

Family Dynamics and Psychological Outcome of the Child in Kenya: Case of Kabete Sub-County in Kiambu County

Margaret Njoroge^{1*} Gabriel Kirori²

1. Magawa Counselling Centre, P.O. Box 55622 - 00200, Nairobi, Kenya

2. School of Business, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, P.O. Box 62157 - 00200, Nairobi, Kenya

*E-mail of the corresponding author: gnkirori@gmail.com

Abstract

Family changes adversely impact psychological outcome of a child. The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of blended family dynamics on the psychological outcome of the child in Kenya using case of Kabete Sub-County in Kiambu County. The study employed primary data collected from a sample of 50 secondary school age-going children from blended families focusing on 14 – 19 years age group. The data was analysed using descriptive analysis method as well as inference using chi-square technique. Some of the key findings were that most of the respondents did not spend time with their stepparents often, and they trusted their biological parents with secrets rather than the stepparents, and were affected by buying decisions in stepfamilies. The findings of the study are important in that they can be used to formulate policies and strategies for promoting improvement in psychological outcome of the child in blended families.

Keywords: Psychological outcome, blended family, stepparents, stepfather families, stepmother families.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the traditional family of mother, father, and shared biological children as the dominant structure of a family has been replaced by the modern family, the blended family (Cindy and Fernandez, 2014). A blended family is a family where at least one parent has children from a previous relationship that are not genetically related to the other parent (Jozsa and Balassa, 2014). Children from a blended family may live with one biological parent or they may live with each biological parent for a period of time. Visitation rights enable children in blended families often to have contact with both biological parents even if they permanently live with only one parent.

Blended families are called by several other names including stepfamilies, reconstituted families, patchwork families, non-traditional families, new families, etc. The part of the couple who is not the biological parent of the child is called stepparent who either can be stepmother or stepfather. Baham, Weimer, Braver, & Fabricius (2008) refer to the traditional family as the intact family where the family has remained together for the duration of the child's life. In an intact family, also referred popularly to as the nuclear family, the parents typically are the biological parents of the children in the household, exceptions occurring when parents adopt children (Baham et al., 2008). The blended family types are referred to as families that do not follow the intact family guidelines (Jozsa & Balassa, 2014).

Cherlin (2009) contends that the concept of blended family has evolved from the embracing of two contradictory cultural ideals, marriage and individualism. Marriage is formal commitment to share one's life with another placing a strong value in the institution of marriage. Individualism emphasizes personal choice and self-development. High value is placed on personal freedom, fulfilment, and growth as well as spiritual fulfilment, reflecting individualism. Religion and law have reinforced both of these behavioural poles in America (Cherlin, 2009). The roots of the American emphasis on marriage and personal freedom were in place by 1900 (Fine, 2010). Between 1900 and 1960, marriage changed from an institutional and practical arrangement to a companionate one, meaning that individuals looked to marriage not just for help in raising a family and sharing a home but also for personal growth and fulfilment. Since 1960, marriage has become more an individualized institution as increasing number of individuals made unilateral decisions to divorce or separate, and more people made decisions based on what they perceived as best for them rather than for their families as a whole (Fine, 2010).

High emphasis on personal growth can explain partially the high divorce rate in the United States (US) as it provides individuals in dissatisfying marriages with a reason to seek divorce. Rates of both marriage and divorce in the US are very high suggesting that Americans are frequently both entering and leaving relationships. If one is not achieving a personal fulfilment in one's present relationship, one's individual interests provide a justification for leaving that relationship in search of a more satisfying alternative relationship (Fine, 2010).

The area of blended families is new ground for investigation, which is complex, and not vastly explored in the Sub-Saharan Africa. In the US the rate of family breakdown is more than 50% and about 38% of White children and 75% of Black children born to married parents experience family breakdown prior to the age of 16 years (Lazar, Guttman, & Abas, 2009). Majority of these adolescents become part of a remarried family prior to turning the age of 18 years. The effect of the latter causes a change in the family structure of these adolescents that will result in relationship issues in their life (Carranza, Kilmann, & Vendemia, 2009). Blended families are rapidly becoming the most common family structure, partly due to a high divorce rate and remarriage (Carranza, et al., 2009).

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the institution of traditional family is resilient but steadily responding to global changes (Dube, 2015). For instance, the HIV/AIDS scourge has played a pivotal role in the changes in family in SSA because of adult mortality of people in their prime age. Other changes in the traditional family in SSA are characterized by increase in divorce, increase in cohabitation, and plethora of living arrangements other than marriage (Lesthaeghe, 2010). For instance in Kenya, Chacha (2015) reported of a drama in Githurai, Nairobi, where fed-up neighbours ganged up and stormed into a woman's house and warned her against mistreating her stepchildren. Details later emerged that the family was a complex and almost dysfunctional blended family. The stepmother and the stepfather had one child of their own while the she brought a son into the marriage and he brought two daughters. The mistreated stepchildren were the daughters that belonged to the man.

