

**THE CHALLENGES OF COHABITING FAMILIES WITH REGARD TO
DISCIPLINE OF ADOLESCENTS**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation, 'THE CHALLENGES OF COHABITING FAMILIES WITH REGARD TO DISCIPLINE OF ADOLESCENTS' is my own work and that all resources that were used or during the research study, are indicated by means of a complete reference and acknowledgement.

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MS GAMUCHIRAI BERE



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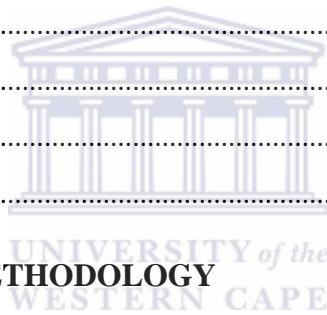
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ABSTRACT

Cohabitation families have become a widely accepted and increasing form of family structure nowadays. However this family structure's characteristics have caused it to be described as a risk factor to child development as it is associated with negative child outcomes especially during the adolescence period. The adolescence stage itself has been described by literature as a unique human development stage coupled with a variety of physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes, making it a vulnerable stage characterised by experimenting with risk behaviours. Therefore the aim of this study was to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of the adolescents. An explorative and descriptive research design grounded in a qualitative research approach was used. Two sets of data, namely (a) cohabiting biological parents, and (b) adolescent children living in cohabiting families, were collected for a better understanding of the situation.

The population for the study encompassed all cohabiting parents and their adolescent children living in the city of Cape Town, and research participants were purposively selected from the caseload of Cape Town Child Welfare. Data was collected by means of individual interviews with the aid of an interview guide. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were taken. Data analysis was conducted according to Tesch (in Creswell 2009), and ethical considerations, such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent from parents and informed assent from adolescents, as well as no harm to participants, were adhered to. Most participants identified with cohabiting step-parent families. The reported challenges affecting discipline of adolescent children stemmed from poor parent-child relationships, ambiguous step-family roles, negative family communication patterns, and the applied disciplinary methods in cohabiting families. With consultation from some of the suggestions put forward by all the participants, the researcher concluded the study with recommendations for social workers working with cohabiting families.

KEY WORDS:

Cohabitation families; Family structure; Discipline; Adolescence; Parenting; Child development.

Key Concepts

- **Cohabitation**

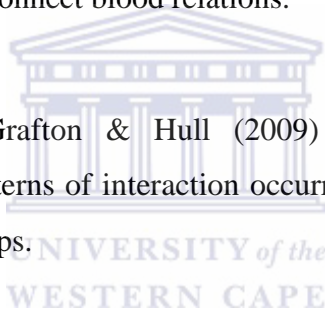
According to Whyte (2000) cohabitation is when two people live together for their own strictly private reasons and carve out their own strictly private bargain about the relationship without any legal/social pressure. This same author further asserts that a shared quarters and a shared sex life are the minimum requirements of this social arrangement, no ceremony, no license and no long term plans. Within this union, partners are less likely to pool in their finances to assume responsibility of their partner or own property together, (Whyte, 2000).

- **Family**

According to Giddens (2009) a family is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult member of which assumes responsibility for caring for the children. The same author defines kinship as connections between individuals established through marriage or lines of descent that connect blood relations.

- **Family structure**

According to Kisrt-Ashman, Grafton & Hull (2009) family structure refers to the organization of relationships, patterns of interaction occurring within the family and may or may not involve blood relationships.



- **Discipline**

Webb, Gore, Amend and De Vries (2007) defined discipline as a way of modelling and teaching children appropriate behaviours. It involves punishment, correction and training to develop self-control as well as to enforce obedience and order (Barnes, 2009).

- **Adolescence**

According to Kosslyn & Rosenberg (2011), adolescence is the period between the onset of puberty and roughly the end of teenage years. The adolescence period is divided into three categories which are early adolescence (between the age of 10-12), middle adolescence (between the ages of 13-17) and late adolescence (between the age of 18-24) (Kaplan, 2004).

- **Parenting**

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviours and attitudes that work individually and together to influence child outcomes (Belsky, 1984).

- **Child – development**

Child development refers to the biological and psychological changes that occur in human beings between conception and the end of adolescence, as the individual progresses from dependency to increasing autonomy (Berk, 2013).



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Cohabitation has become an increasingly acceptable form of family structure in modern society. Unmarried couples are living together and often raising children from previous relationships or children born out of the cohabitation relationship. Historically, marriage was the traditional and ideal family structure which was a central element in defining human identity, womanhood and manhood; it was a place for child bearing and child rearing, and it also governed living arrangements (Thornton, Axinn and Xie, 2007). Both in the Western and African context, marriages were historically of religious and cultural significance. However over the past years, marriage has become less influential in delineating the relationships between men and women, and less relevant to the context of sexual expression, living arrangements, child bearing and even child rearing (Thornton et al., 2007).

According to the Department of Home Affairs South Africa, 170 826 civil marriages and 9 996 customary marriages were registered in South Africa in 2010 (Statistical release Marriages and Divorce, 2010). The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, made data available that 12 of the 62 magistrate courts that are dealing with divorces showed that 22 936 divorces were granted in South Africa in 2010 (Statistical release Marriages and Divorce, 2010). Of the 22 936 divorces recorded in 2010, 12 486 (54.4%) involved children younger than 18 years, and all in all about 20 383 children were affected by divorces that took place in 2010 (Statistical release Marriages and Divorce, 2010). These fluctuating divorce rates and a changing society contributed to the creation of new forms of family structures such as single-parent families, restructured or step-families, and cohabitation families, which literature has often argued to be risk factors for child development. Daily and Wilson (2005) assert that for children to live with a cohabiting adult is one of the largest risk factors for severe child maltreatment.

Even though cohabitation has become an acceptable form of family structure in modern societies, it is still attached to stigma as it defies the rules of marriage which are of cultural and religious significance for many people. Cohabitation is also associated with negative impacts on children (Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Smock and Gupta, 2002;

Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Manning and Lichter, 1996). It is on this basis that a need was identified to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline, specifically focusing on adolescents, taking into account the physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes experienced during this human development stage, and also the fact that families are the primary unit for human interaction linked to the previously indicated domains of development to produce positive child outcomes (Bergin and Bergin, 2012).

1.2 Literature review

In view of the large amount of literature on the definition of cohabitation, three definitions which together illuminate what cohabitation entails were chosen for this study. According to Whyte (2000:13) cohabitation is when two people live together for their own strictly private reasons and carve out their own strictly private bargain about the relationship without any legal/social pressure. This author further explains that shared quarters and a shared sex life are the minimum requirements of this social arrangement, with no ceremony, no licence and no long-term plans for the relationship. Within this union, partners are less likely to pool their finances and to assume responsibility for their partner's and their own property together (Whyte, 2000).

Denier (2010) on the other hand, views cohabitation as a living arrangement in which two adults who are not married to each other live in the same setting and have a sexual relationship. Shepard (2010:327) defines cohabitation as living with someone in an arrangement such as a marriage without any legal obligations and responsibilities of a formal marriage. These definitions of cohabitation denote the informal nature or lack of institutionalisation of these unions, their short-livedness or temporary nature, lack of sharing resources, lack of commitment and even instability.

Among the reasons why people rather cohabit than get married, a survey conducted in America by the National Survey of families and households (1987-88), disclosed that most people who cohabit regard cohabitation as a trial marriage in order to make sure they are compatible before they get married (Whyte, 2000). However for some it was found to be a reason to avoid commitment, preserving each other's independence, sexual freedom and for economic reasons such as sharing expenses (Whyte, 2000). The latter correlates with Thatcher's (1994) claim on the three types of cohabitation which are as follows:

- temporary/casual cohabitation entered with little thought/commitment;
- conscious preparation for marriage/trial marriage; and
- a substitute for marriage.

Nock (1995) refers to cohabitation as an incomplete institution, being a private arrangement between the involved parties without any licence or legal requirements. Cohabitation's lack of institutionalisation means that this form of family structure is not recognised by law even though it has been socially accepted. Cohabitation has no status in the South African law; there is no statute that regulates cohabitation or addresses the consequences of its breakdown (Van der Merwe and Du Plessis, 2004: 158). That is to say, South African law does not recognise cohabitation as a formal family structure and there are no policies or laws which govern it (Mashau, 2011). This can be detrimental in the case of separation or death of a spouse, as the involved parties may run the risk of losing their property or custody of their children. However, cohabiters can set up a series of agreements on shared responsibility for children, ownership of property and ownership of jointly owned possessions, which are recognisable by courts (Gregory, Swisher and Wilson, 2013). The cohabiters can also set up wills which guarantee inheritance of property to their partners or children (Gregory et al., 2013). Thus even if cohabitation is not sanctioned by law, the involved parties can legally protect themselves and their families like other family structures which are governed by the law.

According to Whyte (2000) most cohabitation unions are short-lived/temporary and typically last for a year or a little longer to end up in a marriage or dissolve. It is this uncertainty for the longevity of the relationship that weakens the partners' investment in the relationship both materially and emotionally. If children are involved in this relationship, it is ill-advised for the cohabiters' extended families to become attached to the children of their child's cohabiting partner as that relationship may dissolve if the cohabitation splits up.

Due to the lack of institutionalisation and the temporary nature of cohabitation unions, cohabiters are less likely to pool their resources. Mutual management of finances, sharing of resources and joint investments are limited as this can be seen as risky, since cohabitation is less protected in the event of separation (Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2010). Waldfogel (1998) maintains that this lack of sharing resources between cohabiters usually disadvantages the women and their children in cohabiting unions relative to men, because women are often

the custodian parent and typically earns less than men. Cohabiting partners with no intentions to marry are less likely to be committed to their partners and to their relationship itself (Whyte 2000). Cherlin (2004) explains that due to higher levels of insecurity about the relationship's future, cohabiting partners may also be less committed to the relationship. This lack of commitment will run from lack of sexual exclusiveness between the partners to lack of supporting each other in difficult times, as each person must fend for themselves in cohabiting unions.

All the above-mentioned characteristics of cohabitation may therefore lead to family instability as another characteristic of cohabitation. Considering that cohabitation is not recognised by law and is regarded temporary in nature, there are no shared resources, and limited commitment between the partners, ambiguities within such unions are bound to arise. There are no obligations of the cohabiting partner to their partner's children in parenting or any other form of support as the responsibilities of cohabiting partners to children are not specified (Mahoney and Gabriel, 2002). This ambiguity in cohabiting relationships makes uncertain reduction theory a relevant framework for understanding how cohabitation may influence adaptive and maladaptive relationship development (Vangelish, 2013).

The most prevalent underlying assumption of cohabitation is the stigma attached to this form of family structure, even though cohabitation is common in many communities. This stigma arose from the shared sex life between cohabiting partners which is often unacceptable in some of the African cultures and also on religious grounds as it is believed that sex is for married people only, therefore cohabitation defies this sexual value and it is perceived as immoral by the society (Mashau, 2011). Thornton et al. (1992) state that stigma against cohabitation distances people from some of the most important social institutions such as organised religion.

Cohabitation is also associated with negative impacts especially on the women and children involved in such unions, and is another underlying assumption of this family structure which has been supported by literature (Brown, 2004; Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Wu, 1995). According to cultural and religious beliefs, some women in the African context are not expected to live with a man as if they are married, as this is said to depreciate the value of a woman and lessen the chances of that woman getting married to another man. If children are involved in a cohabitation union, there is great deal of literature which states a number of negative effects cohabitation has on children. These effects include

delinquency, teenage pregnancies, school drop outs, drug abuse, early sexual engagement, low self-esteem and involvement in criminal activities (Brown, 2004; Manning, 2003; Smock and Gupta, 2002; Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Manning and Lichter, 1996).

Bergin and Bergin (2012) lists cohabitation among other new forms of family structures as risk factors for child development in comparison to a traditional nuclear family with married partners where there is higher parental education, fewer financial problems, fewer moves, greater parent-child closeness especially for adolescents, and less abuse, which serve as protective factors for child development. Bergin and Bergin (2012) furthermore states that cohabiting families typically contain a pre-schooler, but by school age they tend to have lower cognitive skills, social competence and academic achievement and later in life are more likely to use drugs or to be violent.

The possibility of instability in cohabiting families is believed to expose the children involved to potential risks because the unions may dissolve at any time. Due to instability, there are bound to be repeated parental separations and family reconstruction, leading to high levels of stress between the parents and the children, which may have a negative effect on the well-being of the children, (Dush et al., 2003). At the same time, Wu, Hou and Schimmele (2008) observe that children living in cohabiting families are prone to high levels of family dissolution which can have negative consequences for their emotional and educational development. For adolescents, in particular, growing up with instability may cause identity crises because they may fail to strike a balance in what they should identify themselves with, and may also identify themselves with the wrong crowd, causing detrimental behaviour.

Cohabitation is associated with high levels of stress for the cohabiting parent because they often receive less consistent support with child care responsibilities than if the partner was a biological parent. This may threaten the parent-child bond on which positive behaviours of the child are based. The children involved may suffer from poor behavioural development, low self-esteem, and undeveloped social skills, (Jeter, 2009) which can often be related to poor parental monitoring and supervision in cohabiting households. Parental monitoring includes knowing children's whereabouts after school, as well as knowing their friends and their respective activities, and when combined with parental support, have been shown to be positively related to higher adolescent self-esteem and greater academic success (Manning and Bulanda, 2002). In addition, parental monitoring is associated with fewer internalising

behaviours, such as withdrawal and depression, and externalising behaviour problems such as fighting and disturbing others, as well as a lower likelihood of drinking, smoking, and engaging in other risky behaviours (Barber, Olsen and Shagle, 1994).

Waite (2000) has found that the parenting role of a cohabiting partner towards children of the other person is vaguely defined, making cohabitation an unstable living arrangement for the children involved. This author adds that the non-parent partner has no explicit legal, financial, supervisory or custodial rights or responsibilities regarding the children of his/her partner. Hence ambiguity and the lack of enforceable claims by either cohabiting partner or child makes investment in the relationship dangerous for both parties, and makes "Mom's boyfriend" a weak and shifting base from which to discipline and guide children (Waite, 2000).

However, some literature has pointed to positive effects of cohabitation as a family structure (Waite, 2000; Cox, 2009). Waite (2000) asserts that there can be positive or improved child outcomes when children are living in cohabiting families provided there is good parenting and positive conduct of all the parental figures involved in this family structure. This author also emphasises the commitment between cohabiting partners to limit the children's exposure to different spouses on a regular basis, which might cause confusion for the children (Waite, 2000). Cox (2009) adds that cohabitation can be seen in a positive light when divorced individuals cohabit before a subsequent remarriage, to give the involved partner's time to sort out their adjustments and possible problems before committing to marriage again. It has been reported that couples who once cohabit before getting married are likely to experience less conflict, more affection and fewer disagreements (Cox, 2009).

Webb, Gore, Amend and De Vries (2007:26) define discipline as a way of modelling and teaching children appropriate behaviours. It involves punishment, correction of behaviour and training to develop self-control as well as to enforce obedience and order, (Barnes, 2011). According to Webb et al., (2007), discipline can be conveyed to children through the distinct discipline styles which some authors refer to as parenting styles, namely authoritative, authoritarian and permissive.

Authoritative discipline style is when parents monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct, (Baumrind, 1991). The parenting skills in this style of discipline would be

open communication, positive nurturing and mutual knowledge and understanding between the parent and the child. Authoritarian discipline, on the other hand, is when children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents, and the parents are highly demanding and directive (Swartz, Rey, Duncan and Townsend, 2008). According to Baumrind (1991) such parents are obedience-and status-orientated and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation; failure of the children to follow such rules often results in punishment.

Permissive discipline, also referred to as nondirective or indulgent parenting, gives parents very few demands on their children; no rules are enforced, and parents allow children to express their feelings and to follow their impulses (Swartz et al., 2008). These parents are non-traditional and lenient. They rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control, and therefore allow their children to make their own decisions at an age when they are not capable of doing so responsibly (Baumrind, 1991).

Adolescence can be described as the transition stage between childhood and adulthood comprising physical and cognitive development (Kaplan, 2004). Physical development occurs through the process of puberty, and cognitive development takes place as they seek to understand their own sense of identity. There are varied ideas on the exact age span of adolescence. This phase in the human development can be divided into three categories:

- early adolescence (between the age of 10-12),
- middle adolescence (between the ages of 13-17)
- and late adolescence (between the age of 18-24) (Kaplan, 2004).

The present study focused on children in the middle adolescence (13-17 years), taking into account the vulnerability of this age group and the intensity of physical, emotional, cognitive and social pressures they will be experiencing. It is such experiences which make the middle adolescence stage a vulnerable group as they are prone to experimenting with risky behaviour (Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2011).

1.3 Theoretical framework

This study was conducted according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach which states that children develop in a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels

of the surrounding environment (Berk, 2013). The environment is viewed as a series of structures in which children spend their everyday lives forming a complex functioning system (Berk, 2013; Bee and Boyd, 2007). Bronfenbrenner developed four structures which resembled the environment and are also termed the "structures of environment" or layers of the environment which are: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 in Bee and Boyd, 2007:363). The microsystem is the settings, activities or interactions in the child's immediate surroundings such as the child's family or school (Berk, 2013).

The mesosystem which occupies the second layer contains the connections between the microsystems, for instance the child's family and his or her school (Berk, 2013). The exosystem includes a wide range of elements in the system that the child does not experience directly but that still influence the child as they affect the microsystem (Bee and Boyd, 2007). According to this author, the macrosystem encompasses the larger cultural and subcultural settings in which all the above-mentioned systems are embedded (Bee and Boyd, 2007). These systems link with each other to affect optimum development.

In application to the study, these four systems make up the different environments of the study population. And through the systems' interconnectedness, children are bound to be influenced by their environment. Taking into consideration that family structure is central to this study in relation to child outcomes, this theory also stresses its emphasis on family, describing it as a filter through which the larger society influences child development (Bee and Boyd, 2007).

In exploring the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to the discipline of adolescents, the research also sought to examine the extent to which cohabiting families influence child outcomes and challenges with regard to discipline for their adolescent children.

1.4 Problem formulation

The literature review points to the fact that cohabitation is often temporary in nature, characterised by a lack of commitment and shared resources and support (Whyte 2000: Nock, 1995). It is often associated with negative impacts on child development, such as lower cognitive skills, social incompetence, low self-esteem and low academic achievement. It may

result in the child showing detrimental behaviours such as delinquency, teenage pregnancies and school dropping out (Bergin and Bergin, 2012; Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2010; Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Smock and Gupta, 2002; Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Manning and Lichter, 1996). In view of the fact that adolescents are already prone to experimenting with risk behaviour (Kosslyn and Rosenberg, 2011), living in a cohabiting family may add to the vulnerability of this age group. The disciplining of children, especially adolescents, is another concern. Adolescents present with additional emotional, physical and behavioural challenges (Louw, 2008), and during this phase of their development, living with a biological parent in a cohabiting relationship may complicate discipline even more.

Considering these research problems, a need was found to explore the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents so as to understand the dynamics of these families, such as the challenges of the cohabiting parents in conveying discipline to their adolescent child, in addition to exploring the challenges that adolescents themselves experience with regard to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabiting relationship.

1.5 Research question

This study aimed at exploring and describing the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline. The research question for this study was: What are the challenges of cohabiting families in disciplining their adolescent children?

1.5.1 Research goals and objectives

Goal: To explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.

Objectives

- To explore and describe the challenges of the biological parent in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents;
- To explore and describe challenges of adolescents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabitation union.

1.6 Research approach

Boeije (2010) explains that qualitative research uses flexible methods and techniques to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of meaning brought by people. Boeije (2010) furthermore states that qualitative research is based on the assumption that individuals have an active role in the construction of social reality; hence it enables contact with participants and produces rich descriptive data. Qualitative research can be applied through in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations and case studies (Frederikson, Chamberlain and Long, 1996).

Quantitative research uses methods to collect numerical data, emphasising the measuring of variables and testing hypotheses that are linked to general causal explanations (Neuman, 2006). Thus quantitative research generates statistics through the use of methods such as questionnaires or structured interviews. Quantitative research methods collect direct specified information, without room for more explanation of the logic behind the given answers.

A qualitative study was used as it allowed the researcher to be in direct contact with the participants and to make use of flexible methods of data collection such as interviews which yield a lot of information, unlike quantitative research. According to Davis (2007) qualitative research is more flexible than quantitative research as it allows greater spontaneity and adaptation of interaction between the researcher and the participants. Creswell (2009) points out that the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports, and detailed views from informants while conducting the study in natural settings. Qualitative research sets less formal relationships with the participants than quantitative research as participants engage in reciprocal communication styles with the researcher, elaborating their responses and in greater detail (Creswell, 2009). Taking into consideration the special qualities of painting social phenomena through people's experiences in natural environments on direct interactions between the researcher and the participants, a qualitative approach was more suitable for this study. Qualitative research methodology's flexible data collection methods which yield rich information are another added quality in obtaining a variety of information from the participants, and contributed to the researcher's decision.

1.7 Research design

A research design is a specification of the most satisfactory actions to be performed in order to successfully answer the research question (Swartz et al., 2008). De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2011) refer to seven types of research designs, namely explorative research, descriptive research, explanatory research, correlational research, evaluative research, intervention research and participatory research.

According to Neuman (2006), **explorative research** design is the first stage in a sequence of studies focusing on the "what" questions. It is mainly used with qualitative research and it seeks to gain insight into the phenomenon, situation or community in focus (De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie and Mouton, 2001). This author describes **descriptive research** design as similar to explorative design, which presents a picture of the specific details of a situation or an area of focus asking "how and why" questions. This study applies both explorative and descriptive design, as explorative design seeks to gain insight into the studied area of interest and descriptive design seeks to paint a picture of the research problem studied (De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Through explorative design, the researcher sought to explore the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline. By using descriptive design, the researcher expected to obtain descriptive details of the challenges that the adolescent children and cohabiting parents living in cohabiting families experience with regard to discipline.

1.8 Research methodology

This section considers issues related to the methodology of the study which include a discussion on population and sampling, data collection, data analysis, data verification and the ethical considerations applied to this study.

1.8.1 Population and sampling

According to Swartz et al., (2008) **population** is a group of organisms of the same species inhabiting a given area. The population for this study was adolescents between the ages of 13-17 years of age living in cohabiting families, as well as the cohabiting parents in the city of Cape Town.

Sampling is a process employed by researchers in which individuals are selected to participate in the research study (Swartz et al., 2008). A sample is an element of the population that is considered for actual inclusion in the study (De Vos et al., 2011). With particular reference to non-probability sampling, De Vos et al., (2011) identify purposive sampling, snow ball sampling, theoretical sampling and deviant sampling as the respective sampling techniques of the non-probability method. Non-probability sampling is where every unit of analysis in the population does not have an equal chance of being selected into the sample (Swartz et al., 2008). For this study, purposive sampling and snow-ball sampling techniques were used, taking into account the sensitivity of the study with regard to the underlying assumptions on cohabitation. Some people might not feel comfortable to identify themselves as cohabits or living in a cohabiting family structure, therefore it was difficult to locate participants.

Purposive sampling technique is a sampling procedure in which participants are selected into a sample on the basis of the researcher's own judgment about the participants (Swartz et al., 2008). With permission granted from the management of Cape Town Child Welfare Organisation, cohabiting families who had been living together for a year or more with adolescents between the ages of 13-17 years were targeted and sourced from the case load of this Organisation.

Having located the first few participants through purposive sampling, **snow-ball sampling** was applied in locating more participants. Snow-ball sampling technique is a sampling procedure where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances (Swartz et al., 2008). Taking into account that qualitative research sample size is not determined at the outset of the study (Donalek and Soldwisch 2004:356 ; Harvey, McDermott and Davidson, 2002:726), the researcher planned on conducting individual interviews with the cohabiting biological parents involved in cohabiting unions and the adolescents living in cohabiting families until data saturation. Data saturation is when new data tends to be redundant because of the data already collected, and the researcher begins to hear the same comments again and again (Grady, 1998:26). The researcher chose to include both biological parents as well as adolescents in order to broaden the scope of the problem in order to extend understanding of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.

In view of the fact that the principal researcher is only conversant in English, the interviews were conducted in English.

1.8.2 Data Collection

Data collection took place by means of individual semi-structured interviews with the aid of an interview guide in which a set of predetermined questions guided the interview (De Vos et al., 2011). This data collection method is aimed at gaining a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs, perceptions and accounts of the area of interest (Swartz et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews make use of open-ended questions which range from simple to complex and broad to allow the participants to gradually adjust to the pattern of the interview (De Vos et al., 2011), (See Appendix 1). Through this data collection method, there were flexible relations between the participants and the researcher, as the researcher could follow up on particular interesting avenues emerging from the interviews, and the participants also shared more closely in the direction of the interview. The interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants, field notes were taken, and the data was also transcribed verbatim. The researcher sought informed consent from the biological parents of the children participating as well consent to interview the adolescents. Informed assent was also requested from the adolescents. Appointments for interviews were set at the participants' homes to ensure familiar surroundings.

1.8.3 Pilot study

A pilot study is a smaller version of a study that is carried out before the actual data collection is done (Bryman and Bell, 2003). These authors state that it is like a small experiment designed to test logistics and to gather information prior to the actual study, in order to improve the quality of the interview schedule and the efficiency of conducting the research study. A pilot study is conducted not only to ensure that the interview questions are functional but also to ensure that the research instrument as a whole functions well (Bryman, 2003). A pilot study was therefore conducted prior to the actual larger data collection process to check that the interview questions were not ambiguous and was suitable to yield the relevant intended data. See Chapter 3 on 3.7.3 for a detailed explanation of the applied procedure during the pilot study and the outcome thereof.

1.8.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis refers to the categorisation, ordering and summarising of data to obtain answers to research questions (De Vos et al., 2011). It is also defined by Holloway, (1997) as the scrutiny with which researchers categorise themes and patterns in interviews through listening to the audiotapes and reading transcripts in order to make sense of the collected data. Creswell (2009) furthermore states that qualitative data analyses move deeper and deeper into understanding the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data. In order to systematically conduct a comprehensive data analysis, the study followed Tesch in Creswell's (2009) eight generic step processes of qualitative data analysis.

- **Firstly** in preparation for the data analysis, the author states that the researcher should organise and prepare data through transcribing interviews, keeping account of field notes and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information. Having done the transcription process, the researcher should read through all data to obtain a general sense of the information and be able to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). Thus the researcher transcribed all the interviews thoroughly and read through them with reference to the field notes in order to gain an general idea of the overall information collected.
- **Secondly**, starting with the shortest and most interesting transcript, the researcher is expected to read through it, reflecting on its underlying meaning and making notes on any rising thoughts, views or opinions (Creswell, 2009). Having carried out this process on most of the informants' data, the researcher should make lists of all the noted topics and cluster together similar topics as the **third** stage (Creswell, 2009).
- Moving onto the **fourth stage**, Creswell (2009) points out that this is the beginning of a detailed analysis with a coding process. According to Rossman & Rails, (1998) coding is a process of organising the materials into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those chunks. Thus in relation to the drawn up list on noted topics in the informants' data, the researcher should abbreviate the topics and develop codes on the appropriate or noted relevant segments in the participants' information (Creswell, 2009).
- Onto the **fifth stage**, Creswell (2009) advises the researcher to develop descriptive wording for the already noted topics in the third stage. Finding descriptive wording for

these topics turns them into categories and these categories should be reduced considerably by grouping related topics together.

- At the **sixth stage**, the researcher should make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and then categorise the codes.
- This leads to the **seventh stage** of assembling data material belonging to each category in one place and performing a preliminary analysis (Creswell, 2009).
- As the **final stage**, the author further states that if necessary, the existing data must be recoded to obtain consistency in the meaning attached to the participants' collected data. See Chapter 3 on 3.7.4 for a detailed explanation on how these staged executed to analyse the obtained data.

1.8.5 Data verification

According to Neuman (2006), data verification refers to a process where data is checked for accuracy and inconsistencies. Data was verified on the basis of **credibility**, meaning that the data of enquiry validly represents appropriately the phenomena that it is expected to represent. In order to prove data credibility, the researcher ensured that she asked the participants whether or not their realities had been represented appropriately. The researcher also confirmed whether the final data analysis was believable in the understanding and knowledge of the participants (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004).

Data must also be verified on the basis of **transferability**, that is, the extent to which knowledge generated can be generalised to similar contexts. From a general naturalistic perspective, generated knowledge cannot be transferred beyond its context (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). To prove that the data gathered was transferable to similar contexts, the researcher ensured that diverse participants were used so as to gain a broader perspective of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline. The researcher made use of the same sampling criteria in order to enhance transferability.

