis, University of Pretoria.
- Ntoumanis, N., Edmunds, J. & Duda, J.L. (2009). Understanding the coping process from a self-determination theory perspective. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, **14**(2), 249-260.
- Ogden, J. (1997). *Health psychology: A textbook*. United States: Open University Press.
- Osborn, J.W. (1995). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and other methods of psychological qualitative research. *Canadian Psychology*, **35**(4), 167-189.
- Owen, I.R. (1994a). Introducing an existential-phenomenological approach. Part 2: Theory of practice. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, **7**(4), 347-359. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Owen, I.R. (1994b). Introducing an existential-phenomenological approach: Basic phenomenological theory and research. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, **7**(3), 261-274. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Pargament, K.I., Ensing, D.S., Falgout, K., Olsen, H., Reilly, B., Haitsma, K. & Warren, R. (1990). God help me: (I): Religious coping efforts as predictors of the outcomes to significant negative life events. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, **18**(6), 793-824.

- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. United States of America: Sage Publications.
- Pedro-Carroll, J.L., Sterling, S. & Alpert-Gillis, L. (1987). *Children of divorce intervention program: Procedures manual for conducting support groups with 2nd and 3rd grade children*. New York.
- Phelps, S.A. & Jarvis, A. (1994). Coping in adolescence: Empirical evidence for a theoretically based approach to assessing coping. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, **23**(3), 359.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1983). *Methodology for the human sciences: Systems of inquiry*. Albany: University of New York Press.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R.S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience*. New York: Plenum.
- Pope, H.G., Ionescu-Pioggia, M. & Pope, K.W. (2001). Drug use and life style among college undergraduates: A 30-year longitudinal study. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, **158**(9), 1519-1521.
- Pretorius, R. (2003). Hope, self-concept and coping behaviour of a group of children in the middle childhood phase. Unpublished MA thesis. North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus.
- Priest, H. (2002). An approach to the phenomenological analysis of data. *Nurse Researcher*, **10**(2), 50-63. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Ragin, C. (1994). Constructing social research: The unity and diversity of method. In *Sociology for a new century*. London: Pine Forge Press.

- Rapport, F. & Wainwright, P. (2006). Phenomenology as a paradigm of movement. *Nursing Inquiry*, **13**(3), 228-236. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Reason, P. & Bradbury, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Reber, A.S. (1995). *Dictionary of psychology*. London: Penguin Books.
- Reissman, R. (2000). Fun with Dick and Jane: Multi-ethnic middle school perspectives. *What's past is prologue: Teaching the future through historical perspectives*, 91.
- Rice, V.H. (2000). *Handbook of stress, coping and health*. California: Sage Publications.
- Robertson, T. (2002). The public availability of actions and artefacts. *The Journal of Collaborative Computing*, **11**(3/4), 299-316. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Rogers, C.R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Rogers, C.R. (1963). The concept of the fully functioning person. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, **1**(1), 17.
- Rogers, C.R. (1978a). *Carl Rogers on personal power*. London: Constable.
- Rogers, C.R. (1978b). The formative tendency. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, **18**(1), 23.
- Romanis, A. (2011). Pre-marital communication training and levels of marital satisfaction: A one year follow-up study. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Limpopo, Medunsa Campus.
- Rosnow, R.L. & Rosenthal, R. (1999). *Beginning behavioural research: A conceptual primer* (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

- Roux, L.M. (2007). Exploring children's coping with divorce: A phenomenological perspective. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Ryan-Wenger, N. (1998). Impact of the threat of war on military children. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Sadala, M.L.A. & Adorno, R.C.F. (2003). Phenomenology as a method to investigate the experience lived: A perspective from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's thought. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **37**(3), 282-293.
- Sadock, B.J. & Sadock, V.A. (2007). *Synopsis of psychiatry* (10th ed.). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkens.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Focus on research methods. Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research In Nursing & Health*, **23**(4), 334-340.
- Sandler, I.N., Tein, J. & West, S.G. (1994). Coping, stress, and the psychological symptoms of children of divorce: A cross-sectional and longitudinal study. *Child Development*, **65**(6), 1744-1763.
- Schaefer, J.A. & Moos, R.H. (1992). Life crises and personal growth. In B.N. Carpenter (Ed.), *Personal coping: Theory, research and application* (p.150-170). Westport, CT: Preager.
- Schlebusch, L. (1990). *Clinical health psychology: A behavioural medicine perspective*. Southern Book Publishers.
- Segal, A.M. (1999). Architectural metaphor in psychotherapy: A phenomenological study. Unpublished PhD thesis. Vista University, Pretoria.
- Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2000). Causal links between stressful events, coping style, and adolescent symptomatology. *Journal of Adolescence*, **23**(6), 675.