Family life is full of challenges and on top of all these there are extra challenges, more complex than ever imagined, for blended families (Gately, Pike & Murphy, 2006; Butler, 2012). The life in a blended family is rife with complicated schedules, squabbling stepsiblings, issues with ex-partners, and new spouses who have never been parents trying out childcare. The authors indicate that blended families can be happy and effective, but the extra challenges require extra effort and extra wisdom to make the family strong. Formation of blended family initially was a function of the death of a spouse. This has been preceded, in recent times, by the divorce of one or both partners from previous spouses (Cindy & Fernandez, 2014). Butler (2012) indicates that there are 1,300 new blended families formed everyday in the US, yet 60% to 70% of the blended families end in divorce. These remarriages, most often bring children from the previous relationships to the new family, either from one or both partners (Lee & Payne, 2010). In the blended family, there may be three adults fulfilling parental roles and responsibilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Family Types and Compositions

There are two main types of family compositions: intact families and blended families (Yau, 2016). An intact family, commonly referred to as traditional family or nuclear family is one, after marriage, husband and wife has remained together for the duration of the child's life. The parents in an intact family typically are the biological parents of the children in the household, exceptions occurring when parents adopt children, and when one of the parents has a child from a previous relationship. Initially, individuals looked to marriage as a formal commitment to sharing one's life with another as well as helping in raising a family and sharing a home (Cherlin, 2009). Between 1900 and 1960, marriage in American changed from an institutional and practical arrangement to a companionate one, meaning that besides looking to marriage for helping in raising a family and sharing a home, individuals also looked to it for personal growth and fulfilment (Fine, 2010). According to the author, marriage has become more of an individual institution since 1960 as increasing number of individuals made unilateral decisions to divorce or separate. High emphasis on personal growth can partially explain the high divorce rate in the US. In a study in Western Kenya, Goldberg (2013) observed that after a family transition, children may experience increased ambiguity in expectations about behaviour, as well as disruption in their sense of security and difficulties in fitting in blended families, and they may begin to rely on peer groups for support or intimacy previously provided by caregivers.

A blended family is one referred to as a non-traditional family, stepfamily, reconstituted family, patchwork family, new family, and refers to family types that do not follow the intact family guidelines (Jozsa & Balassa, 2014). Initially, formation of a blended family depended on the death of a spouse. This has been preceded,

since 1960s by divorce of one or both partners from previous spouses (George & Fernandez, 2014). More than 1,300 new blended families are formed daily in the US of whom about 70% end up in divorce (Butler, 2012). These remarriages often bring children from previous relationships to the new family either from one or both partners (Lee & Payne, 2010). The dissolution of two traditional family structures that may lead to formation of a blended family structure requires reorganization of the new family structure as a whole in terms of its definition, identity, purpose, and roles of the family members (Cindy and Fernandez, 2014).

2.2 Dynamics of Blended Families

A common sociological and physiological typology of the blended family system distinguishes five situations according to the stepparent who joined the system (Cindy & Fernandez, 2014). The five situations are: 'simple' family with stepmother where a woman joins a man and his biological child; 'simple' family with a stepfather where a man joins a woman and her biological child; 'complex' family where the two partners get connection and both bring their children from prior relationships, 'complex' family where the two partners have a common child or children besides the 'brought' child or children; and 'part-time' family where the children from the prior relationships live with the biological parent and the stepparent in certain specified times. If both members of the couple have prior children, those children are stepbrothers and stepsisters to one another. Any subsequent child born to the couple is a half-sibling of the respective members' prior children (Cindy & Fernandez, 2014).

According to Jozsa and Balassa (2014), blended families can include various combinations of stepparents or single parents. A stepparent family occurs when one parent is the biological parent of the child or children, and the other parent is not the biological parent of the child or children. A step-father family is one in which the children are biologically related to the mother, but not the father. A step-mother family is one in which the children are biologically related to the father, but not the mother. A family may have both a step-mother and a step-father. A step-mother and step-father family is one in which both mother and father have biological children from previous relationships living together (Jozsa and Balassa, 2014). Some children are biologically related to the mother and unrelated to the father, and other children in the household are biologically related to the father and unrelated to the mother. A single-mother family is one in which the biological mother of the children is the only adult or parent living with the children, whereas a single-father family is one in which the biological father of the children is the only adult or parent living with the children (Jozsa and Balassa, 2014).

Blended families can be distinguished between simple and complex blended families (Jozsa & Balassa, 2014). A simple stepfamily is one in which there is only one stepparent and all children are the biological children of the same parent. This type of family would occur with a step-mother family or a step-father family. A complex stepfamily is one in which both parents are stepparents to at least one child. A complex stepfamily may also include the presence of a half-sibling: a child that is the result of a genetic union between both parents in the family, and would be a half-sibling to a child of the mother's or a child of the father's.