Data was also be verified on the basis of **dependability**, meaning the alternative for quantitative research reliability. Dependability relates to stability after taking into account

contextual differences (D’Cruz and Jones, 2004). To prove that the research was dependable, the researcher used the same interview schedule, research approach and methodology during data collection. As long as the problem formulation remained similar, the researcher employed the same methods so that the data gathered could correlate. The researcher also made use of an independent coder to enhance dependability.

Conformability is another basis for data verification and it is the ability of the researcher to use reflexivity in identifying own personal and social positioning and power issues in research (D’Cruz and Jones, 2004). Even though it is impossible to totally remove oneself as researcher and yet be objective, the researcher consulted the participants regarding the information they give to ensure whether the inferences, deductions and conclusions drawn in the data analysis and coding of data had their intended meanings as the researcher interpreted it.

1.8.6 Ethical considerations

Neuman (2006) indicates that every researcher should be ethically sound in order to protect the participants from any physical or psychological harm, and treat participants with respect and dignity. Rubin and Babbie (2005) state that it is a fundamental ethical rule of social research that it **must do no harm** to its subjects. Taking into consideration that some of the participants for this study were adolescents, who by law were minors, the researcher first presented all participants’ parents or guardians with an informed consent form which outlined terms and conditions on which this research was based. This informed consent form included all the adequate information on the goals of the research, expected duration of the participants’ involvement, procedures to be followed, possible advantages or disadvantages, benefits if any, and the credibility of the study (De Vos et al., 2011). The parents or guardians having approved, assent forms were then presented to the adolescents, seeking their permission to participate in the study. Both informed consent and assent forms guarantee all participants that:

- Participation is **voluntary**, that is to say, the participant has the right to choose whether or not to participate; no one should be forced to participate in the project (Babbie, 2005);
- Participants therefore, have the **right to withdraw at any stage of the study**;

- Participants have the right to **anonymity** as they are not obliged to give identification details in order to participate in this research. On this note, De Vos et al., (2011) also emphasise that every individual has the right to privacy. In ensuring this ethical consideration, the participants' names were not be used in the study; pseudo names were used instead;
- **Confidentiality** is the continuation of privacy and refers to agreement between persons that limit others' access to private information (De Vos et al., 2011). Participants have the right to confidentiality, and interviews were conducted between the participants and the researcher only. The recorded transcripts remained within the students' reach and no one else will have access to these transcripts except for the researcher's supervisor. The researcher also ensured confidentiality of the interviews conducted with the adolescent participants by making sure that this information was not available to these children's biological parents and vice versa so as to safeguard the relationships between the biological parents and their adolescent children. This also preserved the **principle of no-harm** to the relationships between the parents and adolescents who would participate in this study;
- **Permission** was requested from the Senate Degrees Committee UWC for ethical clearance as well as from the officials of Cape Town Child Welfare organisation where the participants were recruited;
- Participants, who needed intervention after the interview were referred to a colleague for **debriefing** to avoid emotional harm.

1.9 Conclusion

With reference to the underlying assumptions on cohabitation and the literature comments on this research topic, the researcher sought to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline, unveiling both the challenges of cohabiting biological parents and the challenges of adolescent children living in cohabiting families. For an excellent study, a carefully selected adolescent population was considered, and a qualitative methodology was selected, and guided by the above ethical considerations, the researcher looked forward to yielding optimum results for this study. The results obtained from this

research will be used to produce guidelines for social workers that can be implemented during parental guidance for cohabiting parents.



CHAPTER 2

AN EXPLORATION OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an introduction of the research topic accompanied by a brief background and rationale for the study. Chapter 1 also presented the research problem, research question, goal and objectives as well as a summary of the research approach, research design and research methodology of this study and concluded with the applied ethical considerations.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the relevant concepts significant to the research topic, providing an in-depth account of the identified subject matters. These include identifying and discussing some of the most common types of family structures and their respective effects on child development on the basis of the key determinants of child well-being, which include family stability, consistent parenting practices, economic resources and parent-child relationships. The subject of discipline, which is the focus of the study, will be introduced as well as the different parenting styles used in disciplining children. The researcher discusses the adolescence stage in relation to various human development theories, as well as looking at the characteristics of adolescence including psychological changes and behavioural changes and their relevance to the study. Finally the researcher identifies Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory as the most applicable theoretical framework for this study.

2.2 Family structures

The South African family system is currently comprised of diverse structures which include married families, single parent families, restructured or blended families, child-headed families and cohabitation families. Family structure is defined as the composition of the family, characterised by family functions, family interactions, family disruption and family size (Buefeld, Burfeld and Bartusch, 2011: 120).

These varied family structures are caused by a number of reasons which include the pressures of modernisation, western education, industrialisation and urbanisation. South Africa's

history of apartheid, particularly the migrant labour system, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and poverty, also contributed to these diverse family structures, (Holbon and Eddy, 2011; Budlender, Chobokoane and Simelone, 2004; United Nations 2003).

For a better illustration of current South African family structures, see the following table adapted from Berger (2012:72).

Table 1: A summary of South African families

Number of registered civil marriages	Down from 176 521 (2004) to 171 989 (2009)
Number of registered customary marriages	Down from 20 301 (2004) to 13 506 (2009)
Number of published divorces	Down from 31 768 (2004) to 30 763 (2009)
Divorces with children	17 214 (56%)
Double orphans	859 000
Paternal orphans	2 468 000
Maternal orphans	624 000
Total orphans	3.95 million
AIDS orphans	1.4 million
Number/proportion of children in child-headed households	98 000 (0.5%)
Proportion of children with absent living fathers	Up from 42 % (1996) to 48% (2009)
Proportion of children with present fathers	Down from 49%(1996) to 36% (2009)
Proportion of children with present fathers	
African	30%
Coloured	53%
Indian	85%
White	83%
Proportion of children with absent fathers	
African	Up from 46% (1996) to 52% (2009)
Coloured	Up from 34%(1996) to 41% (2009)
Indian	Down from 17%(1996) to 12% (2009)
White	Up from 13% (1996) to 15% (2009)
Children (0-17) living with biological parents	35%
Children (0-17) living with mother only	40%
Children (0-17) living with father only	3%
Children (0-17) living with neither biological parent	23%
Children (0-17) living with grandparents	8%
Urban single parents in each race group	
African	54%
Coloured	30%

Indian	7%
White	24%
All	44%
Urban single parents by age	
16-24	13%
25-34	33%
35- 44	24%
45-64	23%
Proportion of female urban single parents in each race group	
African	79%
Coloured	84%
Indian	64%
White	69%

Out of the five mentioned common family structures in South Africa, the above table illustrates only three, which are marriage families, single parent families and child-headed families. The married families are presented first as civil and customary marriages, but due to the high divorce rates among other factors such as never married individuals, the single parent families are also recorded in the above table. A proportion of child-headed families are also illustrated with clearly presented statistics of the recorded orphans in South Africa. It should be noted that restructured or step-parent families and cohabitation families are not included in the above table. With specific reference to the former, these family structures have not been included in any recent studies in South Africa, which accounts for statistics on cohabitation.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the married families, single parent families and restructured or step-parent families as they can be compared to cohabitation families and can be adequately scrutinised with reference to child development relevant to the aims of this study.

2.2.1 Married families

Marriage is viewed as a key institution around which the entire social structure revolves. Its main functions are directed at dividing human identity into manhood or womanhood, reproduction, biological generation and genealogical continuity (Thorton et al., 2007; Alfolayon, 2004). Furthermore it serves to fulfil human needs such as sexual expression, physical intimacy, psychological comfort and social partnership. Therefore marriage is

regarded as the original family structure which administers human existence through the birth and nurturing of children as well as a form of support for all the parties involved in that particular family.

There are different types of marriages such as polygamous marriages and monogamous marriages, also referred to as nuclear families. The former are a union between a man and a woman who will become husband and wife together with their children (Levin and Sussman, 1997). A polygamous marriage means having many spouses at the same time and it is usually a man having more than one wife, especially in African and Moslem cultures (Shepherd, 2010). Both these types of marriages are recognised by the South African law regarding customary and civil marriages. Customary marriages are marriages negotiated, celebrated or concluded according to the systems of the indigenous African customary law (Department of Home Affairs South Africa, 2013). African customary marriages have a tradition of paying *lobola* which is a property in cash or in kind, paid by the prospective husband to the head of the prospective wife's family (Customary marriage Act 120 of 1998).

Civil marriages on the other hand, are marriages conducted by a government official employed by the Department of Home Affairs or the South African Magistrates Court and are conducted under the Civil Union Act (Act 17 of 2006) which allows anyone regardless of sexual orientation to marry (Department of Home Affairs South Africa, 2013). The Statistical Release Marriages and Divorces (2010) has shown that about 170 820 civil marriages, 9 996 customary marriages and 888 civil unions were registered in South Africa at the time. These statistics however do not include some of the unregistered customary marriages which often occur in the rural areas.

2.2.1.1 Married families and child development

Married families have been associated with more positive or better child development outcomes than children from other forms of family structures on the basis of a stable family environment, good consistent parental practices, and steady economic resources (Berger 2012; Manning et al., (2007); Manning and Brown (2006); Manning and Lamb (2003). A stable family environment is defined as a safe environment for a child, providing a sense of emotional security and social integration, and offering critical social expertise that leads to behaviours that will eventually permit the child to engage in self-regulation (Raley and

Wildsmith, 2004:212). Therefore both parents in married families are agreed to limitlessly invest in a stable family environment which would increase parent-child interaction, It also fosters the most desirable child development outcomes thorough support and stimulation for the child or children involved (Maccoby and Martin (1983). This support of children by both parents involved can be associated with warm consistent parental practices which lead to positive child outcomes such as higher academic achievement, better emotional health and fewer behavioural problems (Dunifon, 2002).

A stable family environment also means secure home settings. Raley and Wildsmith (2004) and Manning and Lamb, (2003) have indicated that there is less prevalence of domestic violence in marriage families than in other family structures, hence making it the preferred family structure for optimum child development. In support of this claim, Yexley, Borowsky and Ireland (2002) report that 4.4 % of adolescents living with both biological parents have witnessed domestic violence in their families, while 9.9 % of adolescents not living with biological parents reported the same. Furthermore about 6.5 % of these same children not living with biological parents have been direct victims of domestic violence as compared to 3.5% of the children living with both biological parents. These findings clearly illustrate more security for children's development in married families than in other family structures. Married families are likely to have lower psychological distress; reduced likelihood of engagement into risk practices during the adolescence; high levels of social competence and more successful intimate relationships among the children raised in this family structure (Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003).

Married families are also often associated with consistent parental practices which stem from the more defined and negotiated parental roles which ensure definite parental supervision and monitoring of the children. This enables communication between the parents and their children which also allows further development of the child-parent bond (Brown, 2004). With specific reference to the male child in a father-son relationship, research asserts that parental supervision as well as supportive and affectionate father-son relationship discourages juvenile delinquency regardless of the youth's delinquent peers and the surrounding neighbourhood (Jensen, 1972; Pruett, 2000; Shotton, 2005; Mason, 2006). This shows how much the child-parental bond can protect the child from some risky behaviour. It can also explain the high records of delinquent behaviour in children especially boys with emotionally and/or physically absent fathers, especially in single parent families (Bee and Boyd, 2007).

Married families are also argued to be characterised by steady economic resources, which facilitates healthy child development through the allocation of resources towards children since responsibilities and agreements are more easily enforced under family law (Berger, 2012). There have been several theoretical perspectives which suggest that investments of economic resources in children and the quality of family relationships may be influenced by the biological and marital status. Hence financial resources have been identified as one of the key determinants of child well-being (Blau, 1999). In marriage the involved parties pool their resources together, allowing themselves to purchase goods and services important for child development. By forming a union, the availability of family resources can increase through several mechanisms (Becker, 1991; Michael, 1973; Shaw, 1987; Drewianka, 2004). The high cost of divorce that would require a legal separation of property, assets and custody rights, makes marriage more difficult to dissolve. In addition, married family structures signal a greater commitment, leading to greater investments in the respective children (Björklund, Ginther and Sundström, 2007).

Although married family structures are found to offer children the most desirable family environment, it should however be taken into consideration that some marriage families may be dysfunctional due to marital conflict and other social problems. There are therefore children from married family structures who have also witnessed and experienced domestic violence. Therefore, some married families could also be risky environments for optimum child development as marital conflict and especially violence can lead to insensitivity, neglect, insecure attachment and lack of parental warmth towards the children (Webster-Stratton and Hammond, 2003; Grych and Fincham, 1990). In case of poverty or alcohol/substance abuse by the parents in a married family, there are bound to be less financial investments in the children involved, hence affecting the children's well-being (Berger, 2012; Webster-Stratton and Hammond, 2003).

In the next section of the research study, single parent families and the relation between this family structure and child development will be discussed.

2.2.2 Single parent families

According to the International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families (2004) single parent families are families where one parent lives with dependent children either alone or in a larger household without a spouse/partner. Single parents are often a result of the death of

one of the parents, or else a divorce. In the South African context, deaths as a result of the AIDS pandemic are another major factor that contributes to the death of a parent. Others became single parents through teenage pregnancies or chose not to marry. Some single parents also make use of technological advancements such as artificial insemination or adoption to become parents.

Globally, one-quarter of all families are headed by a single parent, single mothers to be specific. In developed countries the increase of single parent families is perpetuated by high divorces rates (International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families, 2004). In developing countries, death, desertion and imprisonment are among the leading factors to the development of single parent households which are primarily headed by women (Kinnear, 1999).

In South Africa, single parent families were highly influenced by the migrant labour system, where mostly the Black African men who were the sole bread winners in their families migrated from their rural reserves to the town mines for employment to provide for their families. These men would be absent from their families for most of the year. They visited their families only during the short Christmas and Easter holidays, which resulted in alienating fathers from their families, leaving the women to raise their children on their own. Even though South Africa is now living in the post-apartheid era, migrancy still exists (Holborn and Eddy, 2011). It still contributes to the existing single parent households today.

According to the South African Demographic and Health Survey of 2008, statistics have shown that 40% of children were living with their mothers only and 2.8% with their fathers. A further breakdown of these numbers has illustrated that 44% of urban parents were single parents, and among these most were female Africans between the ages of 25 and 34 years. These indicators were supported by another survey which has shown that 44% of first-born children were born to unmarried mothers before their mothers had been married (South African Demographic and Health Survey, 1998). This confirmed that a typical child in South Africa is raised by their mother in a single parent household due to absent living fathers. The International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families (2004) indicated that more than 10% of fathers either did not visit their children or had had no contact with them for over a year, and thus fathers often become disinterested and detached from their children. The latest

available data on absent fathers in South Africa has shown that the proportion of fathers who were absent from their children but still living increased between 1996 and 2009 from 42% to 48%. Over this same period, the proportion of fathers who were present decreased from 49% to 36%, thus contributing to the high rates of single parent families in South Africa, leaving single mothers to raise their children on their own (Amato, 2004).

The above-mentioned information verifies the high prevalence of single parent families especially among South Africa black women, and leads to the idea that some of these single parents are then more likely to engage in cohabitation. These findings are supported by Manning, Smock and Majumdar (2000) who maintain that older children in cohabiting unions primarily live with their mother and her partner. It is also important to note that single parenthood shares some features with cohabitation if the parent is not married and living in a union that is not legally sanctioned and whose meaning for the family members is not clear, especially when one member of the cohabiting relationship has no biological ties to the child (Manning and Lamb, 2003).

Among the challenges of single parents, research has pointed out that they often experience responsibility overload in making decisions and providing for the family, and task overload with the demands of work, housework and parenting which can be overwhelming for one person. In addition they experience emotional overload when the single parent must always be available to meet their own and the children's emotional needs. This combination may lead to loneliness, anxiety and depression to the single parent (International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families, 2004). These challenges can hinder effective parenting, which in turn may affect child development.

Amato (2000); Pryor and Rodgers (2001) indicate that research has consistently shown that children in single parent families are at greater risk for emotional and behavioural problems, and for poor academic achievement, than are children from traditional two-parent homes. It has been found through varied research that children in single parent homes generally fare worse than those from homes with two parents. Statistically, in the US, family structure contributes to certain characteristics of a child's well-being, but there is a prevalence of lower birthrates and higher death rates among infants when there is just one parent. The number of children aged 15-17 in school and in good health is much lower among single parent families,

and the numbers of children becoming pregnant at these ages are also increasing. There are also indicators that children from divorced families who have subsequently ended up living in a single parent family, may have problems with depression, emotional stress, and difficulties in school (Kotchick, Dorsey and Heller, 2005).

Adolescents raised by single mothers during some period of their childhood are twice as likely to drop out of high school, twice as likely to have a baby before the age of 20, and one-and-a-half times more likely to be out of work in their late teens or early twenties than those from a similar background who grew up with two parents in the family (Kotchick et al., 2005). In addition factors such as financial hardship, mothers' lack of social support and children's exposure to conflict and hostility between parents before, during and sometimes after separation or divorce become evident (Amato, 2000; Pryor and Rodgers, 2001).

2.2.2.1 Single parent families and child development

Some researchers have associated children from single parent families with lower mental, emotional and behavioural well-being, increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes (Choi and Jackson, 2011; Flouri and Buchanan, 2003; Ratele, 2012). These negative child outcomes could be explained by the single parent's applied parental practices, parent-child relationships, and the economic status of single parent families (Ratele, 2012).

Due to emotional, task and responsibility overload, single parents have been reported as having high stress levels, and this stress can undermine both parental psychological well-being and parenting effectiveness, leading to inconsistent parenting (McLanahan and Sandefur, 2004; Cherlin, 2004). Furthermore, prior research postulated that single parents in general have low parental supervision levels on their children as they may be too lenient, too busy, self-preoccupied or inconsistent in their parenting techniques. This may promote and sustain patterns of interaction that facilitate the development of antisocial behaviour in children and adolescents, resulting in their poor social and academic outcomes (Patterson and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984; Spodek, 2006). The quality of the children's relationship with their resident parent and that parent's economic status may also affect the children's outcomes, (International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families, 2004). Some of these children's development problems may have been caused by a decrease or lack in economic resources as well as adult supervision, leading to many negative outcomes in children (McLanahan and Sandefur, 2004).

In single parent families with only a mother, children often experience short- and long-term economic and psychological disadvantages; higher absenteeism at school; lower levels of education and higher school dropout rates; and more delinquent activity including alcohol and drug addiction, with boys more negatively affected than girls (International Encyclopaedia of marriages and families, 2004). As a result children from single parent families are more likely to marry early, girls to have children at a young age and be at risk of experiencing divorce themselves and therefore at greater risk of becoming single mothers themselves (Colossi, 2009), thus repeating the cycle.

A considerable amount of literature describes the frequent consequences of single parent families due to the absent male adult or father figure in the family (Amato and Sobolewski, 2004; Summers, 2002; Beller and Graham, 1993; Biller, 1993). However, the lack of the male presence is equally significant as the extra income in the family, hence economic deprivation of single parent families (Colossi, 2009). Economic hardships in single parent families is major challenge and a stress factor for both the parent and children involved and may influence the single parents to engage in cohabitation for an economic relief through sharing living costs.

Problems found in a single-parent household may not be caused by the parent who raised these children, but can be linked to other factors that are also related to single parenting, such as lower income, often one of the main reasons for so many family problems. The effects of coming from a low-income family can contribute to lower education levels and lower economic achievement, and can result in leaving a child feeling isolated and lonely. Being a single parent and struggling for money often coincide (Kotchick et al., 2005).

It is also true that children of one-parent households are generally less well supervised, their actions are less well monitored, and there is usually less communication between the child and parent (Kotchick et al., 2005).

However other researchers have found that single parent families potentially can function as well intergrated and supportive family structures. These families value home centredness, communication, and family closeness (Graham, 2006). This same author admits to the common single parent's challenges such as responsibility and task overload, but offers some coping mechanisms which single parents can adapt for creating a family environment for the parents and the children involved. One of these mechanisms is to develop an executive

authority figure other than the primary parent present in that family, who could be the oldest child or another adult or a significant other. This would relieve the available single parent of all the responsibility and task overload as one adult can delegate authority and responsibility in an age-appropriate manner to the children while the other appointed member of the executive authority will ensure that these responsibilities are done (Graham, 2006). A stable single mother family may provide consistent home environment and parenting that may be beneficial to children leading to positive child outcomes (Manning and Bulanda, 2002).

It therefore appears that being part of a single parent household often contributes to a negative family environment but others manage to find a balance and successfully thrive in today's world.

2.2.3 Step or restructured families

According to Hammond (2010:175), step-families or restructured families are legal unions between two adults following the dissolution of their previous marriages for one or both spouses. Being single again often leads to a new marriage with children from another marriage or relationship can also be called remarriage. For the purpose of this study, these family structures will be referred to as step-families. Step-families can be seen as similar to cohabitation families except that they are legalised through the union of marriage while in cohabitation families, the involved parties are not married.

Research has shown that step-families are mainly a product of divorce. It has been found that most divorced people's single life is short-lived, with the median interval before remarriage for previously divorced men being 2.3 years and for divorced women 2.5 years,(Goldenberg and Goldenberg, 2002),hence the high prevalence of step-families. Step-families are made up custodian parents after a divorce, those who do not have custody over their children, and heterosexual couples as well as same-sex couples. As mentioned above, step-families are mainly a product of divorced couples, individuals who are widowed, and those who were not previously married (Kelley, 1995; Levin and Sussman, 1997).With reference to the profiles of individuals who may engage in step-families, Robinson (1991:123) classifies the following different types of step-families:

- Legitimizing, where the biological parent was not previously married, and the children were illegitimate;

- Revitalised, where the biological parent has remained following the death of the other natural parent;
- Reassembled, where one or both parents have been divorced, and the biological parent brings into the family a step-parent who did not previously have children;
- A combination, where both parents have been previously married and have children from their first marriages, who may or may not live with the step-family full-time.

Step-families have been described as complex family structures because of the variety of parental figures, siblings and extended family members that are involved in current as well as previous marriages (Goldenberg, 2006). The dynamics of cohabiting step-parent families may mimic married step-families in the way in which family roles are assumed, and financial and emotional contributions are made to the other partner's children (Stewart, 2001 ; Raley and Wildsmith, 2004). Therefore challenges experienced in step-parent families are often common in cohabitation families as well. According to Pino (1996), there are unique problems typical to step-families that create conflict within these families.

These problems often surface owing due to factors such as step-parent authority, angry step-children, step- sibling relationships and even extended step-family relationships. Therefore among the commonly expressed attitudes towards step-families are that step-children will suffer from illtreatment by the step-mother, and that conflict between step-parents and step-child(ren) will often result in conflict between the spouses (Levin and Sussman, 1997).

This same author explains that the tension and conflict which occur in step-families between step-parents and step-children is also due to the battling for emotional or material resources (Levin and Sussman, 1997). The above-mentioned perceptions of step-families are mainly associated with the step-mother's parent role, because mothers are more involved with the day-to-day business of raising children and so they can be viewed as cruel and constantly plotting to harm their step-children (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). Another perception is that step-children are seen as children who do not belong, especially to the other person who

married their biological parent, so there is bound to be tension and conflict between step-parents and step-children (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001).

In general, step-parent families are described as less cohesive than "normal" ones, with the step-parent-child and sibling relationships more negative, distant and less warm (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). Step-parents have been reported as engaging in fewer activities with their step-children, with limited communication, less warmth and expression of feelings than with their biological children (Thomson et al., 1992; Ganong and Coleman, 1994 in Levin and Sussman, 1997). Hence family functions in step-parent families may be viewed as risk factors for child development if there is tension and conflict between the biological parent and the step-parent and between the parents and the respective children.

However, taking into account the common ground of legal union between marriage families and step parent families, it can be argued that step-parent families offer more stability than cohabiting families, owing to the commitment of the involved parties that resulted in marriage. In the case where the step-parent families have a child or children together, it often becomes a stabilising influence which serves as evidence of the spouses' commitment to the union (Wu, 1995; Brown and Booth, 1996). Therefore the advantages of marriage families can also be applied to step-families, leading to more positive child development.

2.2.3.1 Step or restructured families and child development

Children in remarriages or step-families have been found to have more externalising behaviour problems than those in first marriage families, displaying less competence, low academic achievement, and low social skill. These adjustment difficulties are mainly reported as children move towards adolescence and during the adolescence stage itself, while younger children have been found to adjust better to their parents' remarriages (Bray, 1990 in Levin, 1997). Research also states that adolescents who live in a step-family are more likely to form intimate unions before the age of 20, and these unions are more likely to be cohabitational than legal marriages. They tend to drop out of school, engage early in sexual activities, have teenage pregnancies or be teenage parents, and are more likely to be involved in criminal activities (Upchurch, 1993; Gorman and Korste, 1994; Coleman, Ganong and Fine, 2000). Therefore step-families or remarriage are argued not to always have protective effects, and instead be associated with more negative effects on child well-being.

Another factor which leads to negative child outcomes in step-families is that most parenting behaviours used in first marriages, such as authoritative parenting styles, are less effective in step-parent families. Step-parents may be negative in their interactions with the children, resulting in more negative behaviours in the children (Levin and Sussman, 1997). Negative child outcomes in step-families are also exhibited as the step-parent tries to adjust to the routines of the resident family on issues such as parenting involvement, discipline, standard of behaviour for children, allocation of household tasks, and the management of the household finances (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). Such intergration by the step-parent into the family functions of the resident family in case his or her relationship with the step children is negative, may also lead to severe maladjustments among the children involved.

On the other hand, if the step-parents and step-children have a mutually satisfying relationship characterised by warmth and a strong bond, marital satisfaction between the biological parent and the step-parent is bound to be enhanced, consequently fostering positive child outcomes for the children involved (Levin and Sussman, 1997). The nature of the relationship between step-parent and step-child provides a key to understanding child outcomes. Although the researcher found limited literature associating step-parent families with positive child outcomes, that does not mean that all step-parent family structures are necessarily associated with negative child development outcomes.

In the next section, the reseracher will discuss cohabitation families as a family structure and the possible impact on child development.

2.2.4 Cohabitation families

Cohabitation is one of the family structures that have increased greatly in recent years (Shepard, 2010; Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Whyte, 2000). Even though cohabitation is a prominent family structure in South Africa, there are limited statistics to indicate the prevalence of cohabitation. This is probably due to the fact that South Africa only distinguished between married and unmarried. The scarcity of literature on cohabitation can be explained by this structure's lack of institutionalisation and the fact that it is not recognised by the South African law. On an international level, cohabitation is legalised and recognised by most Western countries such as the United States, Britain and Australia. Denmark, Norway and Sweden follow a Scandinavian Welfare Model identified by heavy

social spending, benefits and services of a high standard, and a high degree of government intervention. In these states cohabiting persons receive similar if not identical benefits to married couples (Esping-Andersen and Korpi 1987; Schults Lee, 2010). Even though this type of family structure has not been recognised by the South African law, the involved parties can legally protect themselves financially through a contractual agreement or will, which is endorsed by legal practitioners (Gregory et al., 2013).

Cohabitation families can be related to single parent families and step-parent families considering some of the shared characteristics between these three family structures. With specific reference to cohabitation and step-parent families, the major difference is that step-parent family structures are formalised through marriage whereas in cohabitation, the involved parties are not married. The adopted definition of cohabitation for the purpose of this study is by Whyte (2000:13) who views cohabitation as two people living together for their own strictly private reasons and carving out their own strictly private bargain about the relationship without any legal or social pressure. In a broader sense, the term "cohabitation" denotes a situation in which two people live together in a family framework analogous to marriage, without actually having gone through a ceremony of marriage (Mashau, 2006).

Cohabitation is often characterised by lack of institutionalisation, limited economic resources, temporary or shortlivedness leading to its often unstable nature (Cherlin, 2004; Hiekel, Liefbroer and Poortman, 2010; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Whyte, 2000). Cohabiting parents are often characterised by lower levels of education and by unemployment, and are usually younger than their married counterparts (Colosi, 2009; Manning et al., 2007).

The cohabitation family structure is comprised of two types the cohabiting biological parent families and the cohabiting step-parent families. Cohabiting biological parent families are those where the children involved are living with two biological parents who are not married to each other, and in cohabitation step-families the children involved are living with one biological parent and the parent's male or female partner (Acs and Nelson, 2004:7). Regardless of these distinctions between cohabiting families, some authors have argued that living in a cohabiting family which is either biological or step exhibits more or less the same child outcomes, which have been reported to be mainly negative, especially for adolescents (Wu, Costigan, Hou, Kampen and Schimmele, 2010). For the purpose of data collection in

this study, the researcher focused on cohabiting families where the biological parent of the adolescent was living with a partner and was not married to him/her.