- Seligman, M. (2002). How to see the glass half full: In a bold new book, the author of "Learned optimism" offers life lessons in love, work and raising children... from my book "Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment". *Newsweek*, **140**(12), 48-49.
- Selye, H. (1956). *The stress of life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Selye, H. (1974). *Stress without distress*. New York: Lippincott.
- Shortz, J.L. & Worthington, E.L. (1994). Young adults recall religiosity, attributions, and coping in parental divorce. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, **33**(2), 172.
- Smith, C.C. & Carlson, B.E. (1997). Stress, coping, and resilience in children and youth. *Social Service Review*, **71**(2), 231-256. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Smith, D.W. (2008). Phenomenology. E.N. Zalta (Ed.). *Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy*. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology>.
- Smith, J. (2005). Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological reduction. *Inquiry*, **48**(6), 553-571. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Smith, J. (Ed.). (2007). *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Sorensen, E. (1993). *Children's stress and coping: A family perspective*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Spalding, B. & Pretorius, H.G. (2001). Experience of young adults from divorced families. *Health SA Gesondheid*, **6**(3), 75-86.
- Spielberg, H. (1970). *Phenomenology*, **17**(14). Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.

- Statistics South Africa. (1998) Marriages and divorces 1996. Retrieved August 10, 2010, <http://wwwstatssa.gov.za>.
- Statistics South Africa. (2010) Marriages and divorces 2009. Retrieved August 10, 2010, <http://wwwstatssa.gov.za>.
- Statistics South Africa. (2011) Marriages and divorces 2011. Retrieved November 11, 2012, <http://wwwstatssa.gov.za>.
- Steiner, A. & Markantoni, M. (2013). Unpacking community resilience through capacity for change. *Community Development Journal*, 01-19. Retrieved November 03, 2013, <http://cdj.oxfordjournals.org>.
- Steyn, G.M. (1989). Die onderwyser en die kind uit die eenouergesin. *Educare*, **18**(1), 95-101.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Struwig, F.W. & Stead, G.B. (2001). *Planning, designing and reporting research*. Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa.
- Thevenaz, P. (1962). *What is phenomenology?* Chicago: Quadrangle.
- Thomas, S.P. (2005). Through the lens of Merleau-Ponty: Advancing the phenomenological approach to nursing research. *Nursing Philosophy*, **6**(1), 63-76. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Valle, R.S., King, M. & Halling, S. (1989). An introduction to existential phenomenological thought in psychology. In R.S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.),

Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience. New York: Plenum.

Van Kaam, A. (1969). *Existential foundation of psychology.* New York: Image Books.

Van Loggerenberg, M. & Roets, H.E. (1993). Die beleving van die kind in die enkelouergesin. *Educare*, **22**(1), 106-119.

Van Rensburg, E. (2001). Die ontwikkeling van 'n sielkundige spanbenadering vir die bepaling van beheer, toesig en toegang by egskeidingspunte. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

Vogt, W.P. & Johnson, R.B. (2011). *Dictionary of statistics & methodology: A nontechnical guide for the social sciences.* Sage Publications.

Von Wielligh, J. (2003). Coping by kinders uit egskeidingsgesinne. Unpublished Master's dissertation. North-West University, Potchefstroom.

Vorster, C. (2003). *General systems theory and psychotherapy: Beyond post-modernism.* Pretoria: Satori.

Vorster, C. (2011). *Impact: The story of interactional therapy.* Pretoria: Satori.

Wallerstein, J.S. & Blakeslee (1989). *Second chances.* London: Bantam Press, Transworld Publishers.

Wallerstein, J.S. & Kelly, J. (1996). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce.* New York: Basic Books.

Wallerstein, J.S. & Kelly, J.B. (1976). The effects of parental divorce: Experiences of the child in early latency. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, **46**(1), 20-32.

Wallerstein, J. & Kelly, J. (1980). Effects of divorce on the visiting father-child relationship. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, **137**(12), 1534-1539.

- Watzlawick, P., Weakland, J.H. & Fish, R. (1974). *Change: Principles of problem formation and problem resolution*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Weiten, W. (1997). *Psychology themes & variations* (3rd ed.). Belmont: Brooks/Cole.
- Weiten, W. & Lloyd, M. (2003). *Psychology applied to modern life: Adjustment in the 21st century* (7th Ed.). Belmont: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Werner, E.E. (1993). Risk, resilience, and recovery: Perspectives from the Kauai longitudinal study. *Development and Psychopathology*, **5**, 503-515.
- Whitehead, L. (2003). Enhancing the quality of hermeneutic research: Decision trial. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **45**(5), 512-518. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com>.
- Whiting, L.S. (2008). Semi-structured interviews: Guidance for novice researchers. *Nursing Standard*, **22**(23), 35-40. Retrieved March 23, 2013, <http://web.ebscohost.com>.
- Whitley, B.E. (2002). *Principles of research in behavioural science*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Willig, C.J. (2001). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Wimpenny, P. & Gass, J. (2000). Interviewing in phenomenology and grounded theory: Is there a difference? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, **31**(6), 1485-1492.
- Yu, T., Petit, G.S., Lansford, J.E., Dodge, K.A. & Bates, J.E. (2010). The interactive effects of marital conflict and divorce on parent-adult children's relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, **72**, 282-292.