Davis (2015) uses 'intact' to refer to families in which all children are biologically related to both parents, 'stepmother' to refer to families in which at least one child was a stepchild of the mother, 'complex' to refer to families in which both parents had children from previous relationships on the household and may also include children biologically related to both parents, and 'single-mother' families to refer to families in which children live with a single mother who either was never married/cohabited, or is separated/divorced.

Blessing (2016) identifies three types of siblings and two main types of family composition. The three types of sibling are: full-siblings, step-siblings, and half-siblings. A full sibling is a sibling of the target child who shares the same biological parents. A step-sibling is a sibling of the target child who is not biologically related to the child, and has entered the family system via the child's stepparent. A half-sibling is a sibling of the target child who shares one biological parent with the child, but the sibling's other biological parent is not biologically related to the child. The half-sibling can be a result of the union between the target child's biological parent and the target's stepparent, or could be the result of the target child's biological parent's with a prior partner (Blessing, 2016).

In the blended family structure, there may be three adults fulfilling parental roles and responsibilities. This happens because, the marriage of two individuals even though legally sanctioned, an ongoing existence of the biological, noncustodial (absent) parent complicates the dynamics of the parenting relationship (Manning, Brown, & Stykes, 2014).

In America, the data describing the context of family diversity serve to substantiate the numbers and growth of blended families. Blessing (2016) claimed that more than half of Americans were eventually in one or more

family during their lives. At more than 55% divorce rate for first marriages in the US, majority remarry and these remarriages often bring children from previous relationships (Lee & Payne, 2010; Stanton, 2015). Yau (2016) predicted that the numbers of blended families would soon bypass the numbers of nuclear families to become the most prevalent family constellation in the American society.

The portrait of the Canadian family is changing dramatically with blended families increasingly becoming the national norm, especially in Quebec (Fekete, 2012). The 2011 census on families and living arrangements in Canada counted blended families for the first time and found they represented about one in eight couple families with children. There were 464,335 blended families in 2011, accounting for 12.6% of the nearly 3.7 million couple families with children (married or common-law couples). The remaining, 3.2 million couple families or 87.4%, were considered intact families, where all children in the household are the biological or adopted offspring of both parents (Fekete, 2012). Of all the blended families identified, 271,930 were considered simple stepfamilies, in which all children are the biological or adopted children of only one married spouse or common-law partner in the couple and whose birth or adoption preceded the current relationship. The remaining 192,410 stepfamilies were considered complex (all other types of stepfamilies) and accounted for 5.2% of all couples with children, according to the Statistics Canada data (Fekete, 2012).

Children's lives are influenced by the number of parents and siblings that they live with, as well as by whether or not their parents are married (World Family Map, 2014). According to the World Family Map, two-parent families are becoming less common in many parts of the world although they still constitute a majority of families around the globe. Children are particularly likely to live in two-parent families in Asia and the Middle East, compared with other regions of the world. Children are more likely to live with one or no parent in America, Europe, Oceania, and sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions (World Family Map, 2014).

The increase in blended families comprises one of the largest demographic trends in Australia, brought about by the rising divorce rate (AIPC Article Library, 2012). Although many people come to re-partner with children, the odds are not in favour of remarriages, as a higher proportion of second marriages fail than first marriages. About one third or 33% of registered marriages celebrated in Australia involve at least one previously divorced partner (AIPC Article Library, 2012). In SSA, Kenya included, studies on blended families are almost non-existent (Dube, 2015). In a study in Western Kenya, Goldberg (2013) observed that after a family transition, children may experience increased ambiguity in expectations about behaviour, as well as disruption in their sense of security and difficulties in fitting in blended families, and they may begin to rely on peer groups for support or intimacy previously provided by caregivers.

The changing of classical or traditional form of family has been a global social phenomenon. In Hungary, half of the marriages end with divorce and majority of these adults remarry (Jozsa and Balassa, 2014). Social processes are influenced by way of life and lifestyles including consumption and buying habits of families. The blended families are as convergent as traditional families and may have to face several conflicts because of differences of the members in the family composition. The family structure can affect the buying decision making processes which in turn can cause children more problems of poverty, psychical, behavioural, learning, health and financial problems.

2.3 Role of Stepparent

The transition into step parenting role is neither immediate nor a smooth transition (Pasley, Dallhite, & Ihinger-Tallman, 2017). This process is clouded by lack of positive role models for the role of stepparent, relegating each family to re-imagine and enact this function of step parenting within the ongoing family relationship. According to Pasley, Dallhite, and Ihinger-Tallman (2017), three relevant themes pertinent to the role of stepparents include: an ambiguity regarding feelings of being stepparent; a lack of clarity of stepparent role; and concern about diminished attention to personal needs and loss of private time. The new family (blended family) presents an implicit confusion between the parental authorities of the biological parent and stepparent. Dowd (2015) identifies two principles governing parental rights: the fundamental rights owned as an "entitlement of procreating" where the biological parents are charged with the rights to support, care for, educate, discipline, custody, and control their children; and a child can only have one set of parents at any one time, where re-establishing of families is allowed through divorce, remarriage or adoption with each new family legally nullifying the previous family constellation. Marital status alone does not change parental rights and duties (Lee & Payne, 2010). The authors explain that the stepparent can exercise no more parental authority than bestowed by the biological parent and accepted by the children and that the right to stepparent must be earned and cannot be successfully demanded.