Among the reasons why people cohabit, literature has indicated that some people regard cohabitation as trial marriage, a substitute for marriage, or an alternative form of singlehood, due to a rise in individualism that encourages people to reject permanence but retain the intimacy of relationships (Whyte, 2000; Thatcher, 1994; Loomis and Landale, 1994). Research has also shown that most people who cohabit are divorcees or the never married individuals with children and these factors often influence the selection process for their cohabiting partners (Wendy and Manning, 2008). These authors add that this selection process may be operating through the children or the behaviour and temperament of the adolescents. For instance mothers with children who have behaviour problems may have a harder time attracting a spouse, and can be more likely to cohabit than marry. Selection processes for a partner can also be based on parents' observed and unobserved characteristics, that is to say, individuals who have characteristics that suggest they are better parents and are more likely to marry than cohabit. Individuals who have more traditional orientations are less likely to cohabit, and may possibly be better able to parent, which implies that cohabiters could select individuals with weaker parenting abilities (Wendy and Manning, 2008).

Even though cohabitation is a common family structure in South Africa, it is often stigmatised for the shared sex life between the different parties which is unacceptable in some of the African cultures and also on religious grounds (Mashau, 2011). Extramarital sex is often believed to be only for married people, hence for cohabiting partners to have children together or involving children from their previous relationships may be a cause of concern in these societies (Mwamwenda, 1995 in Louw, 2008). Therefore some people who cohabit do not want this to be known because of the stigma and the reaction they receive from society. However these cultural norms regarding unmarried sex are slowly being transformed as mirrored by the rise of cohabitation (Cherlin, 2004; Ingoldsby, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Stanfield and Stanfield, 1997).

2.2.4.1 Cohabitation and child development

Research has associated cohabiting families with negative child outcomes on the basis of their instability, limited household economic resources, vague parent-child relationships, and inconsistent parental practices which may lead to emotional and behavioural problems in children from such families. Raley and Wildsmith (2004) state that children who are born to cohabiting parents are twice as likely to experience family break up, leading to family instability, which has been argued to be one of the explanations for lower levels of well-being among children in cohabiting families. This impermanence of cohabiting families and their incomplete institutionalisation set a stage for a family environment that may undermine child and adolescence development because of the potential repeated disruptions and formation of new relationships. Such family disruptions as a result of repeated parental separations and family construction can lead to poor developmental child outcomes such as greater emotional stress, inconsistent and poor socialisation, and weaker parental control (Rodgers and Rose, 2002; Brown, 2004; Corey, 2009).

Family disruptions and constructions are also common in step-parent families, just like in cohabiting families, which can result in a disruption of parenting behaviour and interferes with support and supervision of children. This can lead to some of the above-mentioned negative outcomes in children (Raley and Wildsmith, 2004).

Similar to single parent families, cohabiting parents have also been said to experience high levels of depression accounted for by their higher levels of relationship instability (Brown, 2000). In a study to measure the percentage of psychological distress among mothers of different family structures, it was found out that cohabiting mothers' levels of psychological stress were at 24%, single mothers at 29% and married mothers at 14%, (Brown, 2002). Thus cohabiting mothers seem to have high level distress, therefore these low levels of parental well-being may undermine parenting or heighten sensitivity to children's behavioural problems (Carlson and Corcoran, 2001). Furthermore, cohabiting parents have been reported to use high levels of hostile parenting and lower levels of parental monitoring which is associated with problem behaviour and delinquent peer group affiliation among children (Kim, Hetherington and Reiss, 1999).

Therefore cohabiting couples are found to parent less effectively as they provide less support and control of children and adolescents in their families (Arososon and Huston, 2004;

Thomson et al., 1994). These differences may be associated with lower emotional involvement with children and less direct parental involvement in children's schooling, leading to poorer educational adjustment among children in cohabiting families (Wu et al., 2010). High school completion and grade point are the average indicators to measure educational success (Wu et al., 2010) and researchers argue that there are lower school engagement, participation, high school completion rates and the likelihood to attend college among adolescents living in cohabiting families (Teachman, 2008; Manning, 2003; Wu et al., 2010).

With regard to economic resources, cohabiting families have been reported to experience greater economic deprivation, on average, than do married two-biological-parent families or step-families, meaning that it is more difficult for cohabiting parents to adequately provide the material goods and services that facilitate healthy child development (McLanahan, 1997). These inadequate economic resources in cohabiting families may be due to the lack of institutionalisation of cohabitation together with the lack of partners' commitment in cohabiting relationships. Research has shown that cohabiting partners are less likely to pool their economic resources because cohabitation is less protected in the event of separation, which may lead to high levels of material hardships (Waldfogel, 1998; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Hiekel, 2010; Manning, 2011).

According to Colosi (2009) about 19% of children in cohabiting families live in poverty, even after including the income of both cohabiting adults. Acs and Nelson (2002) confirm the significantly higher levels of financial hardship in terms of poverty and food insecurity among children in cohabiting parent families compared to children in marriage family structures. Such strained economic resources in cohabiting families may lead to children being deprived of material goods, proper child care services and children's educational needs that are linked to optimal child development (Bergin and Bergin, 2012; Bumpass and Lu, 2000).

With regard to parent-child relationships, interpersonal ties between parent and child such as frequent interactions, activities or help with homework, and educational expectations, have been theorised as an important connection between family structure and child development (Coleman, 1988 in Artis, 2007). Parental practices are important mediators of the relationship between family structure and children's well-being (Downey, 1995). The quality of the bond

between a biological parent in a cohabiting relationship and his/her children helps to explain some of the problems observed among children and adolescents living in such households (Florsheim, 1998). In support of this argument, Brody and Forehand (1993) postulate that the differences in the levels of drug/alcohol abuse between adolescents living in cohabiting families and those from two-parent married households were closely connected with the differences in the rate of mother-adolescent conflict and maternal acceptance. Thus children in cohabiting households experience some disadvantages by living with a mother's unmarried partner who may not be a fully integrated family member and may compete for the mother's time and attention (Manning, 2011).

The latter may lead to a weaker parent-child relationship which results in negative social outcomes for the child. However, spending time with children, including the frequency of parent-child activities and outings, may lead to more positive child outcomes, together with parental control and warmth (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001; Cox, 2000; Baumrind, 1966).

According to the Manning and Lamb (2003) it was concluded that cohabiting parents are more likely to use negative disciplinary measures such as spanking their children more frequently, hence are exhibiting less warm interactions with their children. In addition, cohabiting parents have been characterised with poor parenting as a result of parental role ambiguity and instability. Obligations to children are less clear in these families than in biological-father and married-parent families (Wendy and Manning, 2008; Nock, 1995). It is therefore possible that mothers will invest less time and effort in their children when living with a partner owing to dividing her time, attention or resources with the cohabiting partner than she would otherwise devote to her child(ren) (Berger, 2012).

The expected negative child outcomes include delinquency, teenage pregnancies, school drop outs, drug abuse, early sexual engagement, low self-esteem and involvement in criminal activities (Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb, 2003; Smock, 2002; Bumpass and Lu, 2000; Manning and Brown, 2006). Daily and Wilson (2005) assert that for children to live with a cohabiting adult is one of the largest risk factors for severe child maltreatment. These findings were also supported by Fomby and Cherlin (2007) who claim that living in a cohabiting-parent family may be a marker of on-going family instability, which is associated both with socio-economic disadvantage and with adverse developmental outcomes for children.

On the other hand, child well-being can also be directly influenced by a number of other factors such as the child's gender, age, race and number of siblings (Artis, 2007), therefore cohabitation families cannot be solely held responsible for negative child outcomes in children raised in cohabiting families. Some authors have argued that retrospective recollections on cohabitation families and child development are biased (Teitler, Reichman and Koball, 2006), but there is only limited literature on positive outcomes for child development in cohabitation families.

In the next section, the researcher will discuss the adolescent phase as a distinct human development stage characterised by changes in all the domains of development, and how this may affect child development in cohabiting families.

2.3 Adolescence

The adolescence phase as a significant human development stage between childhood and adulthood was introduced in 1904 by Hall (1844-1924) who is referred to as "the father of psychology of adolescents", (Louw, 2008: 384). Adolescence is defined as a "stormy phase" describing it as a period of storm and stress as it is characterised by alternating emotions and attitudes such as energetic enthusiasm versus indifference and boredom, cheerfulness vs. depression, idealistic altruism vs. selfishness, vanity and boasting vs. humility and shyness, sensitivity vs. heartlessness and gentleness vs. cruelty (Louw, 2008:386). Other theorists such as Bandura (in Louw, 2008) contradict the above definition of adolescence on the basis that not everyone experience storm and for those who experience conflict, hostility or confusion during adolescence, it is usually associated with some social circumstances within the family or the society. For example, an adolescent who does not receive much love, understanding and support, will most probably experience storm and stress (Bandura, 1964 in Louw 2008). Furthermore, according to Bandura (1964 in Louw, 2008) storminess may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. This means that when certain predictions are made, they can create expectations which can have an influence on later behaviour. Therefore if certain labels are created for adolescents describing them as rebellious or wild in behaviour and these labels are repeatedly reinforced in their environment, this may influence these young people to live up to these expectations or labels.

In the present research study, the most acceptable definition of adolescence is one according to Erikson (1950 in Louw 2008:427) who described this developmental phase as a time of

strife in which the individual ideally constructs an identity formed by a set of personal ideals and belief systems while developing an orientation towards a future role deemed appropriate by society (Lerner and Steinberg, 2004).

The age at which adolescence begins varies from 11-13 years and ends somewhere between 17-21 years of age. Since the age boundaries of this developmental stage vary, it is most acceptable to demarcate this developmental stage on the basis of specific physical and psychological developmental characteristics and the socio-cultural norms instead of chronological age (Louw, 2008.) This author maintains that adolescence begins at puberty when sexual maturation begins and ends when the individual is independent, self-reliant and begins to fulfil adult roles as pursuing a career, marrying and starting a family (Louw, 2008). Legally, in South Africa, adolescence ends at 21 years of age when parental consent expires and the individual can be held liable for contractual obligations (Louw, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the selected age range is the middle adolescent phase which is approximately between the ages of 14-18 years according to Baker (1994). It should however be noted that different authors have specified different age ranges for this phase, for example Kaplan (2004) identifies 13-17 years of age, Kim et al., (2006) listed 12-19 and 15-18 years (Klaczynki, 2004) as the middle adolescent age.

2.3.1 Middle adolescence

Middle adolescence is a time of increasing independence, sexual development, and self-centredness (Liable, 2007). With regard to physical development, the middle adolescents develop sexuality fully, start negotiating feelings of gender attraction and sexual orientation, and they also navigate greater risks relating to sexual activity, alcohol and drug abuse (Klaczynki, 2004).

During middle adolescence the cognitive and intellectual development involves the ability to think deductively, inductively, conceptually, and hypothetically (Klaczynki, 2004). Thus formal operational thinking develops as their cognitive development takes place. This form of thinking is characterised by abstract thinking, hypothetic-deductive reasoning from possible to real, scientific thinking, reflective abstraction, interpropositional reasoning and combinatorial thinking (Louw, 2008:412). Adolescents become able to synthesise and use information efficiently and may become more interested in and critical of the wider world. Socially they try to claim identities, both independently and in relationships with others; they

indicate a need to belong, and have a sense of self-worth, may start to conform less to peer groups, and may also boldly claim racial identity and may seek same-race peers to affirm identity (Klaczynki, 2004). Morally, middle adolescents start to think conceptually and enjoy moral reasoning, engage in “principled morality” principles that are more important than laws, and often have increased social awareness and activism (Bee and Boyd, 2007:280).

With regard to spiritual development, middle adolescents conceptualise religion as an outside authority that can be questioned, questioning faith, leading to deeper ownership or disenfranchising, deepen religious spiritual identity and may use faith as sustaining presence (Klaczynki, 2004).

According to Erikson in Louw (2008), the middle adolescent phase falls within his Identity vs. Role confusion. During this stage adolescents undergo an "identity crisis" and have the task of acquiring identity. The internal cause of this crisis is the physical and psychological changes they experience with puberty (Louw, 2008: 427).

Adolescents in this human development stage often experiment with various possibilities such as being inclined to hero worship, rebel against the accepted norms of society and run the risk of confusion which arises from the profusion of roles opening up at this stage (Bee and Boyd, 2007:265). The ideal solution to this stage is reliability, which means that individuals should be sure of their identity but should also know and accept that there are other identity choices. Adolescents who have achieved an identity or are still actively investigating possibilities tend to have healthy self-concepts, are less emotional and self-conscious (Louw, 2008:429), while those who are stuck at identity foreclosure tend to have adjustment problems characterised with dogmatic, inflexible and intolerant identities (Louw, 2008:429). This failure to reach an identity in the adolescent stage can help explain some of the negative or dysfunctional behaviours common in this human development stage. However other factors such as the family disintegration, lack of involvement of parents, poor communication between parents and adolescents and the parents' own attitudes may influence adolescents' behaviour.

The researcher chose the middle adolescent phase for this study, taking into account all the above mentioned challenges and needs these young people experience, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and morally, to make up a holistic being in a growth process towards adulthood. Louw (2008:431) explains that parenting plays a major role during adolescence as it influences adolescents' identity development, therefore in the next chapter the researcher

will discuss the subject of discipline, discussing its key concepts and the relative parenting styles through which discipline is conveyed to children.

2.4 Discipline

According to Webb et al. (2007), discipline is a way of modelling and teaching children appropriate behaviours. It involves punishment, correction and training to develop self-control as well as to enforce obedience and order (Barnes, 2011). Douglas and Straus (2007:306) define discipline as behaviour by parents in response to and intended to correct or control the behaviour of their children. Such corrective actions by parents are the different forms of discipline referred to as disciplinary strategies, such as spanking, deprivation of privileges or material objects, diversion to socially acceptable tasks, explaining, instructing, ignoring misbehaviour as well as psychological aggression like screaming and yelling (Douglas and Straus, 2007). These disciplinary strategies are aimed at promoting positive behaviour, self-control, self-responsibility, self-governing independence, strengthening and protecting the child's self-esteem (Pickhardt, 2005; Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart and Cauffman, 2006).

Discipline is also defined as a combination of parental instruction and parental correction through which a child is taught to live according to the family values and act within the family rules (Pickhardt, 2005). Discipline aims at rectifying unacceptable behaviour in children; depending on the applied disciplinary technique, it can either strengthen or negatively affect the child's development. In assessing this subject of discipline, literature has observed that discipline can be conveyed to children through the distinct disciplinary strategies which fall within different types of parenting styles, as it is assumed that parenting is an essential component in the cause or maintenance of behavioural problems in children (Smetana, 2011; Burfeind, 2011; Webb et al., (2007; Steinberg et al., 2006). Furthermore, Fitter (2010) explains discipline as a defining element of parenting, therefore below are in-depth accounts of the four distinct parenting styles through which discipline is conveyed to children.

2.4.1 Authoritative parenting

Authoritative parenting is when parents monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct (Baumrind, 1993). The authoritative style is most effective for promoting

overall levels of adjustment (Baumrind, 1993), which is viewed as demanding but responsive and as exercising firm, negotiated, control in a warm and loving environment (Heaven and Ciarrochi, 2008). Authoritative parents establish rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow, explaining the reasons behind these rules. When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are nurturing and forgiving rather than punishing (Baumrind, 1993). There is also open communication between parents and children, and children are involved in family decision-making in an appropriate manner (Swartz et al., 2008).

Thus authoritative parenting maintains emotional closeness and a supportive relationship with the child and provides clear rules for the child in an effort to promote pro-social behaviour (Burfeind et al., 2011). Baumrind (1993) points out that this kind of parenting style is both demanding and responsive, as parents are assertive not intrusive and restrictive, their disciplinary methods are supportive rather than punitive and they want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, self-regulated and cooperative.

According to Burfeind et al., (2011) this style of parenting illustrates parental efficacy through a strong parent-child relationship bond and parental social support. This is the extent to which parents are warm, trusting and caring, providing emotional resources, and the extent to which they are helpful and encouraging, providing instrumental resources. Children with such parents are rated as more socially and instrumentally competent than those whose parents are non-authoritative, so they will be self-reliant, self-controlled and soundly competent, with less likelihood of indulging in risky or delinquent behaviour (Swartz et al., 2008; Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, and Bornstein, 2000; Mounts and Steinberg, 1995).

2.4.2 Authoritarian parenting

Authoritarian parenting is also referred to as autocratic parenting, and it is when children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents and parents are highly demanding and directive (Swartz et al., 2008). Baumrind (1991) states that these parents are often obedience and status-orientated, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation; failure of the children to follow such rules results in punishment. There is very little communication between the parent and the child regarding rules and regulations (Swartz et al., 2008). Authoritarian parents can be divided into two types: non authoritarian-directive,

who are directive, but not intrusive or autocratic in their use of power, and authoritarian-directive, who are highly intrusive (Baumrind, 1993).

Research has shown that strict punitive discipline increases the likelihood of negative social outcomes in children because this style of parenting is more likely to reduce adolescents' motivation to attend to the values of their parents interfering with adolescents' ability to understand parental messages (Burfeind et al. (2011); Knafo and Swartz 2008). This is confirmed by research studies which demonstrate that children from authoritarian families tend to perform moderately well in school but demonstrate poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression (Smetana, 2011; Swartz et al., 2008; Knafo and Schwartz, 2008; Baumrind 1991).

2.4.3 Indulgent parenting

Indulgent parenting is also referred to as permissive, indifferent, neglectful or nondirective parenting, in which parents have very few demands on their children and no rules are enforced, allowing children to express their impulses (Smetana, 2011; Swartz et al., 2008; Knafo and Schwartz, 2008). This parenting style is less conducive to overall adjustment. Parents who practise this parenting style believe that any form of control or discipline inhibits the child's natural tendencies and prospects of self-actualisation, (Heaven and Ciarrochi, 2008). Indulgent parents are often non-traditional and lenient, rarely disciplining their children because of relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control. They allow their children to make their own decisions at an age when they may not be capable of doing so responsibly (Baumrind, 1993). Baumrind (1993) explains that such parents are more responsive than demanding, so their children tend to produce problem behaviour and perform poorly in school, but have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

2.4.4 Uninvolved parenting

According to Baumrind (1993) this parenting style is characterised by few demands, low responsiveness and little communication, as the parents tend to fulfil their child's basic needs while they are generally detached from their child's life. In extreme cases, these parents may

even reject or neglect the needs of their children, and the children tend to perform most poorly in all domains (Baumrind, 1993; Heaven, 2008; Swartz et al., 2008).

The above-mentioned parenting styles have been found to predict child well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behaviour (Smetana, 2011; Knafo and Schwartz, 2008; Baumrind, 1993). Parenting styles describe normal variations in parenting based on the assumption that the primary role of all parents is to influence, teach, and control their children (Baumrind, 1993). It has also been determined that parenting styles capture two important elements of parenting, namely parental responsiveness/warmth and parental demandingness (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Mounts, 2011) which determine the child's ability to understand the parents' message.

- Parental responsiveness refers to parental warmth or supportiveness, which is the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to their children's special needs and demands (Baumrind, 1993). "Parental warmth" refers to expressions of affection towards the child, responsiveness to sensitivity, and adaptation to the child's needs and desires (Knafo and Schwartz, 2008). Both parental responsiveness and parental warmth constructs an emphasis on accepting and supporting the child (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). The same dimensions are usually associated with positive attitudes of children towards their parents, as well as enhancing children's desire to spend time with their parents, thus increasing availability and leading to a positive parent-child bond (Knafo and Schwartz, 2008; Henry, 1994).
- Parental demandingness which can also be termed behavioural control is shown in the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family as a whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys (Baumrind, 1991). This dimension is associated with parental monitoring, which refers to the extent to which parents try to control their children's behaviour by tracking their whereabouts (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg and Dornbusch, 1991). Knafo and Schwartz (2008) asserts that parents who monitor their children closely may make their values more available if they explain to the child the limits they impose, regardless of the fact that monitoring constrains adolescents'

freedom, which can antagonise or alienate them and reduce their motivation to pay attention to their parents' values.

In the next section, the researcher discusses the adapted theoretical framework and its application to this study.

2.5 Theoretical framework

This study was conducted according to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems' theory which addresses the person-in-environment as one entity where humans and the environment reciprocally shape each other (Greene, 2008). Human development, according to the ecological systems theory, is viewed in the context of the structures of relationships that form one's environment (Paquette and Ryan, 2011). These structures are also termed the structures of environment, which are socially organised subsystems which support and guide human development, namely: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macro system, (e) and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 in Greene 2008).

The key aspects of this theory are that the interaction of structures within a system and interactions of structures between systems are of vital importance, therefore one's interaction with each of these subsystems fuels development, and conflict in any of these subsystem may ripple through all the other subsystems (Paquette and Ryan, 2011). As a result one's behaviour is viewed as proactive, inseparable and multi systemic (Greene, 2008).

Having identified the 5 distinct structures of environment according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), in the next section the researcher discusses each of these structures in detail and applies them in the context of this study.

2.5.1 The microsystem:

The microsystem is the first subsystem closest to the child, which contains structures encompassing relationships and interactions with direct contact to the child (Berk, 2000). The structures within the microsystem include family, school, neighbourhood, or childcare environments, and relationships within this structure have an impact in two directions (Paquette and Ryan, 2011). This is the active reciprocal interaction between one human organism and another person, object or symbol in the immediate environment over an

extended period of time. It is referred to as a "proximal process" and such patterns of proximal process are found in parent-child activities or child-child activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to Kuczynski (2003) the parent-child interaction is the primary proximal process in human development.

Applying it to this research study, adolescent children living in cohabiting families are at the centre of this theory, and their microsystem is made up of their cohabiting parents and siblings who constitute their family. The nature of relationships or interactions between this adolescent child/ren and the cohabiting parent (s) and siblings within this family is of great importance in the subsystem. Positive active interactions between a child and a parent over an extended period of time (proximal process) will probably promote positive behaviours in the child, as it has been found that in all instances good maternal treatment appears to substantially reduce the degree of behavioural disturbances exhibited by a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

2.5.2 The mesosystem

The mesosystem provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem (Berk, 2013). It comprise linkages and processes that take place between two or more structures within the microsystem, for instance relationships between home and school or the connection between a child's teacher and his parents, (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In relation to the study, the mesosystem may be comprised of connections between the cohabitation families and their church or the school which the family attends.

2.5.3 The exosystem

The exosystem is the larger social system in which the child does not function directly; it provides a connection between two or more settings in which events occur that directly influence process in the immediate setting in which the developing person lives, (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Greene, 2008). For instance, the biological parents' work schedule may positively or negatively affect the children. With reference to this study, the cohabiting parents' work schedule, if it is too demanding, may probably lead to the development of negative interactions between the parents and the child. It will also affect the parents' parenting practices impacting on the parents' ability to exert discipline with their adolescent child. On the other hand, an a cohabiting parent's reasonable work schedule will probably

lead to positive interactions between the parent and the child, which will result in effective parenting practices from the cohabiting parents to their adolescent child.

2.5.4 The macrosystem

The macrosystem is the outermost subsystem in the child's environment comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws (Berk, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), this system consists of an overarching pattern of micro, meso and exosystem characteristics of a particular culture. The effects of larger principles defined by the macrosystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other subsystems (Paquette and Ryan, 2011).

In relation to this research study, even though cohabitation has been socially acceptable in communities in South Africa, there is some stigma attached to cohabitation on the basis of a shared sex life between unmarried people because premarital sex is not acceptable in some African cultures. This stigma will probably affect the cohabiting parents and the children involved in this particular family structure as they may be negatively labelled or discriminated against by other members of the community. This may also affect the cohabiting family's connections with other structures such as the church, thus affecting the mesosystem. and this may also impact on immediate interactions between the cohabiting parents and their child(ren), thus affecting the microsystem.

2.5.5 The chronosystem

The chronosystem is the final subsystem of the ecological system theory which encompasses the dimension of time, depicting that as children mature they select, modify and create new experiences of their own (Berk, 2013). As children grow older they may react differently to environmental changes and may be more able to decide how that change will influence them (Paquette and Ryan, 2011). With reference to this study, which focuses on discipline of adolescents in cohabiting families, this particular structure has been associated with many dysfunctions which have been said to affect child development and focus this family structure on adolescents in particular. This stage of human development is characterised by features related to risk behaviours and defiance to discipline. If this study on cohabitation families was focused on young adults, it would definitely reap different results from those obtained in the current study.

The ecological system approach can help service providers to analyse and interpret family-related issues, and enable them to locate the family in the society, providing a lens to view the family not in isolation but in concert with its culture or history, its political economy and contemporary social issues. This lays the foundation for an integrated approach to service delivery (White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012). The ecological systems theory will also give direction on the specific systems to intervene in case of conflict or negative interactions between the child and his/her environment (Greene, 2008).

2.6 Conclusion

A detailed literature review account follows on the selected concepts relevant to this study. The researcher unpacked the three different types of family structures relative to cohabitation and cohabitation itself while discussing the general functioning of these family structures and their possible effect on child development, such as family stability, consistent parenting practices, economic resources and the parent-child relationships. A large amount of literature associated with single parent families, step-parent families and cohabitation families with negative child outcomes was reviewed. However, more than an issue of family structures, there are certain underlying factors that cause deviance amongst adolescents, such as the characteristics of the human development stage which are related experimenting with risky behaviours which in turn may lead to the challenges of adolescents with regard to discipline.

The next chapter will deal with the research methodology that was used to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescent children.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided a conceptual background to this research study by reviewing existing literature on the relevant subjects to gain information on the topic of the study. The present chapter will describe the research methodology as applied during the research study, following a brief overview of the methodology in Chapter 1. This will include the selected research approach, the research design, population and sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study and how they were negotiated throughout the research process.

3.2 Research question

According to Babbie and Mouton (2007:73) research begins with the identification and formulation of a research problem expressed as a question. A research question is also derived or extended from the study's purpose and is more specific, representing the actual question that the research study seeks to answer (Mouton & Marais, 1996; Creswell, 2008; Ratele, 2006). Research questions set boundaries for the study, clarifying its specific direction and helping the study from becoming too broad (Punch, 2005; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Babbie and Mouton (2007:74) further explains that a research question guides the research design to be utilised in the study. Thus the research question controls the direction of the study and influences the selection of the research design to ensure that the research goals are adequately achieved.

3.3 Research goal

According to McCuen (1996:40) a research goal is a concise statement of the end product that will overcome the deficiency in knowledge identified in the literature review. The goal of this study was to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to disciplining their adolescent children.

3.4 Research objectives

Research objectives are the specific ends of the research (McCuen, 1996). These are basically the general steps necessary to achieve the set goal of the study. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore and describe the challenges of biological parents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.
- To explore and describe challenges of the adolescents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of their biological parent involved in a cohabitation union.

In order to execute the study and to be able to answer the research question and to meet the goal and objectives of the study, the researcher had to select an appropriate research approach.

3.5 Research approach

Researchers basically have a choice between a qualitative or quantitative approach or a combination of these two primary approaches. Qualitative research is collecting, analysing, and interpreting data by observing what people do or say, in their own words and describing their experiences in depth by capturing meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, and symbols of the studied phenomenon (Anderson, 2006). This research methodology stems from an anti-positivist and interpretative approach as it aims to understand social life and the meaning people attach to their everyday life (De Vos et al., 2005). Boeije (2010) asserts that a qualitative research approach is based on the assumption that individuals have an active role in the construction of social reality. Furthermore, qualitative research provides the texture of real life, giving an insight into the reasoning and feelings that motivate people to take action (Mouton & Marais, 1996).

Data collection for qualitative research is mainly collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups, which generate rich, detailed data that contributes to in-depth understanding of the research problem (Anderson, 2006). Of great importance in qualitative research is that methods are flexible as they allow greater spontaneity and add interaction between the researcher and the participant. The researcher asks open-ended questions which can be restructured as the researcher interviews the different participants (Davis, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Pope and Mays, 2000).

Quantitative research on the other hand, employs objective methods to the collection and analysis of data in numeric form, emphasising large-scale and representative sets of data (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 1996: 61). Data is mainly collected through precise measurement using structured and validated data collection instruments such as closed-ended items in questionnaires and ratings scales (Mack and Woodson, 2005). Quantitative research is also characterised by facts, measurement, reduction, control/precision, testing hypotheses, the use of instruments and generalised findings which lead to the construction of predictions (Mack, 2005; Anderson, 2006; Pope and Mays, 2000).

After studying the two research approaches, the researcher chose qualitative research mainly because of its flexibility which permits the researcher to make direct contact with the participant and the use of in-depth interviews as data collection methods in order to yield richer information than quantitative research. In addition, qualitative research allows the researcher to build a complex holistic picture through the analysing of words, reports, and the detailed views of the participants through conducting the study in the participants' natural setting, allowing them to be comfortable by creating less formal settings which allow the researcher and the participants to engage in reciprocal communication styles (Creswell, 2009).

3.6 Research design

A research design is defined as a specification of the most satisfactory actions to be performed in order to successfully answer the research question (Swartz, La Rey and Duncan, 2011:220). Babbie and Mouton (2007:74) describes a research design as a blueprint of how the research will be conducted. This study was conducted according to an explorative and descriptive research design.

An explorative research design aims to generate new information, make preliminary investigations or gain insight into the studied phenomenon and focuses on the "what" questions (De Vos et al., 2011; Durrheim, 2006). Babbie and Mouton (2007) furthermore asserts that explorative research designs lead to insight, but lack descriptive powers. For this reason a descriptive research design was also employed in this study.

Descriptive studies on the other hand aim at making accurate descriptions of phenomena (Durrheim, 2006). According to Neuman (2006) a descriptive research design presents a picture of the specific details of a situation or an area of focus asking "how and why" questions. The descriptive research design is also more organised than the explorative research design as it aims at attaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon to achieve rich data which could possibly inform an accurate description of the phenomenon (Durrheim, 2006; Babbie and Mouton, 2007). A descriptive research design was chosen for this study through a number of interview questions which were constructed and asked to the participants who took part in the study.

These two research designs were used together so as to obtain a greater understanding of the studied phenomenon, namely exploring and describing the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to the disciplining of their adolescents. This is confirmed by Durrheim, (2006) who stated that a qualitative study with both explorative and descriptive design aims at generating new information on that particular topic.

3.7 Research methodology

According to Sarantakos (2005), research methodology is a research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that indicate how the research is to be executed. Similarly, Babbie (2004:75) defines research methodology as the process to be undertaken, the tools and procedures to be used in order to attain the goal of the research. Research methodology is therefore the practical guidelines utilised in the process of population and sampling, data collection and data analysis of the research study.

3.7.1 Population and Sampling

Population refers to the totality of units such as people or organisations (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). It comprises the larger group from which a sample is taken to represent the population (Durrheim, 2006). The population of this study was made up of all middle adolescents between the ages of 13-17 years living in cohabiting families with a biological parent as well as his/her cohabiting partner parents in the city of Cape Town. Participants in a qualitative study should be individuals who have experienced and are able to relate to the phenomenon the researcher wishes to explore (Creswell, 2007). Time and cost, however,

permit researchers to collect data from only a limited number of members of a population (Leedy and Omrod, 2005:145).

Sampling on the other hand, is a process of selecting a few members (sample) from a bigger group (sampling population) to be the basis for studying the unknown information or situation regarding the bigger group (Kumar, 2010). In other words, it is simply the process of selecting the actual research participants from the identified population to produce a sample (De Vos et al., 2005). In quantitative research, samples tend to be structured, quantitative and strictly applied, whereas in qualitative research, where interviews and observation are used as methods of collecting individual, detailed and in-depth information (rich data), an unstructured element is implied. Non-probability sampling is mostly used; they are relatively limited, the size is not statistically determined and not representative, but based on the saturation of collected data (De Vos and Sarantakos as cited in Strydom and Delpont in De Vos et al., 2011).

Originally, the participants for this study were expected to be selected from the caseloads of local Welfare Organisations such as the Cape Town Child Welfare organisation, Badisa Cristian Compassion, Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA) and the Department of Social Development who are rendering social welfare services in Cape Town. Due to the fact that some organisations took very long to gain permission and others denied the researcher their permission to conduct the study with some of their clients, the researcher only managed to negotiate entry into Cape Town Child Welfare organisation to recruit some of the key participants.

To identify these key informants, the researcher used purposive sampling where the units that are investigated are selected based on the judgement of the researcher, allowing the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of a population that enable him/her to answer the research questions (Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Swartz et al., 2008). Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to select cases that can purposefully shed light on the research problem (Creswell, 2007). The original participants of this study were purposefully selected from the caseload of Cape Town Child Welfare organisations.

The purposive sample for this study was drawn according to the following selection criteria:

- cohabiting families with adolescents between the ages of 13-17 years;

- biological parents of adolescents who have been cohabiting for a year or more.

Having had located the first few participants through purposive sampling, snow-ball sampling was then applied in locating more participants who met the same sampling criteria. Snowball sampling is when participants or informants with whom contact has already been made, use their social networks to refer the researcher to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study (Davis, 2007).

Six participants drawn from the Cape Town Child Welfare were identified as the key informants through whom all the other participants were recruited. Two samples were selected for this study. Firstly, nine cohabiting biological parents who were living with a partner were selected. At that point data saturation occurred, by which similar comments from different participants were obtained (Grady, 1998). Secondly, six middle adolescent participants whose ages ranged from 15-17 were selected to gain an understanding of challenges of adolescents who are living in cohabiting families, with this sample size data saturation occurred.

The researcher obtained permission from the respective senior managers of Cape Town Child Welfare organisation to recruit some of their clients who were eligible for this study. Having been allowed to gain access to the organisation's case load, the researcher was referred to the organisation's social work supervisors who connected her with the potential research participants from whom the key participants of the study were selected. On participating in the study, the researcher ensured that the cohabiting biological parent participants signed an informed consent. The adolescent participants were required to have their parents or guardians sign the assent form in order to provide permission for their participation in this research study.

3.7.2 Data Collection

According to Creswell (2003), data collection is a process of acquiring information through unstructured or semi structured interviews, observations, documents and visual material. Data collection for this study took place by means of individual semi-structured in-depth interviews with the aid of an interview guide. The participants were approached on a one-on one basis and interviews were conducted by the researcher in person. Thus allowing greater

spontaneity and adaptation of interaction between the researcher and the participants (Davis, 2007; Denzin, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were also the most appropriate data collection method because it afforded the researcher an opportunity to gather more information through observation of non-verbal cues, while those being interviewed had the opportunity to ask questions and get clarity on certain aspects of the interview process (De Vos et al., 2011).

Semi-structured individual interviews involve the use of open-ended questions during interviews. These questions range from simple to complex and broad to specific, allowing the participants to gradually adjust to the pattern of the interview (De Vos et al., 2011). Moreover, this data collection method includes flexible relations between the participants and the researcher, as the researcher can follow up on particular interesting avenues emerging from the interview and the participants also share information more closely in the direction of the interview (Swartz et al., 2008). According to Mavnard and Purvis (1994) the relationship between the researcher and the participants was reciprocal and non-hierarchical. The researcher and the participants directly engaged face to face, allowing participants to give their responses without restrictions.

The continuous nature of qualitative interviewing implies that questions are redesigned throughout the research project. The researcher may consider appropriate questions relating to all areas of interest, ensuring that the topic is covered thoroughly. The questions, however, should be limited in number, neutral and open-ended, rather than leading, arranged from simple to complex and from broad to specific. Questions should be brief, thematically and dynamically effective, producing knowledge and promoting good interaction during the interview. As the researcher intended categorising the answers, frequent clarification of answers was done with respect to possible themes and categories that would be used later (Greeff in De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie & Mouton, 2005).

Two sets of semi-structured interview schedules were developed and used to guide the data collection process, one for the cohabiting biological parents and another for the adolescents. The use of interview schedules provided the researcher with some discretion about the order in which questions were asked. Semi-structured interview schedules were utilised because they are instrumental in ensuring that all necessary information has been elicited in a semi-structured manner that allows some flexibility in the manner in which questions are asked.

Such flexibility provided an opportunity for the researcher to probe and explore issues further instead of dictating the flow of discussion. Therefore the interview schedules served as a guide in a conversational two-way communication process that gave both the interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to ask further questions and to clarify data (De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie, 2001).

3.7.2.1 The preparation of participants

In line with the guidelines of De Vos et al. (2011) before commencement of each interview session, the researcher ensured that the participants were fully prepared for the interviews. Appointments for the interviews were set with great consideration given to the participants' schedules and availability. Interviews were conducted in the participants' choice of venue to ensure familiar surroundings so that the participants could feel relaxed and comfortable during the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher took each participant through the principles of ethical considerations explaining their rights to confidentiality, anonymity, withdrawal from the study at any time, voluntary participation and debriefing in case the interview led to any emotional distress. By sharing this information with the participants, the researcher was able to ease the participants' anxieties and assist them to make informed decisions. Permission to audio record the interview was also requested from the participants before the onset of the interviews.

3.7.2.2 Course of the interviews

The interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes on average depending on how much information the participant had to share. In view of the fact that the researcher was only conversant in English, all the interviews were conducted in English. These interviews were also recorded through an MP3 player and the use of an audio recorder allowed the researcher to devote her full attention to the participants as well as on the interview process (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Field notes were also taken during the course of the interview which included the participants' non-verbal cues that were noticed by the researcher by making use of structured interview guides, the researcher also incorporated excellent interviewing and communication skills to elicit in-depth information from the participants.

These communication skills included the use of open-ended questions which allowed participants to provide detailed responses which reflected insight (Neuman, 2006; Mavnard

and Purvis, 1994). The researcher also used probing as another essential interviewing technique, clarifying the participants' statements and also proving the researcher's ability to pay attention to the participants' responses, hence eliciting even more information (Nueman, 2006). Of great importance, the researcher conveyed empathetic understanding of the clients' situations through active listening skills which included summarising and paraphrasing some of the participants' statements. Please see Addendum 1 for the interview guides for biological parents and adolescents who took part in this research study.

3.7.3 Pilot study

A pilot study is a smaller version of a study that is carried out before the actual investigation is done (Bryman and Bell, 2003). It is a small experiment designed to test logistics and to gather information prior to a larger study, in order to improve the quality of the interview guide and the efficiency of conducting the research (Bryman, 2003). Strydom and Delport (2005) in De Vos et al., (2011) explain that a pilot study is used to test the accessibility of the respondents and to see whether data collection techniques employed will result in gathering rich data. These pilot interviews were aimed at determining participants' understanding of the interview questions and whether it was able to collect adequate data relevant to the research problem. It may also indicate to the researcher whether any changes are necessary and provide him or her the opportunity to make relevant changes before the actual study takes place.

Prior to conducting the actual data collection interviews for this study, the initial interviews were scheduled and pre-tested in two pilot interviews, each representing the two samples of the study. These pilot studies conducted prior to the actual larger data collection process were to check whether the questions were not ambiguous, whether or not they were clearly worded and easy to understand, and were suitable for giving the relevant intended data. The pilot study was conducted according to the same sampling procedure as the main study. Several questions on the interview guide were refined and simplified if they were found to be unclear to the participants.

3.7.4 Data Analysis

According to Babbie (2004), qualitative data analysis is a process that includes coding and analysing the data after it has been collected. This procedure can also be referred to as the categorisation, ordering and summarising of data to obtain answers to research questions (De

Vos et al., 2011). Sarantakos (2005) indicates that the basic analysis starts during data collection when the researcher makes notes, such as jotting down commonalities between participant responses. It moves deeper and deeper into understanding the data and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data (Creswell, 2009).

This study adopted Tesch in Creswell's (2009) eight generic step processes of qualitative data analysis for a systematic comprehensive analysis which involved transcribing the data, coding the relevant information, developing categories and assembling data material belonging to each category. Through qualitative thematic data analysis, the researcher identified the emerging themes from the collected data (Neuman, 2006). Within these identified themes, sub themes were developed and related to the participants' hard data which was direct quotes from the participants. Through comparative analysis, the participants' findings were compared and contrasted, linking them to respective literature.

- **Firstly** in preparation for the analysis, the researcher organised and prepared data through transcribing interviews, keeping account of field notes and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information. Having done the transcription process, the researcher read through all data to obtain a general sense of the information and be able to reflect on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). The researcher firstly transcribed all the interviews thoroughly and read through all the transcripts a number of times alongside the field notes in order to familiarise and immerse herself in the data. Immersion is a process of becoming thoroughly familiar with the topic which involves careful reflection and interpretation on an intuitive level as opposed to using analytical techniques (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2005).
- **Secondly**, starting with the shortest and most interesting transcript, the researcher read through it, reflecting on its underlying meaning and making notes on any rising thoughts, views or opinions (Creswell, 2009). Having done this process on most of the informants' data, the researcher made lists of all the noted topics and clustered together similar topics as the third stage.
- Moving onto the **fourth stage**, Creswell (2009) points out that this is the beginning of a detailed analysis with a coding process. According to Rossman & Rails, (1998) coding is a process of organising the materials into "chunks" before bringing meaning to those

chunks. In relation to the drawn-up list on noted topics in the informants' data, the researcher abbreviated the topics and developed codes on the appropriate ones or noted relevant segments in the participants' information.

- In the **fifth stage**, Creswell (2009) advises the researcher to develop descriptive wording for the already noted topics in the third stage. Finding descriptive wording for these topics turns them into categories and these categories should be reduced considerably by grouping related topics together.
- In the **sixth stage**, the researcher should make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and then categorise these codes, for example data reflecting the parental-child relationships was coded *PCR*.
- **The seventh stage** was assembling data material belonging to each category in one place and performing a preliminary analysis (Creswell, 2009) putting data into themes and sub themes. This categorisation of data into themes and sub themes allowed the researcher to initiate discussions and debates comparing and contrasting findings to the existing literature.
- As the **final stage**, the author recoded the existing data to obtain consistency in the meaning attached to the participants' collected data.

3.7.5 Data Verification and trustworthiness

Data verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity of the collected data (De Vos et al., 20011). It is also a process where data is checked for accuracy and inconsistencies (Nueman, 2006) and data is verified on the basis of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability as the main criteria in upholding the legitimacy and neutrality of a study's findings.

- Credibility seeks to answer the question of how compatible the findings are with reality (Babbie, 2004). In order to prove data credibility, each respondent who was

approached was given the opportunity to refuse to participate in this study so as to ensure that the data collection sessions only involved those who were genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely. Participants were also encouraged to be frank from the outset of each session, with the researcher aiming to establish a rapport in the opening moments and indicating that there were no right answers to the questions that will be asked, so as to truly represent the participants' realities.

- Transferability is the essence that other researchers can apply the findings of the study to their own (Babbie, 2004). It is the extent to which knowledge generated can be generalised to similar contexts, from a general naturalistic perspective. Generated knowledge cannot be transferred beyond its context (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). To prove that the data gathered was transferable to similar contexts, the researcher ensured that diverse participants were used so as to gain a broader perspective of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline.
- Dependability relates to stability after taking into account contextual differences (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). The researcher used the same interview schedule, research approach and methodology when working with different participants. As long as the problem formulation remained similar, the researcher employed the same methods so that the data gathered might correlate. The researcher also made use of an independent coder to enhance dependability.
- Conformability is the ability of the researcher to use reflexivity in identifying own personal and social positioning and power issues in research (D'Cruz and Jones, 2004). The researcher ensured that the data collected was confirmable by taking into account the ethical considerations. Even though it is impossible to totally remove oneself from the research as the researcher and yet be objective, the researcher consulted the participants regarding the information they gave to ensure whether the inferences, deductions and conclusions drawn in the data analysis and coding of data had their intended meanings as the researcher interpreted them.

Trustworthiness, one of the most important criteria in qualitative research was also ensured in the study. It assesses whether the researcher has established credibility or confidence in the truth of the findings from the participants and in the context in which the study was conducted. Truth value is obtained through the individual's experiences and is subject orientated, not defined by the researcher.

Krefting (1991:216) cites Sandelowski who suggests that when human experiences are described and interpreted in such a way that others who share the experiences may immediately identify with the descriptions, a qualitative study is credible. Truth value may be determined using the strategy of credibility, which can be established by, for example, prolonged and varied field experience, triangulation, reflexivity, peer examination, interview technique and establishing the authority of the researcher (Krefting, 1991:217).

- As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Krefting, 1991:218), a *field journal* was kept in which the researcher noted her thoughts, experiences, decisions, frustrations and methodology to help identify any bias or preconceived ideas. *Triangulation*, a method of comparing data gained from various sources such as from semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes were used (Knafl and Breitmayer as cited in Krefting 1991:219).
- The researcher also drew on the knowledge of colleagues with experience in either the research methods or through the research topic (*peer examination*).
- The *interviewing process* itself may enhance credibility by verifying participants' interpretations and portrayals of their experiences. Inconsistencies or divergent data were described and interpreted to enhance structural coherence and to contribute to describing a range of experiences.
- Finally, Miles and Huberman (as cited in Krefting, 1991:220) states that the *authority of the researcher as instrument* should also be included as a means of establishing credibility. The researcher was a social worker who worked in the field of child and family care with a specific interest in adolescents.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

According to Babbie (2004) researchers must take all the necessary precautions to ensure that the participants in a study are neither emotionally nor physically harmed by the research process. The research should be ethically sound in order to protect the participants from any

physical or psychological harm, and participants should be treated with respect and dignity, (Neuman, 2006).

Taking into consideration that some of the participants for this study were adolescents, who by law were minors, the researcher firstly presented all adolescent participants' parents or guardians with an informed consent form which outlined terms and conditions on which this research was based. This informed consent form included all the adequate information on the goals of the research, expected duration of the participants' involvement, procedures to be followed, possible advantages or disadvantages, benefits if any, and the credibility of the study (De Vos et al., 2011). The parents or guardians having approved, assent forms were presented to the adolescent participants themselves, seeking their permission to participate in the study. Both the informed consent and the assent forms guaranteed all participants that:

- Participation was **voluntary**, that is the participant had the right to choose whether or not to participate; no one should be forced to participate in the project (Babbie, 2005).
- Participants therefore, had the **right to withdraw at any stage of the study**;
- Participants had a right to **anonymity** as they were not obliged to give identification details in order to participate in this research. On this note, De Vos et al., (2011) also emphasised that every individual had the right to privacy. In ensuring this ethical principle, the participants' names were not be used in the study; pseudo names were used instead in order to protect the participants' anonymity.
- **Confidentiality** is the continuations of privacy which refers to agreement between persons that limit others' access to private information (De Vos et al., 2011). Participants had the right to confidentiality, and interviews were conducted between the participants and the researcher only. The recorded transcripts remained within the researcher's reach and no one else could access these transcripts. The researcher also ensured confidentiality of the interviews conducted with the adolescents that this information was not available to these children's biological parents and vice versa so as to safeguard the relationships between the biological parents and their adolescent children,, thus also preserving the **principle of no-harm** to the relationships between the parents and adolescents who participated in this study.

- **Permission** was requested from the Senate Higher Degrees Committee UWC for ethical clearance as well as the Department of Education Western Cape and Child Welfare Cape Town organisation where the participants were recruited.
- Of great importance, the researcher also adhered to the Social work code of ethics implementing some of the social work practices' respect for person principles of non-judgmental attitude, self-determination and non-discriminatory attitudes towards the participants. In case of **debriefing**, the researcher had arranged for participants to be referred to another social work colleague.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Limitations are constraints that inhibit progress of the study and are inevitable; however, the important thing is how the researcher addresses each limitation (Singleton, Straits, Straits and McAllister, 1988; De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher experienced a number of challenges during the process of recruiting study participants and the actual data collection. These challenges are identified and explained below.

- The researcher experienced some difficulties in acquiring participants for this study probably due to the sensitivity and stigma attached to the subject of cohabitation, therefore some potential participants hesitated to participate;
- The researcher encountered a lack of cooperation from some of the welfare organisations such as FAMSA, and the Department of Social Development offices where the potential participants could be recruited;
- Language barrier was also another an obstacle faced during the interviews as English was a second language to some the participants and it took them longer to understand some of the questions asked of them. This also limited their expression as they would express themselves in their native language to the extent that some participants used the Xhosa or Afrikaans phrases and the researcher had to ask them to translate it to English seeing that the researcher was only conversant in English;

- Accessing participants by means of a welfare organisation limited the socio economic backgrounds of the cohabiting biological parents and the adolescents who took part in the study.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has outlined the methodology applied in conducting this research study, discussing and explaining the actual procedures and measures adopted in the course of data collection and data analysis to data verification. Regardless of the limitations, the research experienced such as limited accessibility of research participants and language barriers during the course of the data collection, she was able to successfully access participants who met the selection criteria and managed to interview 9 cohabiting biological parents and 6 adolescents until data saturation occurred.

In the next chapter the research findings will be given, starting with the cohabiting biological parents and then the adolescents.



CHAPTER 4

THE PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS PERTAINING TO BIOLOGICAL COHABITING PARENTS

4.1 Introduction

At the commencement of this study, the following research goal was formulated: to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to disciplining their adolescent children. In order to adequately achieve this research goal, the researcher collected data, by means of individual interviews, from both cohabiting biological parents and their adolescent children living in their households.

The researcher's motivation for selecting a qualitative research approach with an explorative and descriptive design and the utilisation thereof was given in Chapter 3. The method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, and the population and sampling procedure, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical considerations relevant to this study were also described.

In this chapter, the researcher aims to achieve the first objective of the study, namely: to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting biological parents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of their adolescent children. The relevant demographic data of the interviewed cohabiting biological parents will be presented and discussed. The researcher has followed the common practice in qualitative research of presenting sufficient data, in the form of participants' remarks, to "adequately and convincingly support the findings of the study" (Merriam, 2002:21). The data is described according to themes and sub-themes which were agreed upon after consensus discussions with an independent coder and a study supervisor. The findings are compared and contrasted with the existing literature in the literature control (Creswell, 1998:154). The data concerning adolescents living in cohabiting households will be discussed in Chapter 5.

As was stated in the sampling criteria (3.7.1) participants were recruited from the Cape Town Child Welfare Organisation by means of purposive and snowball sampling. Firstly, the demographic data of the nine parent participants is presented in *Table 2* below, and is discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

4.2 Demographic data of the participants

A demographic profile section was completed by each participant at the beginning of each individual semi-structured interview. *Table 2* below summarises these demographic details of the cohabiting biological parent participants.

Table 2 Demographic details of parent participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Language	Salary range	Marital Status	Duration of the cohabitation relationship	Number of children in the house
1	Female	37	Black African	Suthu	R2100- R4000	Never married	13 years	7
2	Male	46	Black African	Xhosa	R4100- R6000	Divorcee	13 years	7
3	Female	35	Black African	Xhosa	R1000- R2000	Never married	3 years	2
4	Female	30	Coloured	Afrikaans	R2100-4000	Never married	2 years	1
5	Female	40	Coloured	Afrikaans	R1000- R2000	Divorced	10 years	2
6	Female	46	Coloured	Afrikaans	R8000+	Never married	10 years	4
7	Female	36	Coloured	Afrikaans	R1000- R2000	Never married	19 years	3
8	Male	39	Coloured	Afrikaans	R8000+	Never married	4 years	3
9	Female	42	White	English	R8000+	Divorced	2 years	1

4.2.1 Age

According to the demographics, the age range of the participants was between 30-46 years. Five of the participants were in their 30s while four were in their 40s. From the ages of the participants it can be deduced that some of the parents were relatively young when their children were born, in fact being adolescents themselves.

4.2.2 Gender

The demographic data has also illustrated that seven out of nine participants were female and only two were male. It was difficult to locate more male participants during the sampling process, which endorses the statement in the International Encyclopaedia of Marriages and Families (2004) that about one-quarter of all families are single-parent families, single mothers to be specific, therefore there are more female single parents than male single parents who are likely to engage in cohabiting relationships.

4.3.3 Socio-economic status

As indicated in *Table 2*, three participants indicated that their salary range was R1000-R2000 per month. Three participants earned between R2100-R4000 while the remaining three participants earned more than R8000 per month.

In an attempt to analyse the trends in incomes of the participants, the researcher compared them with the South African absolute poverty line which defines the poor on the basis of an absolute standard applied to income or expenditure, (Technical report on measuring poverty in South Africa, 2008). Statistics South Africa (2007) has estimated that with the type of food typically available to low-income South Africans, it will cost R211 per person to satisfy their monthly energy requirement. Non-food consumption was also calculated at R111, providing an estimation of the minimum cost of both essential food items and non-food consumption of R322 per capita per month in terms of 2000 prices (Blaauw, Viljoen and Schenck, 2011). This amount rose to R431 per person in terms of 2006 prices and in 2008 it was recorded to be R517.92 (Statistics South Africa, 2007).

When taking into account that three of the participants' incomes were between R1000-R2000 per month, and all participants indicated that they had two or more children plus themselves and their cohabiting partners, they were slightly above this absolute poverty line of R517.92 per person per month. Two participants whose monthly income ranged between R2100-R4000 both had seven children in their households, and dividing this amount by the estimated per capita amount per month, their income would not adequately suffice the needs of each individual; hence they were living below the absolute poverty line.

The aforementioned information is in agreement with Huurre et al., (2006); Manning (2003); Manning (1996) and Eccles et al. (1999) who assert that cohabiting families often present with poor financial resources. However, on the other hand, negating literature, the other three

participants whose monthly income was more than R8000 per month and the fact that they had four or fewer children together, were calculated at being economically more sound.

4.2.4 Marital status

Three of the biological cohabiting parents who took part in the study indicated that they were divorcees, and six had never married.

4.2.5 Duration of cohabitation relationships

Five of the participants indicated they had been in the same cohabiting relationship for ten years at the time of the study, while one of them had been in the same cohabiting relationship for 19 years. Four other participants' cohabiting relationships ranged between two and four years. Literature supports that cohabiters often regard cohabitation as a trial marriage to make sure they were compatible before marriage (Whyte, 2000; Thatcher, 1994; Loomis and Landale, 1994). The fact that five of the participants had been in their current relationships for more than 10 years, and one for 19 years does somewhat refute the above literature assertions that most cohabitates can be regarded as a trial marriage.

4.2.6 Number of children in the house

Two of the parents reported having seven children living with them together in the same household, while one participant reported staying with four children. Two of the participants indicated that they had three children living with them, while two participants recorded two children. Two of the participants indicated that they had one child staying with them in the same household.

4.2.7 Ethnic group

The interviewed group comprised five Coloured individuals, three Black Africans and one White. The researcher found it difficult to access more White participants to represent the South African population.

4.2.8 Language

Five of the participants were predominantly Afrikaans-speaking; two were isiXhosa-speaking; one was English and one Suthu. However considering that the researcher is only conversant in English, all the interviews were conducted in English.

4.3 Presentation of findings

To report on the research findings, the researcher presents transcribed quotations from the interviews to support some of the challenges of cohabiting biological parents with regard to discipline of their adolescent children. The content of the quotations guides the reader towards the results inferred from the data and establishes the credibility of the themes, by ensuring that the illustrative quotations reflect the participants' meanings and feelings. The researcher's interpretations and analysis are integrated with the literature, which serves as evidence of the themes and sub-themes (Holloway and Wheeler, 2003).

The collected data from the semi-structured individual interviews, the field notes, the processes of data analysis by the researcher and the independent coder, as well as the subsequent consensus discussion, resulted in four themes. Supported by sub-themes, these are presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Description of cohabiting family formation	
Theme 2: The challenges regarding the respective relationships in the cohabiting households	Sub-theme 2.1: Challenges regarding the relationship between the participant and own children
	Sub-theme 2.2: Challenges regarding the relationship between participants' cohabiting partners and participants' children
	Sub-theme 2.3: Challenges regarding the relationship between the participant and their partner's children

	Sub-theme 2.4: Challenges regarding the relationship between the respective children in the cohabiting families
	Sub-theme 2.5: Challenges regarding the relationship between the cohabiting biological parent and their cohabiting partner
Theme 3: Challenges with regard to the discipline of the adolescents in the cohabiting families	Sub-theme 3.1: Challenges with regard to physical punishment
	Sub-theme 3.2: Challenges with regard to time-out
	Sub-theme 3.3: Challenges with regard to withholding privileges
	Sub-theme 3.4: Challenges with regard to effective communication as a method of discipline
Theme 4: Perceptions of the needed support for adolescents living in cohabiting families	Sub-theme 4.1: Encouraging parent-child bonding between the cohabiting parents and their biological children
	Sub-theme 4.2: Need for nurturing relationships between step-parents and step-children (adolescent) in cohabiting families.
	Sub-theme 4.3: Allocation of parental responsibility
	Sub-theme 4.4: Need for positive role-models to the adolescent children.

In the next section of this chapter, the themes with their accompanying sub-themes are discussed and supported by direct quotations from the parents. The identified themes, sub-themes and the excerpts from the interviews will be contrasted and compared to existing literature.