For the stepparents who do not have biological children of their own in the blended family, their step parenting role becomes more challenging (Pasley et al., 2017). This is because the presence of children requires an ongoing attention and interaction but for the stepparent, the form of the “relational lens” that the attention and interaction of children takes, whether a pseudo parent, friend, disciplinarian or some combination thereof, remains a troubling question (Pasley et al., 2017). Further, the authors indicate that private time and concern must be sacrificed in the new parenting role, but there seems little precedence or guidance in how to be an effective parent.

The stepparent role is more difficult and less clearly defined than the parent role partly because of the negative meaning attached to the term ‘step’ as perceived by people in general (Pasley et al., 2017). The ambiguous nature of the stepparent role has been the focus of a number of empirical investigations. Early empirical studies found that stepfathers felt inadequate in their role and did not perceive mutual love or mutual respect between themselves and their stepchildren while stepmothers were reported to be more authoritarian in their parenting style than were others in first-marriage families and commonly used stern, dogmatic control without explanations of reasons for discipline and did not promote independent decision making on the part of children (Pasley et al., 2017). Similarly, stepfathers were less warm, less supportive, less controlling, and more permissive with their stepchildren than were fathers with their biological children and less consistent in their discipline. Being a stepmother is believed to be more difficult than being a stepfather, primarily because stepmothers often are expected to assume primary responsibility for child care. Some studies have shown that stepmothers emit a greater proportion of negative behaviors toward stepchildren than stepfathers. In addition, stepmothers report higher levels of stress and greater dissatisfaction with their role than do stepfathers (Pasley et al., 2017).

In a blended family structure, the most successful parenting occurs where the stepparent focuses first on the development of a warm, friendly interaction style with the stepchild and once a foundation of mutual respect and affection is established, a stepparent who assumes a disciplinarian role is less likely to meet with resentment from the stepchild (Pasley et al., 2017). Parenting behaviors that include high levels of warmth, support, and control are associated with positive child wellbeing in first-marriage families. This pattern of parenting behaviors, known as authoritative parenting, does not have the same positive wellbeing in a blended family structure. The predominant parenting in blended families is characterized by more disengagement. Over time, stepfathers showed much lower levels of warmth, control, and monitoring and higher levels of conflict than did fathers in traditional families (Pasley et al., 2017).

According to Kwikwap Website Consultant (2017), most blended families in South Africa are able to work out their growing pains and live together successfully. Open communication, positive attitudes, mutual respect and plenty of love and patience all have an important place in creating a healthy blended family. Further, the author asserts that the stepparents need to focus a lot on their children and their adjustment, besides focusing on building a strong marital bond. This will ultimately benefit everyone, including the children, who when they see love, respect and open communication between stepparents, will feel more secure and may even learn to model those qualities. Uncertainty and worry about family issues often comes from poor communication. Children like to know what to expect. When they feel empathy and understanding from their parents and stepparents, they are more likely to be resilient to the normal ups and downs of adjusting to new family members and a new living situation (Kwikwap Website Consultant, 2017). Beninger (2011), in a study in Namibia, explains that stepchildren frequently report discriminatory treatment within the home in terms of love and attention, access to food and material goods, and an unequal burden of household labour as compared to biological children. The author cites abuse as the greatest disadvantage of living in a stepfamily particularly the sexual abuse of a stepdaughter by a stepfather.

Jozsa and Balassa (2014) analyze the causes of social process using consumer behaviour in blended families and test the null hypothesis that the buying decision making mechanism do not differ from that in traditional families. Using snowball sampling technique, the authors selected two samples: one of 42 stepparents and the other 184 traditional parents, and conducted in-depth interviews using questionnaires. Majority of the respondents in the sample for blended families were women (105) due to the fact that women generally are the ones who manage the issues related to the family. The variables examined included the average age, educational background, marital status, number of biological children in the household, proportion of children not living in the household, average age of children not living in the household, etc. The authors examined the kind of roles played by the family members during a buying decision making process which include lower prized consumer goods, higher prized capital goods, cars, holiday, and educational expenses. The data was analyzed using cross

tabulation method comparing the buying decision making processes and conflict of the blended families and traditional families. The authors found that the buying decisions and conflicts of the blended families differ from those in traditional families because of differences in the family structures.

2.4 Blended Family Dynamics and Psychological Outcome of the Child

Several scholars, including Magnuson & Berger (2009), Brown (2010) and Brown et al. (2015), investigated living arrangement patterns and their implication for the psychological wellbeing of the child and found that, on average, children residing outside the traditional family tend to fair less well than those in the traditional family structure.