4.4.1 Theme 1 Description of cohabiting family formation

According to the social constructivist theory, the term "family" has multiple meanings, obtaining its defining characteristics or attributes through people's interpretative practices as

they experience change within their own household structures (Settle, Stenmetz, Peterson, Sussman, 1999; Roschelle, 2002; Malone, 2004). People in different family structures such as marriage families, extended families, single-parent families or restructured families adjust their definition of family to accommodate changes in their marital status, living arrangements, amount of contact with a spouse or parent, and emotional attachments (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985, in Roschelle, 2002). Thus the definition of family depends on personal relationships which may influence family composition. Even the term "family composition" is fluid, depending on the meanings people attach to family as family goes beyond the traditional boundaries that limit membership using the criteria of blood, adoption or marriage (Roschelle, 2002).

A number of scholars on cohabitation have addressed this form of family structure describing its nature, characteristics and its common family dynamics. However, there is limited literature on the different types of cohabiting families, their composition and how each type may affect family functions, especially when children are involved. In this first theme, the researcher sought to explore the structural make-up of cohabiting families as per obtained data.

Firstly **cohabiting biological parent families** exist when the children involved are living with two biological parents who are not married to each other (Acs and Nelson, 2004:7). In describing this type of household, the participants who has been living in a cohabiting family for 19 years described her family as follows:

'I have three children, my daughter is 16 years old, my son is 11 and my other son is two years old.....yes same father, my boyfriend.'

In this instance the cohabiting couple have children born within this same union, and this type of family is similar to nuclear married families where the adults involved are married and live with their biological children (Kennedy and Kramer, 2008). Adolescents in cohabiting families where both parents are biological parents, are more likely to accept discipline from both cohabiting parents considering their biological ties. Children from cohabiting families where both parents are biological parents fare better than children living in cohabiting step-parent families (Coleman, 2000; Manning, 2011; McLanahan, 1994). Cohabiting biological parents have been described as relatively liberal, and their relationship is more androgynous in nature hence they are more likely to share child-rearing responsibilities and be equally

involved in raising their children (Wu, 1996). Hence, one can argue that there may be fewer challenges experienced by cohabiting biological parents with regard to discipline of their adolescent children.

Nonetheless, one of the cohabiting biological parents identified her adolescent daughter's different behaviour since she became an adolescent, and her exposure to peer pressure, as two of the challenges she experienced with her daughter. Louw (2008:385) attributes this challenge to the fact that adolescents are often more anchorless, less idealistic, more critical of moral values, and can be characterised by alternating cheerfulness and depression. Furthermore, adolescents are said to experiment or explore their surroundings in trying out different life possibilities, hence their need for independence (Berk, 2013). The following quotation is evidence of this notion:

“And the children on this adolescence you know they are just difficult because you do not know with the friends they play with, because for my daughter I think she played with wrong friends because I don't understand her behaviour these days, she doesn't listen, she wants to do her own things and has these moods ”

In the second type of cohabiting families, namely the **cohabiting step-parent family**, the children involved are living with one biological parent and the parent's boyfriend/girlfriend (Acs and Nelson, 2004:7). Among the five participants who identified themselves as having this type of cohabiting family, two have been living together for 13 years, one has been in this same cohabiting relationship for three years, and the other two participants for two years. These five participants have children from previous relationships who are living with them and their cohabiting partner in the same household. In describing this type of family, the interviewed participants expressed themselves as follows:

'It's me and my boyfriend of two years and my daughter...my boyfriend living with me...my boyfriend is also a divorcée and has two children who are staying with their mom.'

'I stay with my boyfriend and my child, it's not his child its mine, he has one of his own but doesn't stay with us....'

'I live with my girlfriend since 1998... She has her own three children and I also have two [from previous relationships]....I fetched them from Mtata in 2011 and that is when they started to stay with me and my girlfriend and her kids too.'

This type of step-parent family is similar to a step-parent or restructured family with the only difference being that restructured families are confirmed by marriage (Levin, 2006). Owing to the similar structural make-up of these two family structures, there are also common family dynamics present, such as conflict with the step-parent in the cohabiting family (Stewart, 2001). Conflict between the cohabiting biological parent and their partner's child or children therefore counts for some of the challenges experienced with regard to discipline in cohabiting families.

These cohabiting biological parents living with their partner's children also complained about the challenge of not being accepted or honoured as an equal parent by the partner's child(ren). They explained this challenge in the following way:

"And I would always say to her this is wrong because she would come home late after 9, after 8 when her father is not around and does not want to listen to anyone but when her father is around she is very nice."

"....'you are not my mom, my mom is drinking out there she does not even care; why do you want to look after me?'" [referring to a comment by a step-child]

"My child does not listen to my boyfriend, especially with the way he acts when he is drunk, yah my son he does not like that but I know my child has got respect for elders. But there is no respect between my child and my boyfriend."

Parental role ambiguity is another challenge reported by these parents because the cohabiting partner may not be willing to assume a parental role to their partner's children. The participants also indicated that parental role ambiguity by the cohabiting step-parent may be influenced by the vagueness around parental role allocation in the family. The participants expressed themselves as follows in this regard:

"He would usually say '.....that is not my business he is your son'."

"When it comes to disciplining her [step daughter] it's just my responsibility."

“Most of the time you know the men they are not always around the children, the women are always around the children, so I get to be with all the children most of the time including his children more than he does”

These comments are in agreement with Manning (2003), Manning, (2001) and Nock (1995) who explain that role ambiguity may cause instability. The latter may lead to pressure on one parent, usually the biological cohabiting parent of the children involved (Brown, 2002, Colossi, 2009) although some of the female participants indicated that they have to take responsibility for the discipline of their partners.

The third type of cohabiting family is a combination of step-parent families, as one or both cohabiting partners bring children from the previous relationship(s) and the partners have a child(ren) born within the cohabiting union, hence their biological children. The three interviewed participants who identified with this type of cohabiting family described their families as follows:

‘I am staying with my boyfriend and my two young boys... Only the eight year old is our child together with my boyfriend, the 14 year old has his own father together with his two older brothers.’

‘My oldest daughter has her own father, who got married when she was two and I have two children with my boyfriend...’

‘It’s me and my girlfriend our three children my 15 year old, my girlfriend’s 12 year old son and our three year old girl together.’

Although literature that has been consulted did not describe cohabiting families with children from previous relationships as well as biological children born from their cohabiting union, it is relevant to this study. The family dynamics which may surface in these families are likely to be a combination of those found in the cohabiting biological parent families and those of the cohabiting step-parent families. Thus they may relate to both the characteristics of cohabiting biological families and cohabiting step-parent families.

The challenges regarding the respective relationships in the households will be discussed under the next theme.

4.3.2 Theme 2 The challenges regarding the respective relationships in the cohabiting households

Interpersonal relationships between and among individual family members play a vital role in the psychological functioning of its members, and depending on the nature of these relationships, they can lead to negative or positive family well-being (Stanton and Welsh, 2011). The cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study reported various challenges in their relationships within their families, such as parent-child relationships and sibling relationships, as well as in their relationships with their respective cohabiting partners.

Parent-child relationships refer to the quality of attachment between parents and children (Noom, Dekovic and Meeus, 1999). The parent-child interactions were central to the theoretical framework of the present study, namely the ecological systems theory in which the quality of parent-child relationships have been said to contribute to the well-being or ill-being of children (Rubin and Chung, 2006). Parent-child interactions have been accepted as very important especially during adolescence, considering that this developmental period is associated with risk and problem behaviours (Scaramella, Conger, Spoth and Simons, 2002).

According to the social interactional models, quality parent-child interactions are defined on the basis of effective child management practices and positive or nurturing parent-child affective quality (Conger and Simons, 1997). Effective child-management practices include adequate monitoring, appropriate discipline and positive parent-child affection. The quality of the parent-child interactions frequently feature affirming, supportive and nurturing behaviours, along with the absence of harsh and punitive behaviours (Spoth, Neppl, Goldberg-Lillehoj and Jung, 2006). Stressful family environments or marital discord are among some of the factors which often negatively affect parent-child relationships, leading to low-quality parent-child interactions which serve as contributors to problem behaviours (Spoth et al., 2006).

Under the next three sub-themes, the challenges between the cohabiting biological parents' relationship with own child/ren, the partner's relationship with the participants' children as well as the challenges between the participants and with their partner's children, are described.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1 Challenges regarding the relationship between the participant and own children

The parent-child interactions in this theme can be relative to the parent-child relationships of a nuclear marriage family. Two of the interviewed cohabiting biological parents described their relationships with their biological children as positive, and expressed themselves as follows:

“Between me and my son we do not have a problem, we talk all the time he tells me of what is happening at school or with his friends even if there is a girl he likes [laughs]. He is very open.”

“I think that A [adolescent son] like me a lot because he is the first one to remember my birthday, mother’s day, love to sms me...”

The above quotations reveal a sense of communication, trust and affection, which Devore (2006) argues are among the elements of secure parent-child relationships (Devore, 2006). Secure parent-child interactions are characterised by trust and respectful communication with parents, which foster autonomy and emotional support in the child (Devore, 2006:3). Children who experience trusting and affectionate relationships with their parents, coupled with effective communication, have been associated with fewer behavioural problems among children (Bee and Boyd, 2007).

On the other hand, some cohabiting biological parents revealed difficult relationships with their own children and a longing to improve these relationships. The following participants described the challenges in their relationships with their biological adolescent children as follows:

“That child can get so angry that she would even shout at me. I tried speaking to her but things only get worse.”

“As the parent I tried when she just came to live with us to try and be there for her but I think she child has so much anger so no matter how I want to speak with her she does not talk to you.”

“For me it’s difficult!”

Another participant reflected on the fact that his biological adolescent child blames him for trusting his girlfriend more than he trusts his own daughter, and that it presents a challenge for their relationship as well as for disciplining her:

“But the reports were so much that I started asking her [biological child], ‘what is going on with you. That is when she started saying that I only listen to what my girlfriend tells me and do not take her side.’”

This quotation depicts a lack of trust and feelings of anger between the parents and their biological child, hence representing the avoidant parent–child attachment which is detrimental to children’s optimal well-being (Devore, 2006:3) and that most of the cohabiting families experience difficulty with in parent–child interactions. Manning (2003); Manning (2001); Raley and Wildsmith (2005); and Wu (2000) suggest that poor parent-child interactions may lead children to show heightened levels of anxiety and/or depression, and even behavioural problems such as delinquency (Bee and Boyd, 2007). However, conflict between parents and children during the adolescence phase has been described as normal behaviour expected during this developmental stage (Rathus, 2010).

In the next section, the researcher looks at the challenges regarding the relationship between a participant’s cohabiting partner and the participant’s biological children.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2 Challenges regarding the relationship between participants' cohabiting partners and participants' children

Three of the participants indicated positive relationships between their biological adolescent child and their cohabiting partner. They described these relationships as follows:

“Oh he [boyfriend] loves my children, he loves my children and they all call him ‘dad’.”

“The 14 year old in the beginning once had his differences with him [boyfriend] but they are fine now.”

“I have observed that the way she [girlfriend] treats her son, the baby and my oldest daughter it’s all the same...”

The abovementioned positive parent-child interaction between the cohabiting partner and the participant's biological adolescent child can be attributed to the quality of the relationship between the cohabiting partners (Smock, 2002; Lerman, 2002; Manning and Lamb, 2004) which they extended to their partner's children. The same authors are of the opinion that positive step-parent step-child relationships are often influenced by the duration of the spouses' relationships, age of the step-child, and sex of the step-parent and step-child. More positive step-parent step-child relationships have been associated with less aggression and higher self-esteem (Clingempeel and Segal, 1986:1).

On the other hand, six of the cohabiting biological parents reported negative relationships between their biological adolescent child and the cohabiting partner. Their responses were as follows:

"... because he is not my father, I know my father" [referring to what the adolescent says about the parent's cohabiting partner]."

"Sometimes he [the adolescent child] will say 'he don't tell me what to do because he is not my father'

"you are not my father kind' he [adolescent child] would not say, but the way he acts ... Now I sat him down and I said 'listen here baby he is not your father but have some respect for him."

According to Levin and Sussman, (1997) step or restructured families are often characterised by tension and conflict between the step-parents and the step-children. Step-parents are said to be reluctant to develop close relationships with their step-children because of the assumption that step-parents are abusive towards their step-children. Therefore they are less likely to provide parental supervision, engage step-children in interactions, or be emotionally supportive (Fisher et al., 2003; Coosey and Fondell, 1996; Kurdek and Fine, 1995; Thomson, McLanahan and Curtin, 1992). Thus poor step-parent step-child relationships in cohabiting step-parent families are very similar to step or restructured families. This notion is supported by the abovementioned statements which depict tension between the cohabiting partner and the biological parent's own child/ren.

The fact that adolescents undermine the authority of the cohabiting partner often results in conflict between the biological parent's children and their partners. Undermining of the

authority of the cohabiting partner by adolescents is confirmed by literature. It seems to be a common factor that when the cohabiting partner is a male who is not the children's biological father, boys may experience greater behavioural adjustment problems (Albers, 1999; Lerman, 2002).

In addition to the negative relationship between their biological adolescent children and their cohabiting partners, some of the biological parents indicated their dilemma of being caught between their children's needs to live on their own while they needed the assistance of the cohabiting partner with their upbringing. The latter became evident in the responses below.

"You just need to know how to talk your child because this is the man you are staying with and he sometimes helps you with him [adolescent child]."

"Sometimes it's good sometimes it's bad when they always fight and my boy goes like 'but you are not my father you cannot tell me what to do'.

"So I will just tell him 'hey you need to listen to him because he is the one who has been taking care of you when your father is not here'."

One of the participants disclosed that her cohabiting partner was not respectful to her child, thus causing her child not to listen to her partner and creating challenges regarding discipline:

"My child does not listen to my boyfriend like the way he acts when he is drunk, he does not like that, but I know my child has got respect for elders. But my boyfriend does not have respect for my child."

Another participant seemed to feel helpless because he was of the opinion that his daughter was not cooperating with his cohabiting partner, thus creating challenges regarding discipline:

"... It is my daughter who lets me down most of the time as she does not listen to this lady. She is a good woman shame! She treats my daughter like it's her own."

The above comment confirmed literature that describes step-parent step-child relationships in cohabiting families as negative because it often shows low levels of warmth and support between the participants' biological children and the participant's cohabiting partner. A cohabiting adult who is not the biological parent of a child is most likely to have a difficult

relationship with the child, as cohabiting partners often have ambiguous roles in the family, characterised by little trust and authority (McLanahan and Booth, 1989 in Brown 2004).

Similar to this theme, challenges in the relationships between the biological parents who took part in the study and their partners' children will follow.

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3 Challenges regarding the relationship between the participants and their partner's children

Two of the biological parents who took part in the study described their relationship with their partner's children who were living with them in same household as positive, in the following words:

“My girlfriend’s children they even call me ‘tata’ [father].”

“But the boy was very sweet all the time.”

The first response illustrated a high level of attachment between the biological parent and their cohabiting partner's children in contrast with literature that has referred to cohabitation as "an incomplete institution fused with so much ambiguity that it is not even clear how to address the cohabiting partner" (Albers, 1999:152).

In contrast with the previous two biological parents who reported positive relationships with their cohabiting partner's children, some participants indicated negative relationships with these children. One of the participants spoke of how the partner's child does not listen to or obey the partner, especially when the child's biological parent is not around, and how this poses a challenge with regard to discipline. She stated:

“And I would always say to her this is wrong because she would come home late after nine when her father is not around. She does not want to listen to anyone but when her father is around she is very nice... It’s very hard to relate with this two [boyfriend’s children].”

Difficult parent-child relationships or step-parent step-child relationships in cohabiting families are not the sole challenges with regard to discipline of adolescents in these families. The adolescent phase is also characterised by risk-taking behaviour. Adolescents

increasingly engage in normative risk-taking behaviour outside the direct control of parents, use peer groups to interpret and evaluate the boundaries of parental control, and through their interactions with parents, establish a private sphere of behaviour (Masche, 2010 in Parkin and Kuczynski: 635). Therefore individual characteristics of the adolescent children themselves may be viewed as some of the sources of challenges with regard to discipline of adolescents in general, not only in cohabiting families.

In the next section, challenges regarding siblings' relationships in cohabiting families are analysed.

4.3.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4 Challenges regarding the relationship between the respective children in cohabiting families

"Sibling interactions" are the relationships between children of the same household (Bee and Boyd, 2007). With specific reference to the seven interviewed participants who had more than one child in their cohabiting families, two participants reported challenges with the children's relationship with one another. In describing these relationships, the biological cohabiting parents indicated ongoing quarrelling among siblings as their major challenge which hindered discipline, because some children interpreted it as favouritism to the other child/ren. This notion became evident by the participants' responses below.

“My daughter and his daughter were not close. They were always fighting about who is going to do this now, who is going to wash the dishes and the other one will say I will wash the dishes in the morning and the other will say you suppose to do the washing and if someone skips their duty and you call them to do their duty or as a mother I just do that chore then they tell you ‘you are favouring this one.’”

“Sometimes they are jealous. Everyone wants attention especially the big ones who are saying why didn't you buy me these shoes and it may seem as if you like one child more than the other one.”

The above statements depict sibling rivalry as jealousy, competition and fighting between brothers and sisters (McAuslan and Nicholson, 2010). Problems with regard to sibling interaction are common among all family structures and they are often influenced by sibling positioning, age spacing, gender composition and also parental practice (Berk, 2013;

Milevsky, 2011; Bee and Boyd, 2007). However with specific reference to cohabiting step-parent families where children involved belong to one biological parent between the cohabiting parents, sibling rivalry may be influenced by parental practices in the form of differential treatment as children are very sensitive to such variations in treatment (Bee and Boyd, 2007). The result is that the respective children often end up competing for attention from their biological parents.

The next sub-theme discusses challenges regarding the relationship between the biological parent and the cohabiting partner, which may also contribute to challenges with regard to the discipline of adolescents in the household.

4.3.2.5 Sub-theme 2.5 Challenges regarding the relationship between the biological parent and the cohabiting partner

With regard to the cohabiting partners' relationships, Bee and Boyd (2007) maintain that spouses' relationships with each other are one of the most important family dynamics which contribute to positive child outcomes. While discussing their challenges in this regard, one of the participants commented as follows:

'I am not quite happy because he does not want to get married; he is more of a mother's child. He is more to his family and outside people and for me and the kids, he will buy food and stuff that will make us happy and then he goes. He is never at home..... when he comes home from work he doesn't greet, he doesn't laugh, he doesn't make a joke [shaking head]...'

This participant expressed her anguish that her cohabiting partner seemed to delay the subject of marriage, and lacked commitment to her and their children. This reaction endorses instability and uncertainty of a cohabiting relationship which may lead to emotional stress in the other partner. In support of this, the literature suggests that cohabitation's uncertain nature is due to high levels of insecurity and family instability which lead to emotional stress or depression. This can distort parents' perceptions of their child's behaviour, seeing it as difficult, and leading to inconsistent and weaker parental control (Rodgers and Rose, 2002; Bee and Boyd, 2007; Manning, 2003; Brown, 2000) This may affect the cohabiting parent's

parental responsibilities which may result in poor parenting, hence affecting the coordination of discipline of the adolescent children living in the cohabiting families.

In addition, most of the female biological cohabiting parents indicated physical and emotional abuse from their male partners and stated the following:

'I am not happy with it, I have moved many times, went to stay at a shelter and I have went to court for an interdict against him.'

'He is working at a factory; he is a machine operator paying about R5000 per month. He has got a medical aid but he is not right sometimes to me [laughs]. He is very abusive to me.'

'About in 2000 I was pregnant and I discovered I was HIV positive, I told him [my boyfriend] about that., Before I was pregnant with that child, I did test and I was negative but when I was pregnant it's when I found I was positive. When I told him he put the blame on me and we always fight about that.'

'I am a little scared, because with my previous husband, he was a drug addict and he was abusive. This one he drinks a lot but he is not abusive.'

These above statements confirm literature assertions that domestic violence is predominant and highly significant among cohabitants (Whyte, 2000; Schlapa, 2007; Manning and Lamb, 2003). "Domestic violence" refers to violence between spouses which occurs in the home (Human Rights Watch, South Africa, 1995: 2). It is also a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain power and control over the other partner (Bickerstaff, 2010:10). Domestic violence constitutes physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic or financial abuse (Vetten, 2005: 4). In South Africa this issue of domestic violence, especially against women, is not specific to a certain race, culture, ethnic group, occupation, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or family structure (Bryant, 2011). However, literature asserts that domestic violence is higher in non-marital relationships, and that it is more likely to occur when there are poor communication patterns between the involved parties. Cohabitation has been associated with poor communication generally (Yexley et al., 2002; Bickerstaff, 2010; Bee and Boyd, 2007).

Furthermore, children have been said to mainly experience domestic violence as witnesses or sometimes as direct victims (Bickerstaff, 2010). One of the biological parents who took part in this study confirmed the fact that domestic violence takes place in front of their child, and put it succinctly as:

‘My boyfriend hits me in front of the kids.’

Bickerstaff (2010); Bee and Boyd, (2007) and Bryant, (2011) observe that children who witness domestic violence often display high levels of risk of behavioural, antisocial behavioural problems, emotional trauma and even mental difficulties such as depression.

However, in contrast with abovementioned negative relationships between the cohabiting biological parents and their partners, one out of the nine participants described positive family interactions in her cohabiting relationship:

‘It’s like a normal family. Sometimes we have our ups and downs and we do things together.’

This statement negates the literature that focused on the shortcomings of cohabiting families, as it seems that cohabiting families, like any other family structures such as marriage families, can also function effectively.

The next theme deals with the challenges regarding discipline of their adolescents.

4.3.3 Theme 3 Challenges with regard to discipline of adolescents in the cohabiting families

Discipline is defined as actions that facilitate the development of self-control, responsibility and character among children, more than a response to misbehaviour (Savage and Savage, 2010). These actions can be seen as corrective behaviours by parents. Several authors refer to physical punishment, deprivation of privileges or material objects, time-out, chores, house rules, incentives or rewards and even psychological aggression, as methods of disciplining children (Douglas and Straus, 2007; Pickhardt, 2005; Barnes, 2009).

Taking into consideration that most of the common challenges and needs during the adolescent phase are a result of the physical, mental, emotional and social development that takes place (Louw, 2008:431), discipline of adolescents across all family structures can be

described as challenging. Literature emphasises that discipline of children should take place in quality parent-child interactions, thus an emotionally bonded relationship (Conner and Barnes, 2009; Web et al., 2007).

However, a considerable amount of literature has flagged other forms of family structures such as single-parent families, restructured or step-families and cohabiting families, as risk factors for child development, as these family structures have been mainly associated with poor parent-child relationships and poor economic resources which may also affect the challenges of discipline (Daily and Wilson, 2005; Brown, 2004; Manning and Lamb 2003).

It became evident from the data that the cohabiting families make use of different methods of discipline, and that some of these methods presented with challenges in disciplining their adolescent children.

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1 Challenges with regard to physical punishment

According to Straus (2007) physical punishment is the use or threatened use of physical force with the intention of inflicting pain but not causing an injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling children's misbehaviour. This kind of punishment can encompass a variety of actions which include using degrading verbal expressions, hitting the buttocks of a child or even slapping him/her with an open hand (Straus, 2007). Three out of nine of the interviewed cohabiting biological parent participants revealed that they used physical punishment as one of the methods of disciplining their adolescent children. They said how rebellious their children became when they used physical punishment to discipline them, and even threatened to report them to the police. One participant explained as follows:

“I grew up like that, when you are not listening you get a beating so when I beat him he threatens to go to the police station so I tell him ‘go and let then come in here because this is my house.’”

Another participant described how physical punishment seemed to help only temporarily for the adolescent child's misbehaviour, but resulted in her using this method of discipline often. This is exemplified by the following quotation:

“I shout at him and also use a belt to beat him when he is misbehaving too much. And I saw he does not like it when I beat him, he would just behave for that time but after we start again with the same issue but I also don’t get tired of beating him”

Physical punishment has been found to be controversial because in as much as it is intended to correct children’s behaviour, it is also believed to secure only short-term compliance leading to passive non-compliance, more defiance in the long run, and increased behavioural problems (Oliver, 2007; McLyod and Smith, 2002; Stormshak, Bierman and McMahon, 2000). Cultural differences between the parent and the child may also contribute to the challenges experienced by cohabiting families with regard to physical punishment as a method of discipline, as the parent may believe only in a certain method of discipline while the child disagree. This argument is based on the notion of culture being identified as a mediating force behind parenting styles, management of problematic behaviours and disciplinary practices (Smith and Mosby, 2003). Socialisation and culture serve as the foundation by which parenting and discipline practices are formed and implemented (Shepard, 2010). Therefore in an instance where the parents strongly believe in physical punishment as a method of discipline, the child may experience it as abusive, which will result in problems with discipline.

Olive, (2007) and Patterson, Reid and Dishion, (1992) assert that physical punishment has been categorised as a form of negative discipline associated with ineffective parenting, such as poor supervision and rejection of the child and harsh discipline. Parental behaviour such as the aforementioned, can be linked to authoritarian parenting style characterised by strict punitive discipline, or indulgent parenting characterised by permissive discipline (Baumrind, 1993). However, if physical punishment is applied in a reasonable non-abusive manner, it is said to be an effective form of discipline administered in an emotionally supportive manner by parents with positive parent-child interaction (Baumrid, Larzelere and Cowan, 2002; Straus and Paschall, 1998).

Biological cohabiting parents also referred to their challenges with regard to time-out as a method of disciplining their adolescent children.

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2 Challenges with regard to time-out

Besides physical punishment as a method of discipline used by some of the participants in this study, others revealed that their use of time-out was also a challenge in disciplining their

adolescent children in their cohabiting household. Time-out is a disciplinary method applied by isolating or removing the child away from any stimulus that contributes to negative behaviour for a certain period of time (Fitter, 2010). This short break away from the stimulus that contributed to negative behavior is aimed at providing the child an opportunity to reflect on his/her actions and putting them in a better position to discuss their choices leading to timeout (Fitter, 2010). Instead of time out acting as a constructive disciplinary method, the study participants reported resistance from their adolescent children who either acted up or misbehaved more when they used this method of discipline. The following biological parents reflected on their challenges in this regard:

“He has got so much of play station and stuff so if he does something wrong, I will just tell him no TV and go to your room.”

“She knows when I am angry I just don’t want to even see her face or talk to her because I will do something wrong. I just tell her ‘go to your room and close the door and remember when you want something you are not going to get that. Surprisingly my daughter will just stand there and act like she did not hear what I just said, she completely ignores me because she knows there is nothing more I can do to her.”

‘I use time out with my kids but I don’t think that works at all, you tell my son to go to his room and will go but after he is done with his five minutes or so , he comes back to join the rest of the family misbehaving worse like he is seeking attention or something.’

Although literature identifies time-out as vital in the application of discipline when dealing with adolescents as it will give them time to alleviate some tension or aggression and calm down (Fitter, 2010), it can also be aggravating some children into misbehaving more or totally ignoring their parent’s commands. Time-out thus seems to be an unsuccessful method of discipline if the adolescent children to whom it is applied present with disrespect and disobedience. According to Rathus (2010), disobedience of adolescents, rebelling and having conflict with their parents is a common behaviour during this phase which needs to be controlled by their parents.

Nonetheless time-out is categorised as a positive method of discipline if it is associated with warm parenting styles such as authoritative parenting, which is characterised by established rules and guidelines that children are expected follow, with explanations or reasons behind

these rules to promote emotional closeness and a supportive relationship between the parent and the child (Baumrind, 1993; Burfeind et al., 2011).

The withholding of privileges causes additional challenges for the biological cohabiting parents.

4.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3 Challenges with regard to withholding privileges

Four of the cohabiting biological parents identified withholding of privileges as another disciplinary method in disciplining their adolescent children. Withholding of privileges involves taking away a benefit from the child for a specific amount of time, and these privileges should be related to the actions of the child/ren that need to be corrected, but should not be something the child needs, such as food, or something which might threaten the child's safety, as that may be regarded as child abuse (Kuykendall, 2012).

The following participant indicated that she has problems in withholding privileges from her child who seems to defy her instructions to the extent of stealing what was taken away from her. This is supported by the following quotation:

“And here and there I also ground her, take away her cell phone no facebook, twitter and all that but I tell you she will try by all means to get those things back, one time she even stole her cell phone from bedroom where I had hid it.....I used this method of discipline thinking it is better than beating your child but my daughter pushes my buttons so bad that I want to snap.....now I don't know what to do with her”

The above quotation refers to an element of disobedience or rebelliousness from the adolescent child.

However some participants reported that withholding of privileges is a useful method of discipline. Some authors have referred to withholding privileges as "corrective discipline" taking into account the process of taking away a benefit from the child for a specific amount of time which is aimed at teaching him/her the consequences of their actions or bad behaviour (Kuykendall, 2012; Segal 2005). Two of the participants supported this notion and reflected that their adolescent children made an effort to change their behaviours and act as expected. This is evidenced by the following responses:

“I discipline him like if now he has bad results for June I told him your mother is not going to buy you tekkies [shoes] and he cried, so I do punish him so he promised, ‘no mummy I am going to get nice results’. I do punish him.”

“Usually the grounding works better, if you take her stuff away then she will make an effort to change or improve.”

This method of discipline has been described as a "warm method of discipline" which does not give physical pain to the child but is embedded in the goal of teaching children to be responsible beings (Segal, 2005). Therefore this form of discipline can be associated with authoritative parenting characterised by established rules and warm parent-child relationships which may lead to fewer behavioural problems. However according to Adamec (2009), this form of discipline may not work when parents apply it to a child with extreme behavioural problems and chooses not to learn the lesson behind the withholding of privileges.

4.3.3.4 Sub-theme 3.4 Challenges with regard to effective communication as a method of discipline

Communication has been identified as a central element in establishing discipline through the parents' explanation of the expected rules or guidelines for their children (Fitter, 2010). This author asserts that the role of communication is vital in the foundation of the parent-child relationship. However, among the biological parents who took part in the study, some indicated negative patterns of communication as another challenge they experience in disciplining their adolescents. These patterns of communication seem to be affected by the children's disrespect of their cohabiting biological parent as well as the parent's cohabiting partner, as indicated in the following responses:

“I speak to her you know, that ‘this is your step mother now so you need to listen her’ I mean there isn't much I can do, I would just talk to her and it's up to her whether or not to listen.”

“I don't know how to speak with her, I don't know how to be with her because of the things she say, the things she do which just upset me.”

One parent mentioned the possibility of the adolescent's mood swings as another factor which hinders positive communication at times. In describing this challenge, the participant's comment was as follows:

“I think it’s basically it and also the issue of mood swings, it’s like one minute she is happy the other minute she is ignoring you and does not want to speak! But well I guess it’s the teenage fever kicking in because you know she will come around, luckily my girlfriend understands that too.”

Adolescents’ display of mood swings could be explained by means of the biological changes which come with puberty due to chemical imbalances and hormonal release, especially for girls (Berk, 2013). Adolescents often swing back and forth between happiness and sadness, over-confidence and self-doubt, and dependence and independence. These mood swings are part of normal development which is characterised by emotional upheaval (Hall, 1904 in Rathus, 2010:446). These mood swings may affect effective communication patterns between the parent and the child.

On the other hand, some participants reported positive communication patterns with their adolescent children through which they teach their children what is right and wrong by means of discussion about all matters concerning their children, for instance sex. One cohabiting biological parent described her relationship with her daughter as close, thus also having open and easy communication. These findings are in agreement with those of Fitter (2010) who regards communication as important in the establishment of parent-child relationships which in turn set a foundation for conveying discipline to the children. The participants in this study responded as follows:

“And all the children in the house love me; they are not scared to tell me anything.”

“I’m confident to say we are as close as a mother could be with her daughter. We speak about anything and everything from boys to just anything. We have this open dialogue, that if she has a crush or something she does not hesitate to tell me and we talk about and laugh about it if we need to. With all this I don’t think there could be anything a teenager would choose to hide away from you as a parent if you choose to be warm and speak about these things.”

“I always tell my son that don’t ever hit your children or your wife, respect the, talk with and communicate with them and stuff like that and never lie, don’t run to other people and talk and stuff like that.”

Another parent asserted that the positive communication patterns between themselves and their children paved the way to freely discuss topics such as sex and drugs. This is evident in the participant's responses below.

“Well they know the difference between wrong and right. I talk to them and especially the 14 year old, I teach them the dangers of drugs, girlfriends, if he wants to be in a relationship I tell him ‘you are too young baby’ he just started high school now. But if he wants to be skelm [sly], I tell him to protect himself. And he is the one who came to ask me about sex and stuff.

“I talk straight with them about sex, I swear at them when they don't listen. So they know what is right and what is wrong.”

Discussing topics such as sex, drugs and alcohol with adolescents has been recommended by various authors as this would probably reduce children's likelihood of engaging in such activities (Jaccard, Dittus and Gordon, 2000; Holden, 2010). This was evident from the above quotations where some of the cohabiting parents reported positive communication patterns with their adolescents, refuting literature assertions which associated all cohabiting families with negative communication patterns between parents and children (Rodgers and Rose, 2002; Brown 2002; Manning and Lamb, 2003). These positive communication patterns have been associated with the authoritative parenting style which contributes to open communication between the parent and the child (Swartz et al., 2008). However, maintaining open communication between parents and adolescents during this developmental phase often presents adolescents increasingly believing that they should be secretive about disclosing certain domains of their lives to their parents (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman and Campione-Barr, 2006 in Holden, 2010).

The next section discusses the final theme of suggestions from the cohabiting biological parents in terms of support.

4.3.4 Theme 4 Perceptions of the needed support for adolescents living in cohabiting families

Cohabitation is a family structure which has been labelled a risk factor for child development owing to its characteristics such as its temporary nature and instability, which affect all the other family dynamics in the household (Manning and Lamb, 2003; Wendy and Manning

2008). With reference to disciplinary challenges experienced in cohabiting families, some suggestions in terms of support were put forward by the parents who took part in this study.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1 Encourage parent-child interaction between the cohabiting parents and their biological children

Parent-child relationships are essential for human development (Kuczynski,2003; Bronfenbrenner, 1994).Parental attachment, specifically during adolescence, has been described as a buffer against behavioural problems common in the adolescence period (Scaramella et al., 2002).Therefore some of the cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study suggested assistance with parent-child relationships as a form of support which needed to be promoted among cohabiting families to increase optimum child development among these youngsters. In describing this need, the participants emphasised that parents should show love and also listen to their children, which became evident in the following quotations:

“And we should just be there for our children even though they wrong us, let’s continue to love them....., so I think love is the best.”

“You must listen to your child when he tells you something; you must always have a time for your child.”

“Don’t ignore your child; your child must always come first.”

Parental responsiveness, where parents prioritise their children's needs, respond to their needs, make time available for them and listen to them was suggested to secure positive parent-child relationships with adolescents. Parental responsiveness is the extent to which parent’s intentionally foster warmth and support for their children’s special needs and demands (Baumrind, 1993). This is an influencing factor towards the different levels of parent-child relationships (Isabella and Belsky, 1991 in Devore, 2006). Parent-child relationships provide support and protection through security and comfort in times of distress as well as facilitating the autonomous exploration of the environment by the child, (Devore, 2006). The latter is crucial during the period of adolescence as it facilitates adolescents' social-emotional adjustment, an understanding and participation in future relationships, better educational outcomes and delayed sexual activity (Devore, 2006; Miller, Benson and Galbraith, 2001; Mcneely et al., 2002). Distant or low quality parent-child relationships have

been linked to emotional maladjustment, depressive moods, delinquent and deviant behaviours (Burbach and Bourduin, 1986; Nada, Raja, McGee and Stanton, 1992; Kenny and Rice, 1995; Miller et al., 2001; Devore, 2006; Gerald, Krishnakumar and Buehler, 2006).

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2 Need for nurturing relationships between step-parents and step-children (adolescent) in cohabiting families.

"Nurture" in this context refers to the extent to which a parent or caregiver is available and able to respond sensitively respond and to meet the needs of their child, which include the physical needs such as food and shelter as well as developmental and emotional needs like affection, empathy, acceptance and affirmation (Widom, 2001). This suggested aspect of support aims at promoting nurturing step-relationship within cohabiting families. The cohabiting biological parents who took part in the study also suggested the need for positive nurturing relationships between the cohabiting step-parent and the step-children, emphasising honestly understanding that the step-parent will not be replacing the child's absent biological parent. The participants also encouraged mutual respect between the cohabiting step-parent and the step-children. These suggestions are supported by the following quotations:

“Try to give understanding between your boyfriend and your child, let them know each other, this is not your father this is not your child but there has to be an understanding and a relationship between the two of them.”

“Speak to your child, you must tell your child, ‘he is not your father but you must also listen to what he says’. Even boyfriends also go like ‘but you can see the child does not listen and you don’t do nothing’ sit your child and your boyfriend down and tell them you don’t understand each other and work out a solution and have an understanding of what to do.”

Some of the other cohabiting biological parents who took part in the study also placed emphasise on fair treatment of the cohabiting partner and the children without the cohabiting biological parent taking sides, in order to foster nurturing relationships. They responded as follows:

“Try your best not to choose sides because the minute you choose sides then the other part will fall apart, because if you choose your boyfriend you will end up not loving your child, if you choose your child you will end up not loving your boyfriend.”

“So you have to tell them that this is what it is, ‘I love you both you are in between me’ its 50/50 if you are wrong you are wrong. If you are going to choose your boyfriend over your child it’s not fine and if you are going to choose your child over your boyfriend it’s not fine. But sit and have an understanding on what to do.”

Literature that was consulted (Manning, 2003; Brown, 2004; Raley, 2004; Wendy and Manning 2008) as well as the findings of this study concludes that cohabiting step-relationships are mostly negative. Promoting nurturing relationships between step-parents and step-children may lead to more positive parent-child interactions, which in turn will be associated with positive child outcomes related to a broad range of competencies in learning, self-worth and social skills (Seeman, Singer, Horwitz and McEwen, 1997; Waters, Kondo-Ikemura, Posada and Richters, 1991).

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3 Allocation of parental responsibility

Cohabiting families have been connected with parental role ambiguity because of the unstable nature of this family structure as a result of its lack of institutionalisation (Manning and Bulanda, 2002; Manning and Lamb, 2003 and Nock, 1995). With specific reference to cohabiting families, it is assumed that cohabiting step-parents may be reluctant to fulfil their parental role to the partner’s children as they are not legally committed to take up this responsibility. Therefore, the biological cohabiting parent may experience task overload, which may affect their effective parenting skills resulting in less support and control of the children and adolescents in their families (Arosinson, 2004). Hence the importance of allocation of parental responsibility in cohabiting families, also considering the fact that effective parental monitoring and support have been recognised as vital in the discipline of adolescent children (Moore, Evans, Brooks, Gunn and Roth, 2011). In describing their need for this aspect of parental responsibilities, the participants contributed the following:

“I think the parents involved should have a united force so that the children do not have to say but this one is easy.”

“Talk to your boyfriend that if you ask him to discipline your child then he is the father whatever, but tell him he is the father right there at the moment because the father is not there.”

“You have to understand each other sometimes it’s difficult as you will be struggling with the children but you have to stick together.”

“And I can also say you need to be a united front in the way you discipline all the children in the house, there should be fairness and if I say ‘no’ and my girlfriend should also say ‘no’ so that the children will not take advantage of you.”

“The two adults involved, need to draw boundaries when it comes to care of the children.”

Despite recommending the sharing of parental responsibilities between the cohabiting parents, the above statements also establish some sense of firm cooperative parenting between the cohabiting parents so as to contain the children’s behaviours.

4.3.4.4 Sub-theme 4.4 Need for positive role-models to the adolescent children.

The final identified aspect of support for adolescents from the interviewed parents was the need for positive role-models to their adolescent children. In describing this need their comments were as follows:

“Be role-models to them so that they will be able to respect you.”

“I think when you especially dealing with teenagers its difficult they may behave as if they are ignoring you but if you are s straight person they will respect that.”

“Our children need someone to look up to, someone they listen to and tell them they have were young as well and maybe motivate them to listen to us their parents and go to school and be better than us their parents.”

According to Koonce (2006:43), a role-model can be any adult who inspires someone to live a more meaningful life. Bloom (2013) defines a role-model as a subject of admiration and emulation, whose personal qualities and achievements can inspire others to thrive without direct instruction. Adolescents commonly relate to sportsmen or celebrities as their role-models. However, literature places special emphasis on children’s parents being role-models

to their children by setting examples of positive attitudes and behaviours (Bloom, 2013; Koonce, 2006).

4.4 Conclusion

The cohabiting biological parents' reflections on the challenges they experienced in their households with regard to discipline of their adolescent children were relatively consistent with some of the characteristics of cohabitation described by literature. These included parental role ambiguity, negative parent-child relationships, sibling rivalry and dysfunctional cohabiting relationships characterised by instability and domestic violence. Good parent-child relationships were described by literature as vital, especially during the adolescence period, and with reference to the obtained results, positive parent-child interactions may be a key determinant to overcoming the described challenges on discipline within cohabiting families.

Cohabiting step-parent families which resemble step or restructured families were associated with many of the discussed challenges due to negative step-parent step-child relationships which also posed another challenge on their own. It came out strongly from the collected data that children or adolescents in cohabiting families undermined the authority of their parent's cohabiting partner, making it difficult for the cohabiting partner to assume their parental role as the step-parent within the cohabiting family. Furthermore, the participants identified the different disciplinary methods for adolescents as major challenges themselves. Difference of opinion between parents and children especially with regard application physical punishment was identified as a contributing factor stirring up challenges and taking into account that this method of discipline is against the South African Children's Amendment Act 41 of 2007 while the children's parents felt it was an acceptable method of discipline.

In relation to the identified challenges, the cohabiting biological parents who took part in the study projected a number of suggestions on the support needed for adolescents living in cohabiting families, such as encouraging positive or nurturing parent-child or step-parent step-child relations, allocation of parental responsibility and the need to be role-models to their adolescent children.

The next chapter presents and discusses findings from interviewed adolescent children living in cohabiting families.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS PERTAINING TO ADOLESCENT CHILDREN

5.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter presented the findings of biological parents in cohabitating relationships with regard to discipline of their adolescents, this chapter presents the findings of the adolescent children who took part in this study. It attempts to achieve the study's second objective, namely: to explore and describe challenges of adolescents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline by their biological parents involved in a cohabitation union.

A sample of six adolescents between the ages of 15-18 years, representing the middle adolescent phase was purposively selected from the Child Welfare Organisation in Cape Town. Data was once again generated by means of individual interviews with the aid of an interview guide. The protocol for data recording was the use of audio recordings to record the verbal data, and field notes to obtain the non-verbal data.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to the framework for data analysis for qualitative research by Tesch (in Creswell, 2003:192) to ensure a systematic manner of data analysis. An independent coder assisted with the data analysis. In order to compare and contrast the findings of this study with existing theories and previous research reported in the relevant literature, the researcher made use of literature control. It was used as a data verification tool which enabled the researcher to verify the major themes with the relevant literature (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010:28).

Although the data of the biological cohabitating parents seems to overlap with the data of the adolescents who took part in the study in many instances, the researcher deemed it important to include them in order to illustrate the perceptions of both biological parents and the adolescent children. The fact that some of the themes and sub-themes are very similar to each other also strengthens and supports some of the arguments about the discipline of adolescents living in cohabitating households.

The chapter commences with the demographic data of the adolescents who are living with their biological parents in cohabitating relationships.

5.2 Demographic data of the adolescents who participated in the study

By means of introduction, the biographical particulars of the adolescents sample group who participated in the study is presented in the table below:

Table 4 Demographic details of adolescent participants

Participant	Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Language	Grade	Resident biological parent	Duration of parent's cohabitation relationship	Number of biological siblings	Number of non-biological siblings
1	Male	17	Black African	Xhosa	12	Father	9 years	4	1
2	Female	15	Black African	Xhosa	9	Mother	8years	2	2
3	Female	16	Colored	Afri-Kaans	10	Mother	2 years	3	0
4	Male	17	Colored	Afri-Kaans	Drop-out	Mother	4 years	3	2
5	Female	17	Black African	Xhosa	12	Mother	2 years	3	0
6	Female	16	Black African	Xhosa	9	Father	3 years	1	2

5.2.1 Age

As evident from the above table, the age of the adolescents who took part in this study ranged between 15-17 years. This age range falls within the middle adolescent stage which was the target population for this study (Baker, 1994). The physical, emotional and social changes within this age group often contribute to vulnerability as they are prone to experimenting with risk behaviour (Kosslyn, 2011). Hence many disciplinary challenges are exhibited in this age group.

5.2.2 Gender

Of the six adolescents who took part in the study, four were females and two were males.

5.2.3 Grade

Five of the adolescents indicated that they were still in school. Two of the adolescents who took part in the study were in Grade 9, one in Grade 10, and two were in Grade 12. One participant reported that he had dropped out of school in Grade 10.

5.2.4 Resident biological parent

Four out of six participants indicated that they were staying with their biological mothers and their cohabiting partners. Two were living with their biological fathers and their cohabiting partners. These statements are similar to findings from Manning et al., (2007) who assert that older children in cohabiting unions primarily live with their biological mother and her partner who is not their biological parent.

5.2.5 Duration of the parents' cohabitation relationships

The adolescents who took part in this study indicated different periods in which their parents had been involved in cohabiting relationships, the longest period being eight years and the shortest period two years.

5.2.6 Number of biological or non-biological siblings

Four out of the six participants stated that they lived with both biological and non-biological siblings in the same household. Two participants indicated that they did not live with non-biological siblings in their household.

5.2.7 Ethnic group

The interviewed participants comprised four Blacks and two Coloureds. The researcher struggled unsuccessfully to access any White or Indian adolescents living in cohabiting families so as to ensure representation from all ethnic groups in South Africa.

5.2.8 Language

Four of the participants were predominantly isiXhosa speaking while the remaining two spoke Afrikaans as their first language. Taking into account that the researcher is only conversant in English, the interviews were conducted in English.

5.3 Presentation of findings

According to Mouton (2008:108), “Ultimately, all fieldwork culminates in the analysis and interpretation of some set of data. Analysis involves ‘breaking up’ the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships.” In the process of this study, the researcher engaged in data analysis, and the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are presented in Table 5. Some of the themes in this section relate or are very similar to the challenges presented by the biological parents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabitating relationship. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the findings in this chapter resulted from adolescents who were living with one biological parent and the parent’s cohabiting partner in a cohabitation relationship. The themes are supported by sub-themes to adequately articulate the findings, and are contrasted and compared with existing literature.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings of the adolescents who are living in cohabitating families are presented in *Table 5*.

Table 5: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Description of the adolescents’ cohabiting families	
Theme 2: Challenges regarding parent-child relationships in cohabiting families	Sub-theme 2.1: Challenges regarding adolescents' relationship with cohabiting biological parents
	Sub-theme 2.2: Challenges regarding adolescents' relationship with the cohabiting biological parent’s partner
Theme 3: Challenges with regard to patterns of communication in cohabiting families	Sub-theme 3.1: Negative patterns of communication in cohabiting families
Theme 4: Challenges regarding discipline in cohabiting families	Sub-theme 4.1: Challenges regarding discipline from the biological parents in cohabiting families

	Sub-theme 4.2: Challenges regarding discipline from a cohabiting biological parent's partner
Theme 5: Perceived needs of adolescents to improve the presented challenges regarding discipline in cohabiting families	Sub-theme 5.1: Positive parent-child relationships
	Sub-theme 5.2: Improved communication patterns
	Sub-theme 5.3: Need for role-models

5.3.1 Theme 1 Description of the adolescents' cohabiting families

All the adolescents indicated that they lived in cohabiting step-parent families in which they lived with one biological parent and the parent's cohabiting partner. In describing their families, the participants stated that they were living with one biological parent and the parent's girlfriend or boyfriend as well as biological or step-siblings in cases where there was more than one child. In describing their families, the participants provided the following responses:

"I have three siblings, my brother who is 19, my little sister who is nine and my baby brother who is two. My older brother lives with my aunt and uncle in X [town] where he is working, so it is just me and my little sister and baby brother and our mother and her boyfriend."

"I don't know how many years but I grow up with him [stepfather] but there was a time he left and now he is back."

"I stay with my mother, my siblings and utata (father) [stepfather]. We have been staying with him for a long time now I think for about seven or eight years and in 2010 his two children also came to live with us...."

"We are four children living in the house, it is me and my brother and my stepmother's [father's cohabiting partner], two children then my father and his girlfriend my step mother..."

The participants' descriptions of their households were more or less the same as those of the cohabiting step-parent families. Cohabiting step-parent families have been defined as the situation where the children involved are living with one biological parent and the parent's partner (Acs and Nelson, 2004:7).

Cohabiting step-parent families are structurally similar to step or restructured families with the only difference being that restructured step families are bonded by marriage, and cohabiting step-parent families contain two partners who are not married (Acs and Nelson, 2004; Raley and Wildsmith, 2004; Stewart, 2001). Therefore the family dynamics in step or restructured families are very similar to cohabiting step-parent families. Step-parent families have been described as artificial families bonded by law who share a household instead of family ties through blood kinship (Filinson, 1986). They are also viewed as an imperfect substitute for a married family as they are often characterised by ambiguous step-family roles which impair the cohesiveness of the family (Filinson, 1986).

These families are often characterised by conflict between the step-parents and step-children due to role ambiguity between the step-parents (Fine and Kurdek, 1994; Marsiglio, 1992; Levin and Sussman, 1997; Fine, Coleman and Ganong, 1998). Most of the participants who were living in cohabiting step-parent families described their challenges with regard to their families as follows:

“I don't like it when he [cohabitating step parent] starts bossing me around like he is my father.”

“...and he [cohabitating step parent] expects me to listen to him but he leaves my mother when he wants, I have no respect for that guy”

These responses mainly illustrate the adolescent's lack of respect for their parent's cohabiting partner because of their parenting behaviour or when attempting to discipline the participants. Adolescents' lack of respect or undermining the authority of the step-parent (cohabitating partner) is a commonly described characteristic in step-families, which often contributes to the dysfunctioning of the families (Levin and Sussman, 1997). These findings are consistent with a study by Albers (1999) who asserts that children who grow up in step-parent families often challenge the authority of the step-parent, which can cause great behavioural adjustment problems to the children (Albers, 1999). Although this challenge in cohabiting step-parent families could be described as rebellious behaviour often associated with adolescent behaviour, it can also be interpreted from another angle as it seems that the

cohabiting biological parents' partners display some attitudes, actions or behaviour which may contribute to or encourage the undermining of their step parents' (cohabitating partners) discipline.

Two of the adolescent participants described their difficulties with their step-mothers as follows:

“My step mother thinks she knows it all and acts like she is our mother especially when my father is around.....when you do something wrong she is always the first one to comment and will pressure my father to yell at me, but I told myself to just ignore her”

“.....she tells a lot of lies about me and when I didn't do anything wrong and she thinks I am a bad person so I don't listen to her anymore”

These responses reflect conflict and friction between the adolescent and the biological parent's cohabiting partner, and are in agreement with the findings of Pryor and Rodgers, (2001) and Dainton, (1993) who elaborate on the myths of step-motherhood which assume that stepmothers are cruel or evil and constantly plotting to harm their step-children. Some authors assert that often step-mothers compare themselves to the children's absent biological mother when conceptualising their parental role, which in turn may negatively affect their occupation of the step-parent role (Weaver and Coleman, 2005). Thus, even when they act with the best of intentions, it is often clouded by step-mother myths.

The next theme discusses the challenges in parent-child relationships between the adolescent and their biological parent, as well as the participant's relationship with their parent's cohabiting partner, which may contribute to problems regarding the discipline of adolescents in the household.

5.3.2 Theme 2 Challenges regarding parent-child relationships in cohabiting families

Parent-child relationships are an important dimension of family interactions, influenced by the emotional tone of the family and the responsiveness of the parent to the child, depending on the parent's warmth or hostility (Bee and Boyd, 2007). Positive parent-child relationships relate to warmth and affection, versus negative parent-child relationships which are associated with hostility. Bee and Boyd (2007) and Maccoby (1980) maintain that warm and

affectionate parents express affection towards their child/ren, frequently put the child's needs first, show enthusiasm for the child's activities and are emotionally supportive to their children. Warm and affectionate relationships between parents and children also contribute to children's increased self-esteem, helping to make them more altruistic and less likely to display aggression and delinquent behaviour (Goldstein, Davis-Kean and Eccles, 2005; Petti, Bates and Dodge, 1997). Most importantly, warm parent-child relationships have been identified with more responsiveness of children to the guidance and efficiency of their parents' attempts to discipline them (MacDonald, 1992).

The following sub-theme discusses the challenges regarding the relationships between adolescents and their biological parent.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1 Challenges regarding the adolescent's relationship with a cohabiting biological parent

The quality of adolescents' relationships with their parents is a key component to healthy adolescent development. Secure bonds between parents and their adolescent children allow them to grow, explore, and reach their full potential while at the same time knowing that their home represents a safe haven for them (Rueter and Conger, 1995:435). Two specific components of the parent-child relationship that have been found to be particularly important in adolescent well-being are parent-child communication and parental involvement (Brody, Flor, Hollett-Wright, McCoy and Donovan, 1999; Smith and Krohn, 1995 and Davidson and Cardemill, 2009). Jackson, Bijstro, Oostra and Bosma, (1998) on the other hand, stipulate that those children who grew up in families that practise open communication are happier, healthier and more satisfied with their lives. Parental involvement can be conceptualised in numerous ways, such as the parent engaging in some activities with the child as well as emotional involvement, which has to do with children feeling close to their parents (Wenk et al., 1994; Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994).

Poor parent child interactions are a result of mild arguments and bickering between them which they do not resolve satisfactorily and which are known to weaken the parent-adolescent relationship (Patterson and Bank, 1989 in Rueter and Conger, 1995). The latter can also pose a threat to healthy adolescent development, which may result in adjustment problems such as emotional difficulties, behavioural problems, delinquency and also poor school performance (Robin, Koepke and Moye, 1990; Brook, Whiteman and Finch, 1993;

Selnow, 1987; Thompson and Wilsnack, 1987 in Rueter and Conger, 1995). On the other hand, successfully resolved disagreements between parents and adolescents contribute to the restructuring of parent-adolescent relationships, allowing the adolescent to mature while maintaining close family ties at the same time (Rueter and Conger, 1995). It is the atmosphere of trust and emotional closeness among family members that sets the stage for the successful resolution of parent-adolescent differences and will ultimately assist with effective discipline (Rueter and Conger, 1995:436).

It became obvious from the following quotations that the adolescents who took part in this study did not have positive relationships with their biological parents. The following two participants reflected resentment and unresolved issues between themselves and their fathers:

“I think he was forced to take care of us because if my mother was not drinking too much and the social workers did not want to take us away he was not going to take care of us because he did not visit us much when we were in X [town] and he did not send my mother money to buy food or clothes. My mother received a grant for me and my brother, sometimes his sister helped us but he did not”

This quotation points out some of the unresolved issues between the adolescent and his/her father which is affecting their parent-child interactions now that he/she is living with him. These unresolved issues stem from lack of support that the participant experienced from his/her biological father while she was still living with her biological mother in a single-parent household. Children who live in single-parent households suffer severe economic disadvantages when their fathers pay little or no child support (Seltzer, 1991:79). Contributions to child support together with other dimensions such as visiting patterns, frequent contact and participation in decisions about the children’s lives, are some of the factors which are regarded as fundamental for father-child relationships (Seltzer, 1991). In this case, the father’s absence, lack of involvement in her upbringing, poor financial support while the child was staying with her mother and even her perception that the father was “forced” to take care of her due to her mother’s drinking problem, affected their parent-child relationship even after she joined the father’s household.

Unsuccessfully resolved disputes between parents and adolescents and disagreements between them can become intense and long-lasting. The latter often leads to ongoing conflict that can weaken the parent-adolescent relationships even more, and may also pose a threat to healthy adolescent development, as unresolved disagreements with parents have been

associated with many adolescent adjustment problems which may include emotional difficulties and behaviour problems (Rueter and Conger, 1995). It will obviously also pose a challenge for disciplining of the adolescent.

Some participants reported limited communication between themselves and their parents as another important factor hindering positive parent-child relationships in their households. In describing this challenge the participants' responses were as follows:

“I don't know....I craves that [spending time with father] from my own father because he is my only father, my only parent....”

“I never really had time to chat with him, we never did at all, even when I am coming from school I just say 'hi' and put my bags and get out of the house because he will shout at me even if something is not really important.”

“I don't share anything with him that is happening through my life with him because he is always shouting at me always. I can say he is full of anger “

“My father acts like I am not his child. He does not even know me sometimes I feel like I am an orphan I don't have parents.”

The first quotation illustrates the participant's intense longing for a good relationship with his/her father. The rest of the quotations also reflect the distant relationships between the adolescents and their biological parents, the lack of communication and/or conflict such as shouting or scolding. Sadly, one of the adolescents even remarked that he/she felt like an orphan, thus reflecting the distance between him/her and the father, the lack of attachment between them and even feelings of isolation. It also became obvious that the poor relationships between these adolescents and their parents coupled with a lack of communication posed serious challenges for discipline in these households.