Evenhouse and Reilly (2004) and Shui (2015) analyzed the adolescent health data using family fixed-effects estimation methods and found that stepsiblings do worse than their half-siblings who are joint children in blended families in terms of psychological wellbeing as reflected by trouble at school and school suspensions. Stepchildren also have adverse wellbeing in terms of risky behaviour such as early sexual activity and use of drugs and alcohol. The step children also have lower relationship quality with stepparents and worse psychological wellbeing.

Ginther and Pollak (2004) and Ginther and Sundstrom (2012) studied the reasons why living in a blended family structure may have a negative effect on psychological wellbeing of the child. One possible explanation is that parents' time and stepparents' time are imperfect substitutes and that this leads to fiercer competition for the parents' time between the full and half-siblings which, in turn, creates more stress for the children. Children in blended families may also experience more stress because, as suggested by Cherlin (2009), the parental and stepparent roles lack clear definitions. Another possible explanation, borrowed from evolutionary psychology, is that parents favour their own off springs over their stepchildren (Case, Lin, & McLanahan, 2001; Thomson, 2017). This explanation is consistent with the extensive recent literature on blended families (Magnuson & Berger, 2009; Sweeney, 2010; Brown et al., 2015). Thus, in a blended family in which there are joint children of the couple and half-siblings who are the biological children only of the mother, the father will favour his own offspring over his stepchildren but the mother may equalize inputs between her children. She has means to do so since she most often does the lion's share of household work and childrearing. However, if the half-siblings are the biological children of the father only, the mother will not attempt to equalize between the joint child and the stepchildren.

Scholars, including Artis (2007), Fomby & Cherlin (2007), Magnuson & Berger (2009) and Brown (2010) have investigated living arrangement patterns and their implications on the psychological wellbeing of the child. Children residing outside of families with two biological married parents, married stepparents, and cohabiting families tend to fair less well, on average. These studies have used the approach that captures only parent-child relationships for measures of family structure and assumes implicitly that parents are the most salient feature of the family environment, channelling resources such as time and money to children, which in turn shapes their development and well-being (Brown et al., 2015).

Several researchers including Halpem-Meekin and Tech (2008), (Tillman, 2008), Manning et al. (2014), and Brown et al. (2015) show that family complexity which is evident across all family structures, is negatively related to the psychological wellbeing of the child as reflected in depressive symptoms and delinquency.

There is an increasing trend to encourage both parents to maintain contact with their children following parental separation and divorce (Rasmussen and Stratton, 2016; Kalil, Mogstad, Rege, and Votruba (2011)). Rasmussen and Stratton (2016) use information on the distance between the child and the non-residential parent in order to proxy for contact and analyze psychological wellbeing for a cohort of children from nonnuclear families in Denmark. Similar work is by Kalil et al. (2011) who use Norwegian registry data on a five year cohort of children whose parents were married at the time of their birth, but divorced before their thirteenth birthday to compare the psychological wellbeing for children whose fathers were either always proximate or always distant. Contrary to the popular belief, the authors find no evidence that children who live a greater distance from their non-residential parent experience worse wellbeing. Mbatsane (2014) investigated the association between family structure, including blended family structure, and psychological well-being of 500 school-age going children in South Africa. Psychological well-being was measured using five scales, namely: general distress, life satisfaction, global self-esteem, affect balance. The data was analyzed using the Chi-square method. The results of the relationship between family structure and wellbeing were not statically significant.

2.5 Governing Theories

The key theory that underpinned the study is Attachment Theory by Bowlby complimented by Theory of Structural Family Therapy by Minuchin. The Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of attachment in regard to Internal Working Model (IWM) of a person which guides him/her in inter and intrapersonal relationships throughout life while the Structural Theory places importance on the patterns of interaction within the family.

2.5.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory states that a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver is critical to personal development and it is one of the most studied aspects of psychology. In his work in late 1960s involving the developmental psychology of children from various backgrounds, Bowlby (1969) established the precedent that childhood development depended heavily upon a child's ability to form a strong relationship with at least one primary caregiver. As a concept in developmental psychology, attachment theory concerns the importance of attachment in regards to personal development. The theory makes the claim that the ability for an individual to form an emotional and physical attachment to another person gives a sense of stability and security necessary to take risks, branch out, and grow and develop as a personality.

The parent-child relationship provides the child with important ideas of forming relationships and learning to adjust to various experiences in life (Hines, 2007; Gray, 2011). The theory assumes that adult friendships or romantic relationships develop from parents or examples of early caregivers (Carranza et al., 2009), suggesting that a parental separation could cause the child to have relationship issues later in life. Family breakdown can change the attachment style creating feelings of anger, resentment and confusion. In a blended family structure, adolescents and young adults face challenges of building relationships and committing to a relationship because of low trust in stepparents, low satisfaction and interpersonal skills (Fogarty, Ferrer, and McCrea, 2013). This creates the challenge of the blended family in building quality family.