Ennett, Bauman, Foshee, Pemberton and Hick, (2001) and Barnes and Olson, (1985) encourage frequent communication between parents and their children since parent-child communication encourages adolescents' identity formation and role-taking ability. Adolescents who experience support from their parents are found to be freer to explore identity issues and increase their moral reasoning.

Unresolved issues, limited communication and ongoing conflict between parents and children surfaced as the major factors affecting parent-child relationships which in turn posed challenges for discipline. This lack of a warm biological parent-child relationship helps

explains the high likelihood of adolescents in cohabiting families engaging in delinquent behaviours as parent-child interaction during the adolescent period has been found to have a buffering effect to a negative disadvantaged environment (Scaramella et al., 2002; Pettit, 1997). Adolescents living in cohabiting families are therefore more likely to be less responsive to guidance and discipline they receive from their parents (Bee and Boyd, 2007).

The participants in the study also reported challenges in their relationship with their biological parent's cohabiting partner that affected discipline in the cohabiting families.

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2 Challenges regarding adolescents' relationship with the cohabiting biological parent's partner

In as much as the adolescent children identified negative relationships with their cohabiting biological parents, most of them reflected having negative relationships with their parents' cohabiting partners as well. In evidence of this claim, some of the captured responses of the adolescents who took part in this study were as follows:

"I don't like him [stepfather] at all, he comes homes drunk most of the time..... I don't talk to him and he does not ask me anything, he is not home most of the time."

"She [stepmother] tells lies to my father and I get punished for what I did not do."

"My stepmother hates me, she always accuses me of things in the house, she always picks on me and not the other children in the house. If I want something she tells me, go ask your father."

"...and he expects me to listen to him but he leaves my mother when he wants, I have no respect for that guy"

The above responses depict a sense of animosity between these adolescents and their parents' cohabiting partner. It should also be noted that the relationships between the adolescent children and their biological parents' cohabiting partners mimic step-family relationships which have been argued in the literature to be in general more negative than positive (Levin and Sussman, 1997; Pryor and Rodgers, 2001; Acs and Nelson, 2004; Raley and Wildsmith, 2004) due to parental role ambiguity (Fine and Kurdek, 1994; Fine et al., 1998), the cohabiting partner's parental behaviour (Weaver and Coleman, 2005; Pryor and Rodgers, 2001) and the participants' undermining of the parent's partner's authority as a parental figure (Albers, 1999; Levin and Sussman, 1997). This is also consistent with the findings of

Brown (2004) who generally describe step-parent step-child relationships as negative, characterised by low levels of warmth and trust between the parties involved.

From the data that was collected from the adolescents who took part in this study it appeared that they were more likely to have negative relationships with both parental figures in their households, which were exemplified by their responses below:

“...I just do not know ...they do not understand the kind of person I am, they do not know me to the fullest because they describe me as into the streets but they do not know what I am interested in the most....”

“They don't give me a chance to talk on my side what happened”

These findings are in agreement with findings of Manning and Lamb, (2003); Manning et al., (2011); Bee and Boyd, (2007) and Acs and Nelson, (2004) who consider that children who are living in cohabiting step-parent families are more likely to lack guidance from all the adult persons in their families due to the negative parent-child relationships they have with their own biological parents and the parent's cohabiting partner. The latter may lead to high levels of dysfunctional behaviour such as delinquency that has been associated with cohabiting families, thus posing a serious threat to discipline.



Despite the adolescents' negative reflections of their poor relationships with their biological parents' cohabiting partner, one participant reported a positive relationship, addressing him as “father”. The participant expressed herself as follows:

“I stay with my mother, my siblings and utata (father) [stepfather], I just call him father but he is not my real father but we have been staying with him for a long time now I think for about 7 or 8 years and in 2010 his two children also came to live with us....”

Unlike all the above examples of the adolescents' negative reflections of their relationships, this response depicted a positive step-parent relationship with the biological parent's cohabiting partner, referring to him as “father, thus showing some sign of respect to the cohabiting partner. According to Visher, Visher and Pasley, (2003), successful step-families are ones where there is acceptance and understanding of differences, and integration of the family structure. These statements are in contrast with other authors (Levin and Sussman, 1997; Alber, 1999; Pryor and Rodgers, 2002; Brown, 2004; Raley and Wildsmith,

2004) who focus solely on the high levels of conflict in step-families. Therefore successful step-families would have accepted their family members' individual differences and positions within the family. Positive relationships with the biological mother's cohabiting partner will obviously pave the way for effective discipline of children in the household.

In the next theme, the researcher discusses the challenges with regard to patterns of communication in cohabiting families that also affect discipline of adolescents in this family structure.

5.3.3 Theme 3 Challenges with regard to patterns of communication in cohabiting families

According to Ritchie and Fitzpatrick, (1990:524), family communication patterns are a set of norms that govern the trade-off between informational and relational objectives, which include conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversation orientation is the degree to which families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestricted interaction about a wide array of topics (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002:85). Children are therefore encouraged to develop the ability to recognise, understand and manage their own emotions expressing their own ideas (Kelly, Keaten, Finch, Duarte, Hoffman and Michels, 2002; Rangarajan and Kelly, 2006). Conformity is the degree to which family communication stresses a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values and beliefs (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002:85) for instance, a child's attempt to express themselves may be ignored by the parents or even lead to punishment (Keaten, Kelly and Palmer, 2004).

Communication has been identified by literature as an important component essential for parent-child interaction, especially for adolescent well-being (Brody, Flor, Hollett-Wright, McCoy and Donovan, 1999; Smith and Krohn, 1995 and Davidson and Cardemill, 2009). Communication and parent-child relationships have been seen as mutually influencing each other. If couples value openness in their relationship, they are more likely to also value openness in the parent-child relationship with their children. However when communication is constrained, conflict can arise in this relationship (Ritchie and Fitzpatrick, 1990; Rangarajan and Kelly, 2006).

Open or constrained communication patterns between parents and children are associated with the children's future interpersonal skills, cognitive flexibility and conflict management

(Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002; Schrodt, Ledbetter, Jernberg, Brown and Glonek, 2009) hence the importance of communication to any child's well-being.

Considering the importance of patterns of communication for a well-functioning family and for the children's optimum development, the adolescents who took part in this study mostly reported negative patterns of communication in their cohabiting families as another challenge they experienced which affected their acceptance of discipline in their families.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1 Negative patterns of communication in cohabiting families

The participants emphasised negative communication patterns between themselves and their cohabiting biological parents as well as their parents' partners. Aspects such as verbal abuse, lack of open communication, lack of listening to each other, ongoing conflict and a lack of trust between the parties seemed to be the norm. They described the negative patterns of communication in their families as follows:

"He has even called me with a lot of bad names like I am an Idiot, Useless, Hopeless. I don't really see why I should spend time with him."

"They don't give a chance to talk on my side what happened, my father only listens to his girlfriend, he cannot think for himself that they are lying to him and it makes me mad!.....When I want to explain he says I should stop lying to him and he starts shouting on how I am causing trouble in the house and how i will be like my mother if I don't listen to him. His girlfriend will be there make it worse for me telling him more lies about me and then they will just punish me."

"She is always shouting, sometimes she threatens to throw me out of the house like if I don't sleep at home. Ok. If I may have done something wrong, they are not going to sit down with me they are just going to shout and the problem is they do want to know what is the main reason which leads me to do such a thing."

"I was failing and I think I should not waste my time and her money [biological mother] keeping on going to school because I know I was going to fail but they think I am doing drugs or I am with the gangs. I tell them hundred times already but they don't want to listen to me, they really don't know me so I just leave them like that."

"You cannot be free around her it's always 'don't do this or don't do that which is boring'. Like I am 15 and are taught at school about sex and I wanted to asked my

mother about it but I can't because I am not even allowed to have a boyfriend so if I ask she will suspect I have a boyfriends."

The above responses illustrate some characteristics of conformity communication which discourages children from talking about their feelings and ideas and instead stress the primacy of the parent's opinions and ideas (Rangarajan and Kelly, 2006). Rodgers and Rose, (2002); Brown (2002); Manning and Lamb, (2003) claim that cohabiting families are often associated with negative patterns of communication. Adolescents who are experiencing such negative patterns in their cohabiting families are also more likely to be resistant to discipline, coupled with the lack of disciplinary guidance from their parents. The lack of open communication is therefore a vital aspect in the conveying of discipline to children (Fitter, 2010). Hence negative patterns of communication between the cohabiting biological parents, their partners and the adolescent children are a major challenge for discipline in cohabiting families.

However, some adolescents reported positive communication patterns between themselves and their parents and the parent's cohabiting partner. This is illustrated by the following responses:

"And he [stepfather] is not like my mother he would talk to you and I like that, I feel I can listen to him more than my mother who just want to cause a scene every time."

"My mother is a very warm person, if there is something she talks to me about it, the way she treats me is different from the way she treats my five year old sister. I am an adult now so we talk if there is a problem and I like that about her because I have some friends who are afraid of their parents but I know I can trust my mother."

"We speak about almost everything about boys, schools but there is always respect and I don't want to tell her all the little details about me and my boyfriend. We talk but there is that.....line to say that is enough."

These responses depict conversation orientation, which is the ability to understand and to manage parents' emotions while encouraging children to express their own ideas (Kelly et al., 2002). From the above two statements, these participants seemed to have open communication with the cohabiting adults in their families where they were listened to and were free to express their ideas and emotions. Open communication consists of the exchange of factual and emotional information such as the expression of needs, which can facilitate healthy family relations and adolescent development (Hart, Olsen, Robinson and Mandlco,

1997; Caprara et al., 1998; Brody et al., 1999; Clark and Shields, 1997; Huff, Widner, and McCoy, 2003 in in Davidson and Cardemil, 2009:100). Portraying warm relationships between the adolescents and their cohabiting biological parents and/or the parent's cohabiting partner are mutually influential to each other, thus laying a good foundation for effective discipline and parent-child interactions (Ritchie and Fitzpatrick, 1990; Rangarajan and Kelly, 2006).

The participants who reflected positive parent-child interactions and communication refuted the literature which solely presented negative patterns of communication in all cohabiting families. Owing to the positive patterns of communication in their cohabiting families, these adolescent participants were more likely to be receptive of the guidance and discipline they received from either their cohabiting biological parent or the parent's partner. Such adolescents are therefore more likely to be emotionally and socially mature, with the possibility of developing good social skills into adulthood (Koesten, 2004; Scott, 2004).

In the next section, the researcher discusses challenges experienced by the adolescents with regard to discipline in their cohabiting families.



5.3.4 Theme 4 Challenges regarding discipline in cohabiting families

According to Bee and Boyd (2007) discipline is action by parents and/or caregivers of controlling or correcting children's behaviour and training them to follow rules (Bee and Boyd, 2007). These acts of corrective behaviour by parents and/or caregivers are termed "methods of discipline" and they may include physical punishment of the child, deprivation of privileges or material objects, time-out, extra chores, conforming to house rules, incentives or rewards for good behaviour and even psychological aggression (Douglas and Straus, 2007; Bee, 2007; Pickhardt, 2005; Barnes, 2009).

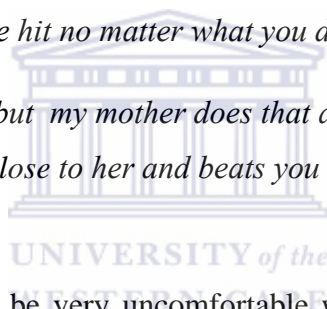
The adolescents who took part in the study presented with some challenges which stemmed from their biological parents and their cohabiting parents' methods of discipline and will be discussed under the following sub-themes.

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1 Challenges regarding discipline from the biological parents in cohabitating families

The adolescents who took part in this study reported that physical punishment by their biological parents was one of the most common methods of discipline in their families. Physical punishment is the use or threatened use of physical force, which encompass a variety of degrading verbal expressions such as shouting or swearing, hitting the buttocks of the child, or slapping him/her with an open hand with the intention of inflicting pain but not injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling the misbehaviour (Douglas and Straus, 2007). In describing their challenges with regard to physical punishment, the participants responded as follows:

“At times she can just beat you but once she beats me I just switch off because I don’t think no one deserves to be hit no matter what you did.”

“I don’t like to be beaten but my mother does that all the time, if she is cross with you she just uses whatever is close to her and beats you with it.”



The above adolescent seemed to be very uncomfortable with the fact that his mother beat him, even “switching off”, thus resisting the outcome of the lesson the child was expected to learn through this method of discipline. Some authors view physical punishment as a normative method of discipline while others describe it as harsh action associated with short-term compliance and increased behavioural problems (Oliver, 2007; McLyod, 2002; Stormshak, 2000). These assertions on their own present a challenge which comes with implementing this method of discipline to children. South African adolescents are likely to perceive this method of discipline as abuse, taking into account the promoted children’s rights which discourage this method of discipline, hence these adolescent children are likely to resist such discipline. The use of physical punishment may also portray permissive or neglectful parenting, and if used too often, it may also pose a danger to child development (Mitchell, 2008). Hence the Children’s Amendment Act 41 of 2007, Chapter 12 (2) discourages the use of this method of discipline stating that "No child may be subjected to corporal punishment or be punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way".

The following adolescents reflected that their biological parents made use of verbal abuse as a method of discipline:

“She [biological mother] is always shouting, sometimes she hits me and threatens to throw me out of the house like if I don’t sleep at home.

“Sometimes also shouts a lot and my mother have a loud voice so she will shout at you that the whole area will know I’m in trouble and it’s like when she is angry she just says whatever!”

“He [biological father] has even called me with a lot of bad names like I am an Idiot, Useless, Hopeless. I don’t see really if I should spend time with him.”

These participants seemed frustrated by their parents' use of verbal aggression stirring conflict between themselves and their parents. Verbal abuse is the use of inappropriate statements by parents in trying to control or stop a child's behaviour (Lange, 2008). Literature on verbal abuse describes it as verbal aggression or coercive responses, and it has been found to occur alongside other forms of child maltreatment such as physical abuse (Lange, 2008, Reece, 2000; Bloomquist and Schnell, 2002). Similar to physical punishment, verbal abuse is also associated with child non-compliance, as evident in the third quotation above, where the participant expresses his deviance to this disciplinary method by refusing to spend time with his parent. Verbal abuse is also connected to increased behavioural problems and psychological consequences which include emotional maladjustment such as low self-esteem, depression and anger or hostility in the child (Lange, 2008).

Some participants reported that their biological parent would take privileges away from them as another method of discipline. They described this form of discipline as follows:

“I don’t like this thing of them taking my stuff away; imagine they take my phone for a week. I am a teenager; my whole world is on that phone so imagine I will be out of touch for a week!”

“Yes like if my grades a low, my mother will not give me pocket money or sometimes they confiscate my phone and that really sucks!”

Although the above participants indicated frustration with this method of discipline in their household, Oliver (2007), McLyod (2002) and Stormshak, (2000) regard the withholding of privileges as a positive method of discipline, seeing that adolescents are expected to be more

accepting of this discipline from their parents. It also became obvious that some of the adolescents who took part in this study resisted discipline from their parents.

The following sub-theme refers to adolescents' challenges with regard to discipline from their biological parents' partners.

5.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2 Challenges regarding discipline from a cohabiting biological parent's partner

As mentioned in theme 2.2, most of the adolescents who took part in this study indicated poor relationships with their biological parent's cohabiting partner. Some participants indicated that they did not respect their parent's cohabiting partner, let alone listen to them or obey them, and expressed themselves as follows:

".....I don't like it when he starts bossing me around like he is my father."

"and he expects me to listen to him but he leaves my mother when he wants, I have no respect for that guy"

"She tells a lot of lies about me and when I didn't do anything wrong and she thinks I am a bad person so I don't listen to her anymore"

These quotations reflect the adolescents' lack of respect and poor communication with their cohabitating step-parents, disappointment for letting their biological mother down, and rebelliousness. It thus appears that verbal abuse as a method of discipline does not result in behaviour changes among adolescents and may cause more behaviour problems.

According to Nelson and Lott (2000) there are three key concepts essential to the effectiveness of being a parent, namely appropriateness, dignity and respect. It will be easier for parents to follow through on what they say if it is appropriate, not only for the development stage of the child concerned, but also to the needs of the situation. Furthermore, arriving at agreement through a problem-solving process that involves teenagers is far more appropriate. Meaningless threats of humiliation and punishment are not appropriate. There is no need for humiliation and punishment when parents follow through with dignity and respect. Maintaining dignity and respect means understanding that adolescents will accept parents' priorities, and it also means avoiding manipulation. Once a consequence, solution or a plan has been mutually agreed upon, parents are doing a disservice to adolescents by not

following through with dignity and respect. Parents also need to retain dignity and respect for themselves, which means carrying out their responsibilities to teach their adolescents certain life skills whether or not they want to learn them. Finally, it means focusing on what needs to be done rather than on personalities (Nelson and Lott, 2000).

Three of the interviewed participants reported the assigning of chores as the most common method of disciplining in their cohabiting households. Even though this disciplinary method has been argued to be one of the more successful methods of discipline (Bee and Boyd, 2007), the participants perceived it as a challenge if the instructions or authority came from their parent's cohabiting partner. They expressed this challenge as follows:

“He [step father] can just say you are not going anywhere this weekend or for this whole week it's you who is going to wash the plates, of coz its sucks”

“In the house our chores are to clean the bathroom, the front and the kitchen and the front, so if it's me cleaning the kitchen I would clean the kitchen and the bathroom and let's say I did something wrong my step mother will tell me to do my chores for two days as punishment....”

According to Bee and Boyd (2007) the assigning of extra chores together with the other methods of discipline such as taking away of privileges and grounding, produce desired behaviour especially if there are warm parent-child interactions. However, the interviewed participants seem not to like the fact that discipline is administered by their parent's cohabiting partner, who in this case will be a step-parent, thus challenging or undermining the authority of the step-parent (Buchara, 1996; Albers, 1999; Lerman, 2002), therefore hindering the whole process of discipline in their cohabiting step-parent families. Nonetheless these participants seemed to have problems with some other methods of discipline applied by their biological parents too. It can be concluded that the adolescents who took part in this study were resisting discipline or control of their parents or any adult caregiver in general, hence contributing to risky behaviours and behavioural problems (Masche, 2010; Louw, 2008).

The animosity in their households, poor relationships between themselves and their biological parents and cohabiting parents, and a lack of open communication were also contributing to these adolescents' resistance to discipline.

In the next section, the researcher discusses the last theme on the perceived needs of the adolescents who took part in this study to improve the presented challenges with regard to discipline in their cohabiting families.

5.3.5 Theme 5 Perceived needs of adolescents to improve the presented challenges on discipline in cohabiting families

With reference to the challenges that the adolescents experienced with regard to discipline in their cohabiting families, they also provided some suggestions on how best they thought they could be helped to improve their acceptance of discipline from their cohabiting parents.

5.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1 Positive parent-child relationships

Considering that most of the adolescents who took part in this study indicated negative relationships with their cohabiting biological parents and the biological parent's partner, the need for positive parent-child relationships was emphasised strongly by the participants. They described their needs in this regard as follows:

"I think parents need to love their children, tell your children that you love that because I know I never get tired of my parents telling me that and it just makes me feel so loved and confident in who I am. So love is the key".

"So if your father, your parent is a friend at times so you would say ok father I am having this problem if you have that strong bond with them."

"They also need to know the likes and dislikes of their children to know what does your child wants."

"I think for the biological parent, they need to have that bond with their children, to have that time to talk to your child and ask them 'how do you feel about living with the step mother, just to know like what's going on inside of your child because at times when you feeling low, looking sad you do not know what....they need to have that bond with their children."

Waters (1991); Dodge (1997); Seeman (1997) and Bee and Boyd (2007) postulate that the desired positive parent-child relationship by the adolescents was associated with positive child outcomes which included reduced behavioural problems, improved self-esteem among the adolescents, and more empathy from the parents. Hence it was important for positive parent-child relationships and child development, especially for adolescent well-being, to

provide a secure base from which the adolescents could independently explore and master their new environments (Paterson, Pryor and Field, 1995). Quality communication between the adolescents and their parents, and warm methods of discipline would also add more positive dimensions to parent-child interactions (Bee and Boyd, 2007).

The participants also suggested improved communication patterns between themselves and their biological parents and their cohabiting parents.

5.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2 Improved communication patterns

In order to foster positive parent-child relationships in cohabiting families, the adolescents who took part in this study expressed the need for improved communication between themselves and their parents. They expressed their frustration with the unsatisfactory communication with both their cohabiting biological parents and the biological parents' partners as follows:

“I just have a problem with my mother only, I wish if she can talk more and not shout all the time. And also I wish if she cannot have many rules so we can talk about stuff at school and boys.”

“Parents need to listen to their children and have time to ask us what going on at school or with your friends?”

“Parents need to listen to their children and know what I want and also encourage me and not shout all the time.”

“I think parents need to be fair and if I am your child you should give me a chance to talk and not just punish me and not just take your girlfriend's side because that is not fair!”

“And if I do wrong don't tell me of how I will become like my mother who is doing wrong things because it shows you don't even believe in me.”

Through the above statements, the participants expressed their need for open communication between the cohabiting parents and the adolescent children in their households. Open communication and conversation orientation are elements of family communication which encourage open unrestricted interaction from managing own emotions to expressing one's ideas (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002; Kelly et al., 2002). This safeguards adolescents against

delinquent behaviour and provides them with a context in which they can learn appropriate interpersonal behaviours that will prepare them to build healthy relationships, resolve conflict satisfactorily, and become responsible adults (Hart, Olsen, Robinson and Mandleco, 1997; Caprara et al., 1998; Brody et al., 1999; Clark and Shields, 1997; Huff, Widner, and McCoy, 2003 in Davidson and Cardemil, 2009:100).

In addition, the adolescents who took part in this study suggested positive role models in order to facilitate positive discipline in their families.

5.3.5.3 Sub-theme 5.3 Need for role-models

Finally, the adolescents who took part in the study identified the need to be inspired and motivated by their own parents as role-models. It is of great importance to note that the adolescents specifically longed for their parents to act as their role-models themselves and not necessarily other persons, as reflected in the following quotations:

“I just want my mother to be a role model someone I would to be like one day but I don’t want to be anything like her.”

“Parents need to be responsible for their children and they also need to set good examples for us to follow.”

The above statements by the adolescents are in agreement with findings from Rueter and Conger, (1996); Ardel and Day, (2002), who explain that during the adolescent phase, parents' influence as role-models and agents of socialisation may seem to fade as the impact of peers on their child's behaviour increases. The latter explains why there are often conflicts between adolescents and their parents during this developmental stage. Regardless of these changes, parents can still continue to have an important influence on their children as role-models. Parents who discourage deviant behaviours reinforce standards of non-deviant behaviours in their children, while those parents who are inconsistent in their supervision and disciplinary practices with their children indirectly recommend deviant attitudes and behaviours (Akers, 2000). This is in line with the above data which seemed to come from a point of frustration of the interviewed adolescents, frustrated by their parents' attitudes or behaviours which they did not want to be associated with. Instead they wished to be motivated and encouraged by the good qualities and good examples set by their own parents as recommended by the literature (Bloom, 2013; Koonce, 2006).

In addition, Gecas and Seff (1990) assert that siblings can also be important role-models within the family as they are also peers who have frequent contact with each other, and the adolescent in the family may be exposed to older siblings' attitudes and behaviours. Older siblings can therefore serve as role-models for younger siblings, particularly if both siblings are of the same gender or if the older sibling is a brother (Ardelt and Day, 2002). Most importantly, older siblings may serve as significant role-models as they have been through similar transitions, therefore those older siblings who are well adjusted can serve as positive, examples and a source of emotional support for younger siblings (Carey, 1986 in Ardel and Day, 2002).

5.4 Conclusion

The adolescents living in cohabiting families indicated that they lived with a cohabiting biological parent and the parent's partner. The composition of their family structures seemed to be among some of the challenges they experienced with regard to their discipline. The participants said that they had strained or poor relationships with both their biological parents and the parents' cohabiting partners, and this posed a challenge affecting discipline in their households. Negative patterns of communication between the adolescent children and their biological parent as well the parent's cohabiting partner was highlighted as another challenge hindering the administration of discipline in these cohabiting households. The adolescents also reported experiencing challenges with discipline from their biological parents and the parents' cohabiting partners in relation to what was identified as the predominantly used disciplinary methods which included physical punishment, verbal abuse, withholding of privileges and assigning extra chores. A sub-theme on proposed suggestions by the participants to improve these challenges encountered in cohabiting families concluded the chapter.

The next chapter concludes this study with a summary, conclusions of the findings, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents. This aim was accomplished through the use of a qualitative research approach which sought to explore and describe the social phenomena in terms of meaning brought by people (Boeije, 2010). The research question, namely: What are the challenges of cohabiting families in disciplining their adolescent children? was answered in Chapters 4 and 5 where research findings were presented and discussed.

The study's three objectives namely:

- explore and describe the challenges of the biological parent in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents;
- explore and describe challenges of adolescents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabitation union;

were accomplished in achieving the aim of the study and answering the research question.

Two sets of data were analysed, namely the cohabiting biological parents' data and the adolescent children's data. Four themes emerged from the cohabiting biological parents' data that were unpacked in Chapter 4. Five themes from the adolescent children's data were described in Chapter 5. Literature was used to substantiate, explain, compare and contrast the findings of this study. In Chapter 6, the final chapter of the study, a brief summary on each of the foregoing chapters, as well as conclusions and recommendations from the findings will be given.

6.2 Summary

6.2.1 Chapter 1

Chapter 1 served as the blueprint of the study through which the background of the study, the research problem, research goal, research objectives and methodology were introduced. A contextual framework on cohabiting families, the adolescence period as a human

development stage and discipline, were discussed as the main focus of this study. The researcher's use of a qualitative research approach was considered appropriate to address the research problem and adequately work towards the research goal and objectives. The selection of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory applied as a theoretical framework for the study was discussed. The research question that was generated from the research problem and answered by means of an explorative and descriptive research design was motivated. The research methodology according to a qualitative research approach provided the procedure for implementation of the study. Purposive sampling was applied as well as sampling strategy, individual semi-structured interviews as means of data collection, and thematic analysis as a method of data analysis. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness and the ethical considerations of the study were also discussed.

In conclusion, the researcher deduced that the qualitative research approach and the designs and methodology used in the study were adequate for reaching the goals and objectives of the study.

6.2.2 Chapter 2

In Chapter 2 literature of relevance to the research topic was reviewed. The researcher discussed the different types of family structures such as marriage families, single-parent families, step or restructured families and cohabitation families. Each of these family structures was reviewed in relation to child development on the basis of family stability, consistent parenting practices, economic resources and parent-child relationships as the key determinants of child well-being. The adolescence stage was identified as a crucial period in human development and was discussed with reference to the four domains of development, namely the physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes experienced during this developmental stage. Discipline of children was also discussed especially with regard to the adolescence stage. The researcher continued to identify the different parenting styles through which discipline is conveyed, together with some of the commonly practised disciplinary methods in administering discipline to children.

Chapter two concluded with a discussion on the applied theoretical framework, namely Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, which accounts for the development of children through a holistic interaction with their environment from the immediate family

environment to the broader society, at the same time emphasising the importance of family as central to, and acting as, a filter through which the larger society influences child development. This chapter provided statistical details and literature assertions from prior studies which assisted in strengthening the significance or relevance of this study.

It was obvious in reviewing the literature that all the different family structures pose challenges for optimum child development as well as discipline. Understanding some of the possible causes and concerns provided the basis from which comparisons and contrasts about discipline in cohabitating families could be made. The researcher concluded that the literature reviewed was indeed in line with the goals and objectives of the study, and served as a reference for the study.

6.2.3 Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research methodology that was implemented during the study. A qualitative research approach culminated in an explorative and descriptive research design. The chapter commenced with a discussion of the research problem, research goal and research objectives as points of reference for the applied methodology. The study's population encompassed all cohabiting biological parents and adolescent children in cohabiting families living in Cape Town. The cohabitating parents and adolescents who took part in the study were recruited from Cape Town Child Welfare by means of purposive and snowball sampling.

Data collection occurred through the use of face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the aid of an interview guide. An explanation was given of the interview protocol followed for all the individual interviews. The data collection process started with preparation and refining of the interviewing schedules, setting up of the interviews, preparation of the participants, and conduction of the pilot interviews to the actual data collection process. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed according to Tesch's (in Creswell, 2009) eight steps of data analysis. The data analysis culminated in the themes and subthemes presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Trustworthiness was used to ensure the reliability and validity of this study. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, informed consent and informed assent were discussed in detail to provide evidence of adherence to research ethics in conducting this study.