Cassidy and Shaver (2008) explain that attachment theory sheds light on early development of Internal Working Model (IWM) in individuals. According the authors, the model informs the individual of relationships and interactions with self and others from childhood to the entire lifespan. Potter and Sullivan (2011) assert that IWM facilitates future interactions of the individual with self and the world. The presence of the primary caregiver mostly the mother is paramount because the child mirrors the self with whom it attaches to (Smith and Elliot, 2011). According to Beebe and Steele (2013) the internal working model begins to develop six months after the baby is born. This confirms the observation by Smith and Elliot (2011). Positive internal working model facilitates intra and interpersonal relationships (Davies, 2011). Attachment relationships form bases on which individuals regulate their emotions (Brenning & Braet, 2013).

The attachment model explains infant behaviour towards their attachment figure, during separation and reunion times. It is believed that attachment behaviours formed in infancy will help shape the attachment relationships people have as adults. Some psychologists, such as Harris (1998) and Field (1996), disagree with this idea. Harris (1998) believes that too much emphasis on how a child "turns out" should not be placed on the parents and also disagrees with the nurture assumption as well. Peers have a lot of influence on a child's personality, just as the child's environment does. Field (1996) also criticizes the attachment model because he believes that there are many limitations to it.

2.5.2 Theory of Structural Family Therapy

Theory of structural family therapy by Minuchin (1974) focuses on the organization of the entire family to include rules, boundaries, and coalitions that characterize the family structure (Nichols, 2010). Structural theory views the family as an integrated whole and as a system. The emphasis is on patterns of interaction within the family providing clues to the basic structure and organization of the system, the family. According to Minuchin (1974), the family will change as society changes. Society develops extra familiar structures to adapt to new ways of thinking and new social and economic realities. It is these changes in society that shape the formation of the blended family and other forms of the family.

The key critique of the Structural Theory is Standish (2013), who claims that the Theory de-emphasizes emotional lives, is biased on appropriate family structure that is "western" nuclear family model and needs cross cultural considerations. While the attachment theory emphasizes the importance of strong emotional and physical attachment to personal development including children, family structural theory addresses problems in

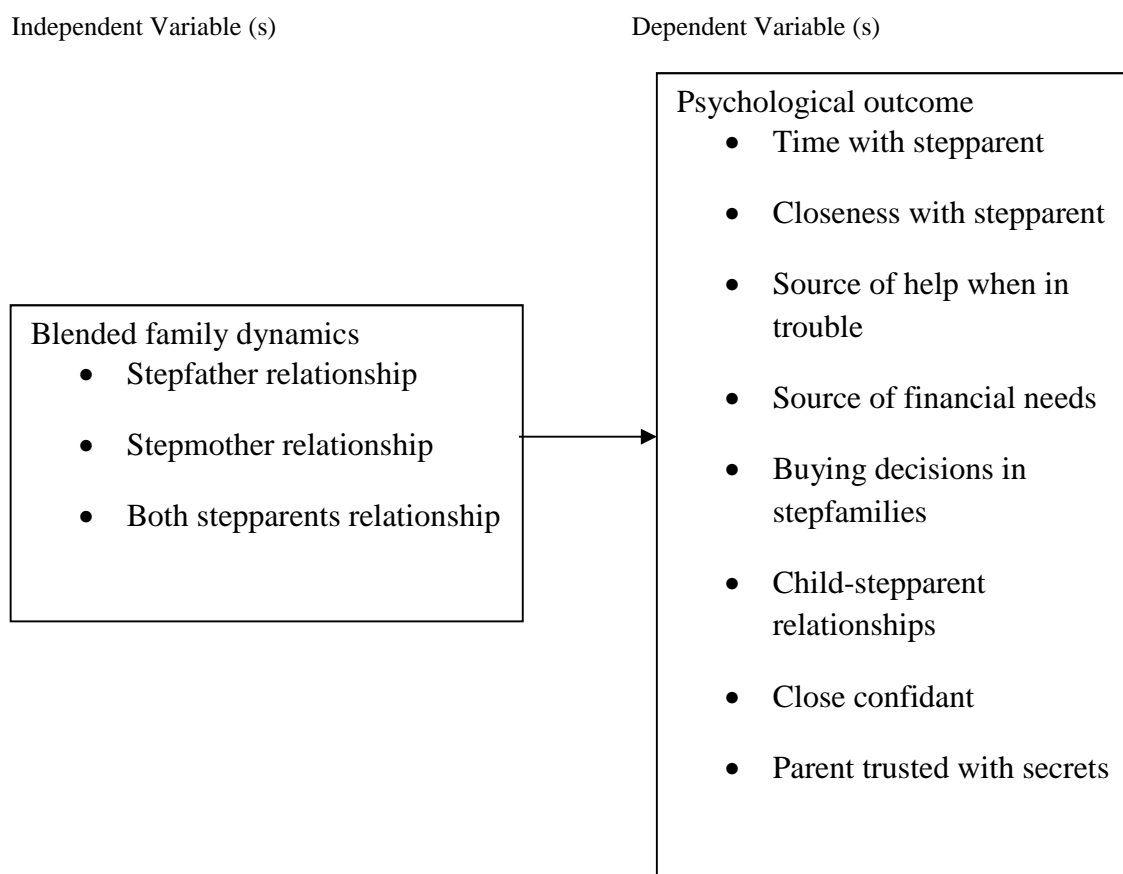
the functioning within a family. Changes in family structures can influence personal development of children in terms of psychological, social, and academic wellbeing (Brown et al., 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework focuses on the interrelationships of various variables based on the theoretical and empirical considerations made in the literature review. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship of the dependent and independent variables used in the study. The independent variable is the blended family dynamics while the dependent variable is the psychological wellbeing of the child.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of blended family and psychological outcome of Child