The chapter concluded with the encountered limitations of the study which included the lack of cooperation from the welfare organisations, as well as difficulties in recruiting participants for the study. The fact that the findings of the study cannot be generalised owing to the small sample was also highlighted. Language barriers were another limitation of the study as the researcher is only conversant in English and most of the participants' mother tongue was isiXhosa and Afrikaans.

Chapter 3 provided a detailed account of the research methodology and the implementation thereof. The research approach and the research design were effectively used to provide detailed information which could be utilised in the data analysis process.

6.2.4 Chapter 4

Chapter 4 comprised the research findings generated from cohabiting biological parents and presented by means of themes and sub-themes. The demographic details of the cohabiting biological participants who took part in the study were given in a table format and then discussed in detail. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis were then presented and compared and contrasted to existing literature.

Nine cohabiting biological parents, seven females and two males, were interviewed. The findings from the cohabiting biological parents fulfilled the first objective of this study, namely to explore and describe the challenges of the biological parents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents. Four themes and their respective sub-themes were generated from the obtained data. A summary and conclusions of these themes are presented in the following sections.

6.2.4.1 Theme 1 Description of cohabiting family formation

Three distinct types of cohabiting households were illustrated through the obtained data, namely cohabiting biological parent families, cohabiting step-parent families and a combination of both step-parent and biological families. These three types of families were distinguished by having or not having children in the cohabiting union and/or children from previous relationships. Existing literature focused mainly on two types of cohabiting families – the cohabiting biological parent families and the cohabiting step-parent families. Five of the cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study indicated that they lived in

cohabiting step-parent families and all of them had children from previous relationships who were living with them and their cohabiting partner in the same household.

The cohabiting step-parent families were found to be structurally similar to step or restructured families and thus presented with the same challenges. These two family structures were found to share similar family dynamics such as conflict among step-parent step-child relationships. The conflict between the cohabitating parents and the children from previous relationships (step-children) presented challenges for the biological parents with regard to discipline. Cohabiting families were thus been associated with greater behaviour problems, similar to step or restructured families.

One participant identified with cohabiting biological parent families where the cohabiting couple had children born within this same union. This type of cohabitation family was described in existing literature as being similar to nuclear married families. Consequently cohabiting biological parent families and nuclear marriage families may also have some common family dynamics. The biological ties between children and cohabiting biological parent families fared better than children living in cohabiting step-parent families.

Three other interviewed cohabiting biological parents reported that they lived in another distinct type of cohabiting families comprised of children from previous relationships as well as biological children born from the current cohabiting union. This seemed to be a combination of step-parent family as one or both cohabiting partners brought children from their previous relationship(s) as well as their own biological children born in the cohabiting union. Literature that was consulted did not make specific reference to this type of cohabiting families, hence there seems to be a gap in the description and challenges of this specific type of cohabiting family.

6.2.4.2 Theme 2 The challenges regarding the respective relationships in the cohabiting households

The interviewed cohabiting biological parents reported that they experienced challenges in the parent-child relationships, sibling relationships and their relationships with their respective cohabiting partners, thus affecting the most important interpersonal relationships vital for family functioning. The challenges with regard to the respective relationships in the

cohabiting families impacted negatively on the discipline of adolescents in cohabiting families. The first three sub-themes focused on the challenges relating to the respective parent-child relationships found in cohabiting families. Parent-child relationships were viewed as the most crucial relationships for optimum child development and parental attachment especially during the adolescence period. They have been reported to act as a buffer against internalisation and externalisation of behavioural problems during this developmental phase.

With regard to the challenges in the relationship between the biological parents and their own children, most of them reported difficult relationships with their own biological children due to limited communication, lack of trust and unresolved anger from their children. The aforementioned challenges in turn hindered the communication between the biological parents and their children, and contributed to disobedience and even a lack of respect of adolescents for their parents in order to exercise effective discipline.

Challenges regarding the relationship between the biological cohabiting parents and their own children and the relationship between themselves and their partner's children compared with step-parent step-child relationships. The findings were congruent with the literature assertions which associated step-relations in a family with tension and conflict. Difficult relationships were reported to be influenced by the children's disrespect of the parent's cohabiting partner, undermining their parental authority, hence affecting the administration of discipline from the parent's cohabiting partner. It appeared that some children, especially adolescent boys, rebelled against their biological parent's male cohabiting partner out of fear that they would replace the child's absent father.

Challenges regarding the relationship between the respective children in cohabiting families was characterised by competition and jealousy. Sibling rival was found to be more intense in cohabiting step-parent families where both cohabiting partners had children from previous relationships in the same household. Elements of favouritism from one's biological parent strongly surfaced as a major challenge which affected the administration of discipline in cohabiting families, as discipline whether reinforcement or punishment, was often interpreted by the adolescents as favouritism.

With reference to the challenges regarding the relationship between the biological parent and the cohabiting partner, domestic violence in the form of physical and/or emotional abuse became evident from the findings. Some authors report a high prevalence of domestic violence among cohabiting families which was confirmed by five of the female cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study. All of them reported some form of domestic violence or abuse from their cohabiting partner, in some occasions where their children witnessed them being beaten by their cohabiting partners. The latter compromises the administration of discipline by both the child's biological parent as well as the parent's cohabiting partner, resulting in more disrespect, undermining the authority of the cohabiting partner, rebelling against discipline and even more behavioural problems from the adolescents. Existing literature has associated children who witnessed domestic violence with high levels of risk of behavioural, antisocial behavioural problems, emotional trauma and mental difficulties such as depression.

It can therefore be concluded that cohabiting families are often associated with difficult or negative parent-child relationships, limited communication and affection, coupled with sibling rivalry and domestic violence, thus leading to more behaviour problems and undermining parents' authority and disciplinary measures.

6.2.4.3 Theme 3 Challenges with regard to the discipline of the adolescents in the cohabiting families

This theme addressed challenges in discipline of adolescents with reference to some of the frequently used disciplinary methods by the cohabiting biological parents. A number of interviewed cohabiting biological parents reported that they used physical punishment as a disciplinary method. However they also reported that the outcome of this method of discipline is often temporary in nature and that it often leads to more rebelliousness among adolescent children. These challenges were seen as resulting from cultural differences between the parents and the adolescents, or from ethnic history, which is in contrast with children's rights which discourage physical punishment. Adolescents are therefore bound to temporary compliance in fear of repeated physical punishment but ultimately rebel against such a disciplinary method with more behavioural problems or threatening to report their parents to the authorities, as indicated by one biological parent. Physical punishment

therefore proved to be an ineffective method of discipline associated with the authoritarian parenting style characterised by punitive discipline.

Time-out and withholding of privileges were among the other methods of discipline used by the cohabiting biological parents. These two disciplinary methods have been described by literature as positive or corrective discipline associated with warm parenting styles such as the authoritative parenting. However biological parents also experienced these disciplinary methods as challenging on the basis of disobedience and disrespect of the adolescent children, which often led to more behavioural problems in these adolescent children.

Communication, on the other hand, was identified by literature as a central element through which parents facilitate expected rules or guidelines to discipline children. Challenges from this method of discipline were experienced as a result of negative patterns of communication between the cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study and their adolescent children due to adolescents' disrespect or disobedience of their parents' instructions. Some adolescents also displayed mood swings as another challenge that hindered effective communication between parents and their children. These negative patterns of communication could be a consequence of the challenging parent-child relationships which were found between the biological cohabiting parents and their adolescent children. It must also be taken into account that literature identified communication as a crucial element in the foundation of parent-child relationships, thus laying a foundation for effective discipline.

6.2.4.4 Theme 4 Perceptions of the biological parents regarding support for adolescent children living in cohabiting families

This theme discussed suggestions by cohabiting biological parents about the needed support for cohabiting families with regard to disciplining their adolescents. These suggestions will be used to generate guidelines for social workers offering parental guidance to cohabiting families.

The cohabiting biological parents who took part in this study encouraged effective parent-child relationships between cohabiting biological parents and their own children as well as nurturing relationships with their cohabiting partner's children. Cohabiting biological parents emphasised prioritising their own children by showing affection, positive communication through listening and parental responsiveness as some of the important cornerstones to

establish secure parent-child relationships. This is congruent with the existing literature that endorses positive or secure parent-child attachments.

Ambivalence of parental roles by one cohabiting partner to their partner's children surfaced as another challenge for the biological cohabiting parents. Allocation of parental responsibility for both parents in the cohabiting relationship was another suggestion by biological parents to provide unity and cooperation of the cohabiting partner with regard to discipline. Finally, a need for cohabiting parents to act as positive role-models was the last suggestion to assist all the children living in their household. This is more likely to foster mutual respect between the adolescent children and the cohabiting adults in that particular household; mutual respect may grow to positive communication patterns to secure parent-child interactions to pave the way for administering effective discipline in these households.

Chapter 5 presents the second set of research findings starting with the demographic details, themes and sub-themes which were then presented and discussed comparing and contrasting it to the available literature.

6.2.4 Chapter 5

Six adolescents, four females and two males living in cohabiting families took part in this study and achieved the second aim of this study, namely, to explore and describe challenges of adolescents in cohabiting families with regard to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabitation union. Once again, the demographic data was provided in a table format and then discussed in more detail. The findings that were generated from the adolescents was found to be very similar to that of the cohabiting biological parents, thus confirming some of the challenges experienced by cohabitating families.

6.2.5.1 Theme 1 Description of the adolescents' cohabiting families

All of the adolescents who took part in this study indicated that they were staying in cohabiting step-parent families, living with one biological parent and the parent's cohabiting partner. Four participants reported primarily staying with their biological mothers and two participants lived with their biological fathers and the biological parent's partner. Among the participants, another four participants indicated living with non-biological siblings in the same household as their step-siblings. Cohabiting step-parent families have been described as

structurally similar to step or restructured families, with the only difference being that restructured families are institutionalised by marriages. Therefore consistent with the existing literature, some of the participants identified with step-parent step-child conflict and ambiguous parental roles within their own cohabiting step-parent families which posed a challenge to the administration of discipline within these households.

The adolescents' disrespectfulness or disobedience of the biological parent's cohabiting partner as well as the cohabiting biological partners, were displayed by means of negative attitudes or actions that often resulted in behavioural problems among the adolescent children in cohabiting families. Therefore it can be argued that cohabiting step-parent family structures pose a challenge for disciplining adolescents.

6.2.5.2 Theme 2 Challenges regarding parent-child relationships in cohabiting families

This theme presented the relationship of adolescents who took part in the study with their biological parent as well as their relationships with their parent's cohabiting partner. The participants indicated that challenges with regard to their relationship with their biological parents were mainly due to unresolved disputes of the past, unresolved and ongoing conflict, and limited or totally lacking communication between themselves and their parents. These factors hindered the development of positive parent-child relationships which existing literature describes as a safeguard against maladaptive behaviours especially during adolescence.

The participants also indicated some challenges with regard to their relationships with their biological parent's cohabiting partners. Their poor relationships with their cohabiting step-parents were mainly due to the adolescent's lack of respect for the cohabiting partner, thus undermining their "parental" authority. It also became evident that the adolescents who took part in this study had negative relationships with both adults (biological parent as well as the cohabiting partner) within their households. The latter could be explained as a possible reason for the high levels of dysfunctional behaviour among adolescents in cohabiting families as they are less likely to obey or respond to either their biological parents or the parent's cohabiting partner.

6.2.5.3 Theme 3 Challenges with regard to patterns of communication in cohabiting families

Most of the adolescents who took part in the study indicated poor communication patterns in their cohabiting households. Communication with biological parents as well as their cohabiting partners was characterised by ongoing conflict, verbal abuse by some of the parents, lack of trust by parents or adolescents, and limited or lack of open communication between the participants and their parents. The fact that the adolescents' s relationships with their parents were characterised by poor patterns of communications discouraged them from expressing their ideas and their feelings. These findings therefore contribute to understanding the reasons for poor parent-child relationships in cohabiting families since positive parent-child interactions include warm and open communication between the child and the parent, thus fostering the development of positive parent-child relationships.

6.2.5.4 Theme 4 Challenges regarding discipline in cohabiting families

This theme took into account the adolescents' discipline from their biological parent and the parent's cohabiting partner as well as the disciplinary methods applied. It became evident from the findings that most of the participants' biological parents mainly used physical punishment and verbal abuse as methods of discipline. The adolescents expressed their frustration with these methods of discipline applied by their biological parents as they viewed them as harsh discipline which they did not deserve even if they had done something wrong. Some of the participants reported that they ignored their parents once physical punishment or verbal abuse was used by them. It can therefore be concluded that the use of these methods of discipline leads to more disobedience and disrespect and often encourages non-compliance and more behavioural problems in children.

Some of the adolescents who took part in the study also indicated challenges with discipline from their parents' cohabiting partner such as the assigning of extra chores and withholding of privileges as methods of discipline. Although these methods of discipline have been described as corrective discipline by literature and associated with positive parenting styles such as authoritative parenting, the participants who took part in this study expressed frustration with it. The adolescents' frustrations may have stemmed from their urge to undermine the authority of their biological parent's cohabiting partner. In addition, the

adolescents did not accept the cohabiting partner's administering discipline as an equal parent, hence their lack of conforming to their methods of discipline in this case.

6.2.5.5 Theme 5 Perceived needs of adolescents to improve the challenges in discipline in cohabiting families

Similar to the findings of cohabiting biological parents (5.3.4), this theme set a foundation for this study's third objective which sought to describe guidelines for social workers that could be used during parental guidance for cohabiting parents. The participants came up with a number of suggestions which can contribute to support and improve the challenges of adolescents living in cohabiting families with regard to discipline, in order to support their well-being.

The participants expressed their need for positive parent-child relationships characterised by affection and open communication between themselves and their parents. Furthermore, the adolescents who took part in this study suggested the need for improved communication patterns especially with their parents to enable them to feel free to express themselves without feeling ignored or being punished. Finally, they hoped to see their parents acting as role models for them in order to inspire them to reach their optimum potential in life.

Through this study, the researcher acknowledges that cohabitating families as a family structure pose several challenges for the cohabitating parents as well as the children involved, especially with regard to discipline. In view of this, the following recommendations are made to different stakeholders.

6.3 Recommendations

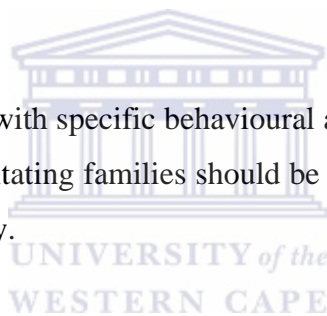
The researcher developed three sets of recommendations for (a) social workers working with cohabiting families, (b) policy makers, (c) future research to improve the well-being of adolescents living in cohabiting families.

6.3.1 Recommendations for social workers

Cohabiting families have been described by literature as a risk factor for child development due to their structure and characteristics. In order to provide the optimum development of

children by means of parental guidance and family preservation, the researcher made the following recommendations for social workers who are rendering services to cohabiting families. These recommendations encompass holistic intervention to all the family members and the larger communities in which these families reside.

- Taking into account the developmental changes experienced by adolescents during this developmental stage, social workers are recommended to formulate and conduct programmes (meso and macro level) directed at educating adolescents about the psychological and emotional changes during this development phase. These programmes can take place at schools, in communities and even youth camps.
- Programmes with adolescents should also address the challenges during this development phase, such as peer pressure, sex education, use of substances and delinquent behaviour.
- Adolescents who present with specific behavioural and emotional challenges resulting from dysfunctional cohabiting families should be involved in individual counselling (micro) and family therapy.
- Adolescents, their biological parents and cohabiting partners need to be involved in family therapy to address issues with methods of discipline, parent-child relationships and communication.
- Existing literature has associated cohabiting parents, especially biological mothers, with high levels of stress which could lead to depression which negatively affects their parenting capabilities. Therefore social workers are also recommended to conduct individual counselling and support groups for biological cohabiting parents.
- Cohabiting parents need to be involved in either support groups or individual counselling to equip them with the necessary skills and to define their roles in the cohabiting family
- With the instability and the ambiguity of cohabitation families as literature has stipulated, there is a need to promote family support systems for both the children and



parents involved in such families. Family support systems should focus on the building of appropriate and adequate systems of support for healthy family development that encompass healthcare, childcare, education and other essential components of strong families (White Paper on Families in South Africa, 2012). Of great importance is that social workers should encourage responsible parenting through parenting education to the cohabiting parents.

- Cohabiting parents should be educated in effective/responsible methods of discipline to guide children's behaviour.
- Cohabiting parents also need to be educated and encouraged to use warm parenting styles that enhance healthy parent-child relationships.
- Social workers are also recommended to conduct workshops on problem-solving or conflict management for both cohabiting parents and adolescent children living in cohabiting families.
- Most of the participants indicated they lived in cohabiting step-parent families similar to step or remarriages. Cohabiting step-parent families have therefore been associated with ambiguous family roles. Social workers are therefore recommended to conduct family therapy sessions to assist all the family members with gradually adjusting to their new family structure without unrealistic expectations of each other.
- Social work intervention should also focus on prevention, support and guidance with regard to cohabiting partners concerning domestic violence.
- Finally, taking into account the stigma associated with cohabitation, it is important that thriving and nurturing communities be promoted by means of macro social work intervention. Even though cohabitation goes against some of the cultural and religious values of the society, it is important that the society accepts the reality of this family structure, as criticising and stereotyping such families will only further cripple the parents and children living in such families.

- According to the White Paper on Families in South Africa, (2012) thriving and nurturing communities emphasises building nurturing and supportive environments in which families pursue long-term goals crucial to sustainable family development. Thus the society or the community should develop a system that provides protective factors to help these families to flourish. Therefore social workers rendering services to cohabiting families should organise awareness campaigns against stigma or stereotypes against cohabitation, educating the communities about the realities of this family structure and how stigma affects those living in such families.

6.3.2 Recommendations for policy makers

- South African legislators should accept that cohabitation is one of the most growing family structures in South Africa, and take cognisance of current studies of this family structure and child development. Cohabitation should be recognised by South African law as a formal family structure applicable to the necessary opportunities, networks support and protection beneficiary to both involved parties and the children living in these structures. The institutionalisation of cohabitation may protect the vulnerable parties economically, socially and emotionally, especially the women and children.

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6.3.3 Recommendations for future research

- Studies on a larger scale that include more ethnic groups is recommended as they may yield more comprehensive insightful results validating the findings of this study.
- Comparative studies between cohabiting families and other family structures, or of cohabiting families in South Africa and another country, should be conducted for further expansion of the research on cohabiting families.
- Quantitative studies are also recommended on this subject to generate statistical data, empirical analysis and more generalised findings.

6.4 Conclusion

The research goal and objectives were achieved and the research question answered through a qualitative enquiry which was considered the best research approach for this study as it acquired rich comprehensive data. The findings of the study provided a better understanding

of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescent children from both the cohabiting biological parents and the adolescent children interviewed. This final chapter of the study provided the reader with a summary and conclusions of the foregoing chapters from the introduction, literature review, applied methodology to the major research findings.

Based on these findings, the researcher made a number of recommendations for social work practitioners, legislators and future research. In conclusion, the researcher hopes that this study will add to the development of studies on cohabitation families and child development in South Africa. The researcher is also of the opinion that the study contributes to the practice tasks of all social workers working with cohabiting families to improve family functioning and to promote well-being of the children involved.



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UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE
DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

SR1

UWC RESEARCH PROJECT REGISTRATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE APPLICATION FORM

This application will be considered by UWC Faculty Board Research and Ethics Committees, and then by the UWC Senate Research Committee, which may also consult outsiders on ethics questions, or consult the UWC ethics subcommittees, before registration of the project and clearance of the ethics. No project should proceed before project registration and ethical clearance has been granted.

A. PARTICULARS OF INDIVIDUAL APPLICANT	
NAME: Gamuchirai Bere	TITLE: Miss
DEPARTMENT: Social Work	FACULTY: Community and Health Science
FIELD OF STUDY: Masters in Child and Family studies	
ARE YOU:	
A member of UWC academic staff?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A member of UWC supports staff?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A registered UWC student?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
From outside UWC, wishing to research at or with UWC?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
B. PARTICULARS OF PROJECT	
PROJECT NUMBER: TO BE ALLOCATED BY SENATE RESEARCH COMMITTEE:	
EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE: November 2013	
PROJECT TITLE: The challenges of cohabitation with regard to discipline of adolescents.	
THREE KEY WORDS DESCRIBING PROJECT: Cohabitation Adolescence Discipline	

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT:

To explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to disciplining their adolescents so as to understand the dynamics of these families, such as the challenges of the cohabiting parents in conveying discipline to their adolescent child and the challenges adolescents experience with regards to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabiting relationship.

M-DEGREE: MCF

D-DEGREE:

POST GRADUATE RESEARCH:

C. PARTICULARS REGARDING PARTICULAR RESEARCHERS

	FAMILY NAME:	INITIALS:	TITLE:
PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER:	Gamuchirai	G	Miss
OTHER RESEARCH PROJECT LEADERS:	None		
OTHER CO-RESEARCHERS:	None		
THESIS: STUDENT RESEARCHER:	Gamuchirai Bere		
THESIS: SUPERVISOR:	Dr M de Jager		

C. GENERAL INFORMATION

STUDY LEAVE TO BE TAKEN DURING PROJECT (days): N/A

IS IT INTENDED THAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE SUBMITTED FOR PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATION?
YES NO

COMMENTS: DEPARTMENTAL CHAIRPERSON:

SIGNATURE OF THESIS STUDENT RESEARCHER – WHERE APPROPRIATE:

DATE

SIGNATURE OF THESIS SUPERVISOR – WHERE APPROPRIATE:

DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER – WHERE APPROPRIATE:

DATE:

SIGNATURE OF DEPARTMENTAL CHAIRPERSON:

DATE:

NOTE: THESE SIGNATURES IMPLY AN UNDERTAKING BY THE RESEARCHERS, TO CONDUCT THE

RESEARCH ETHICALLY, AND AN UNDERTAKING BY THE THESIS SUPERVISOR (WHERE APPROPRIATE), AND THE DEPARTMENTAL CHAIRPERSON, TO MAINTAIN A RESPONSIBLE OVERSIGHT OVER THE ETHICAL CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH

E. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT AND RESEARCH ETHICS STATEMENT

Cohabitation has become an increasingly popular form of family structure within South African communities and the world at large. It is associated with negative impacts on child development, such as lower cognitive skills, social competence, low self-esteem and low academic achievement. Considering these above-mentioned problems I found the need to explore the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents so as to understand the dynamics of these families, such as the challenges of the cohabiting parents in conveying discipline to their adolescent child and the challenges that adolescents experience with regards to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabiting relationship.

This study will be conducted according qualitative research approach through explorative and descriptive research design. It will targets cohabiting families with adolescents between the ages of 13-18 years within the city of Cape Town in which the adolescent of these families and the biological parent involved in cohabiting relationship will be the primary participants of this study. The first few participants will be located through the case load of Welfare Organizations such as Child Welfare Cape town, Badisa, FAMSA and the Department of Social Development offices. Data will be collected by means of individual interviews with the aid of an interview guide.

Ethical guidelines would be adhered to and **permission** will be requested from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape and the above mentioned Welfare Organizations to approve the conduct of the study.

Taking into account that some of the participants of this study are minors between the ages of 13-17 years of age, permission will also be requested from their parents to participate in the study. Informed **consent letters** with more information on the research entailing what is expected of participants and that the participation is **voluntary**, their information would be kept strictly **confidential** and they are free to withdraw from participating at anytime would also be issued to the

parents of the children whom I would like to part-take in the study.

Assent forms will also be issued to the children whose parents would have allowed their children to participate in the study. Participants would be informed about the research what it entails and what is expected of them and that their participation is voluntary and how their information will be protected and they **free to withdraw** from participating at anytime. All participants of this study will be required to sign the informed consent and the assent form respectively if they agree to participate in this study.



Form issued by: Professor Renfrew Christie, UWC Dean of Research, February 2002.

959 2949; 959 2948 secretary, 959 3170 fax, email: rchristie@uwc.ac.za



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Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa
Social Work Department
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INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: The challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.

What is this study about?

This research is conducted by Gamuchirai Bere, a Master's student in Child and Family studies at the University of Western Cape. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to disciplining their adolescents so as to understand the dynamics of these families, such as the challenges of the cohabiting parents in conveying discipline to their adolescent child and the challenges adolescents experience with regards to discipline from their biological parent involved in a cohabiting relationship. Therefore, I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you have been identified as a suitable candidate.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher and you will be required to answer the questions the researcher will present to you. These interviews would last about 30 - 45 minutes. Should the questions asked be upsetting you, debriefing sessions would be offered by one of my colleagues after the interviews.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

I will do my level best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential, only my supervisor and I will have access to this information. To help protect your confidentiality, you will be addressed by a pseudo name in protecting your identity. Permission would be asked from you to audio tape the interview, and the recorded interview file will be stored under password protected files where only I have the password, so that no unauthorised persons will be able to access these files. The tapes would be used only for transcribing; after the study has been completed they will be destroyed. In case an interpreter is required for you to fully express yourself, he/she will bound to confidentiality. Note that information will only be disclosed if there are suspicions of potential harm to you, and in such a case, information will be disclosed in accordance with legal requirements or professional standards to the appropriate individuals or authorities.

What are the risks of this research?

There are no known physical, financial or legal risks associated with participating in this research project. However there can be emotional risks which may come up as a result of recalling or reflecting on a hurtful event through the process of the interview.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help me as a researcher learning of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the challenges of cohabiting families with regard to this issue discipline of adolescents.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If

you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Gamuchirai Bere as the principal researcher from the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me, **Gamuchirai Bere** at gamuchiraibere4@gmail.com

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant, or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact Professor Schenck (below):

Head of Department: Prof C Schenck
Social Work Department
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
Email: cschenck@uwc.ac.za
Tel: 021 9592011



Dean of the Faculty: Prof H Klopper
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag 7535
Email: hklopper@uwc.ac.za
Tel: 021 9592631

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.

Interview Guide for adolescents

Biographical data of the adolescents

Age:

Gender:

Language:

Ethnicity:

Grade:

Living with biological mother/father:

Number of biological siblings in the household:

Number of non-biological siblings in household:

For how long have you been living together as a household?

Questions

Tell me about your current family?



How is it for you to live together in your current household?

Tell me about the challenges in your household?

Tell me about the roles of the parents in the household?

Tell me about your challenges with the way your parents discipline you?

Can you give me some advice as to how we can help parents and children who are living in cohabiting relationships?

Interview Guide for the cohabiting biological parent

Biographical data of the parents

Age:

Gender:

Language:

Ethnicity:

Number of years in current relationship:

Marital status: Unmarried/divorce/widow/widower

How many children are living in your household?

Questions

Tell me about your current relationship family?



How is it for you to live together in your current household?

Tell me how you divide your roles in the current household?

Tell me about your challenges with regards to disciplining children in your household?

Tell me about any specific challenges with regards to disciplining adolescents in your household?

Can you give me some advice as to how we can help parents and children who are living in cohabiting relationships?



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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Witness.....

Date.....

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator's Name: Dr. Mariana de Jager

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Telephone: (021)959-3674

Fax: (021)959-2845

Email: mdejager@uwc.ac.za



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ASSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: The challenges of cohabiting families with regard to discipline of adolescents.

The study has been described to me in language that I understand and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Witness.....

Date.....

Should you have any questions regarding this study or wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact the study coordinator:

Study Coordinator's Name: Dr. Mariana de Jager

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17, Belville 7535

Telephone: (021)959-3674

Fax: (021)959-2845

Email: mdejager@uwc.ac.za

Letter of request for research study

Cape Town Child Welfare

P.O.Box 374, Gatesville

Cape Town, 7766

G108 Ruth First Residence
University of Western Cape
Bellville

05 May 2013

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Gamuchirai Bere, I am a Masters student in Child and Family Studies at the University of Western Cape. I am conducting a research study on the Challenges of cohabiting families with regards to discipline of adolescents as the previous studies have described cohabiting families as a risky for child development. Whilst on the other hand, the adolescence stage is a critical human development stage accompanied by physical, emotional and cognitive changes which can be associated with a vast amount of behavioural problems. Therefore I hereby seek permission of Cape Town Child Welfare to conduct my research among some of your clients who are living in cohabiting families. The study targets parents and adolescents between the age of 13-17 years who had been living in a cohabiting household for the duration of a year or more.

I have attached all my Proposal documentation which includes the Abstract, Proposal document, Ethical clearance form, Interview guides, Information sheet, and the Assent and the Consent form for your own perusal. The obtained results from this research will be used to produce recommendations for social work intervention on working with clients living in cohabiting families.

Yours Sincerely

Gamuchirai Bere.