Source: Own formulation based on Minuchin (1974) and Bowlby (1969)

Psychological outcome refers to self-acceptance, self concept (high or low self-esteem), depressive mood, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Brown, Manning, & Stykes, 2015). Several aspects as proxy for psychological outcome used in the study include: time spent with stepparent, closeness with stepparent, source of help when in trouble, source of financial needs, buying/consumption decisions in stepparent families, child-stepparent relationships, child-sibling relations, misunderstanding in stepfamily, close confidant.

Blended family is a family where at least one parent has children from a previous relationship that are not genetically related to the other parent (Jozsa & Balassa, 2014). The aspects used in the study as proxy for blended families is the blended family types: stepfather family, and stepmother family.

3.2 Sampling Design and Data Collection

The study employed both random (or probability) sampling and non-random (or non-probability) sampling techniques in sample selection. The target 15 public secondary schools in Kabete Sub-county were stratified into three (3) strata: girls' only secondary schools, boys' only secondary schools, and mixed secondary schools. A simple random sample of one-third of schools from each stratum was drawn, namely: one school for girls, one school for boys, and three mixed schools. From each school, the study drew a target sample of 10 students from blended families using purposive sampling with the guidance of the schooling administration through Guidance and Counselling teachers. Thus, the study used a sample size of 50 secondary school age-going students from blended families in the age-group 14 - 19 years. According to RoK (2013), secondary school age-going children are in the 14 - 19 years age bracket.

With the help of the guidance and counselling teachers, the respondents were convened in a room, inducted about the study and were able to willingly participate in the study. The study collected primary data on family composition types, on children from blended families focusing on their well-being in relation to psychological wellbeing.

3.3 Study Area

Kabete is a cosmopolitan Sub-County in Kiambu County, close to Kenya's Capital City, Nairobi. It covers an area of 60.20 square kilometres which is about 2.4 percent of the total area of Kiambu County and has a population of 140,427 people constituting about 8.7 percent of the total population in the County (RoK, 2009). Due to its proximity to the Nairobi capital city, Kabete Sub-County has the highest population density in Kiambu County which is 2,534 persons per square kilometre followed by Kiambaa Sub-County which has 2,153 persons per square kilometre. The Sub-County is among the leading innovative commercial hubs in Kiambu County and constitutes five (5) County Assembly Wards (CAWs): Gitaru, Muguga, Nyathuna, Kabete, and Uthiru. Kabete Sub-County is also among the wealthiest counties in Kenya where people primarily work in the Civil Service, carry out businesses, do farming or are in the informal sector. The larger population of the people is in retail business and service provision where they manage hotels and restaurants, new and second hand clothes, foodstuffs, hardware shops and household goods (RoK, 2013).

Kabete Sub-County has a total of 203 schools: 185 primary schools and 18 secondary schools. The secondary school age group is 14-19 years and forms about 7.4 percent or 10,391 of the total population in the Sub-County (RoK, 2013). The total number of students in public secondary schools in the Sub-County is 5,504.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the effect of blended family dynamics such as time spent with stepparents, parental closeness, as well as the help from parents when in trouble, financial support, and state of relationship with stepparent and siblings, understanding in the family and confident in the family on the psychological outcome of children in Kabete Sub-County.

4.1 Time Spent with Stepparent

Annex 1 presents results of the time children from blended families in Kabete Sub-County spent with stepparents. The results reveal that the time spent with stepfamily was not statistically significant between respondents from step-mother family and those from step-father family ($\chi^2(2) = 446, p > .05$) suggesting that most of the respondents did not spend time with their stepparents often and that stepfamily typology did not influence time spent. This is consistent with the argument fronted by Mooney et al. (2009) that due to the nature of blended families, stepparents have too little time for their stepchildren.

4.2 Closeness with Stepparents

Annex 2 presents results of closeness of the children from blended families in Kabete Sub-County spent with stepparents. The results show that the difference in the level of closeness between respondents from step-mother family and those from step-father family was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 469, p > .05$) implying that most of the children maintained a close relationship with their stepparents irrespective of step-family typology.

4.3 Source of Help When in Trouble

Annex 3 presents results of source of help for the children from blended families in Kabete Sub-County when in trouble. The results reveal that a statistically significantly higher proportion of respondents from step-father family sought help from other people rather than the stepfathers compared to the proportion from step-mother families ($\chi^2 = 6.857, p < .05$). This implies that the relationship between the children and their stepparents in the Sub-County was not secure or close to inspire confidence in the children, with the relationship within step-father family typology inspiring the least confidence on the respondents.

4.4 Source of Help When in Financial Need

Annex 4 presents results of source of help for the children from blended families in Kabete Sub-County when in financial need. The Chi-square results show that the difference between respondents from step-father family and those from step-mother family in their preferred source of help when in financial need ($\chi^2(1) = .556, p > .05$) was not statistically significant. This implies that stepparent family typology did not influence the source of help for the respondent when in financial need. Most of the children who went to neither stepparent turned instead to their biological parents, mostly mothers. This finding underscores the belief that parents should maintain contact with their children following separation and divorce because such contact is in the best interest of the child (Rasmussen and Stratton, 2016). The finding also supports attachment theory by Bowlby (1969) which claims that the ability for an individual to form an emotional and physical attachment to another person gives a sense of stability and security necessary to take risks, branch out, and grow and develop as a personality.

4.5 Buying Decisions in Stepparent Families

Annex 5 presents results of buying decisions of blended families in Kabete Sub-County. The results indicate that the difference between respondents from step-mother families and those from step-father families with regard to the extent to which they were affected by buying decisions in the blended family, was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = .254, p > .05$) suggesting that most of the respondents were affected by buying decisions in the stepfamily irrespective of the blended family typology. This finding is in line with assertion that the family structure of blended families can affect the buying decision making processes which consequently affect stepchildren materially and emotionally (Jozsa and Balassa, 2014).

4.6 Child-Stepparent Relationship

Annex 6 presents results of state of relationship of the children with stepparents of blended families in Kabete Sub-County. The indicate that the difference between respondents from step-mother family and those from step-father family with respect to the state of relationship between them and their step-parents was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 2.275, p > .05$). The lack of statistically significant difference implies that the respondents related well with their new parents (stepparents) irrespective of the blended family typology.

4.7 Close Confidant in Case of Worry or Fear

Annex 7 presents results of the close confidants of the children in blended families in Kabete Sub-County in case of worry or fear. The results indicate that the difference between respondents from step-father family and their counterparts from step-mother family in their choice of confidant when worried or fearful was highly statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.254, p < .000$) suggesting that most of the respondents in Kabete Sub-County confided in their stepmothers more than in their stepfathers implying that the blended family typology had an influence on choice of the of the confidant by the respondent. Most of the respondents who never talked to their stepparents cited a range of reasons including lack of trust, lack of understanding and attention and stronger bond with biological parents. This finding is in line with the perspective that adolescents in blended families face challenges of building relationships and committing to a relationship because of low trust in stepparents, low satisfaction and interpersonal skills (Forgarty et al., 2013).

4.8 Parent Trusted with Secrets

Annex 8 presents results of the trust of the children in blended families in Kabete Sub-County on the parent with their secrets. The results reveal that most of the respondents trusted their biological parents or relatives with secrets rather than their stepparents. The finding underscores the assertion by Kalil et al. (2011) that parents should maintain contact with their children even after separation because such contact is in the best interest of

the child. The chi-square results of the difference between respondents from the step-mother family and those from the step-father family with respect to whom they trusted with secrets was highly statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 4.289$, $p < .05$) suggesting that a significantly higher proportion of the respondents from step-father family type confided more in their biological parent or relative than respondents from step-mother family typology implying that although, most of the respondents from either blended-family type trusted their secrets with their biological parents or relatives, step-fathers were less trusted compared to step-mothers.

5. Conclusion

The study findings show that, there is a strong bond that persists between children in blended families and their biological parents that cannot be displaced by new relationships with stepparents such that children in blended families struggle to adjust to new family structure and this result in adverse effect on the psychological outcome of the children. This finding is more manifest within step-father family type than within step-mother family typology. Further, it is critical for the stepparents in blended families to foster an environment of trust and confidence over the children in their parental responsibilities. Another finding was that children in blended families, struggle to acknowledge the new mother in their life.

5.1 Policy implications

Drawing from study findings, the following can be considered as important policy initiatives that can promote improvement of the psychological outcome of the child from blended families. Firstly, biological parents should continue to play an active role in the upbringing of their children through regular visitations and quality time in order to reassure the children that they have their back in case their presence and support is needed. Secondly, stepparents should also reassure children that the new environment is safe for them to live in by establishing friendship with them, fostering trust and respecting established boundaries. A significant role in this regard can be played by the biological parent in the blended family structure by creating a bridge through which the stepparent begins to establish connection with their stepchild. Thirdly, stepparents and biological parents should collaborate rather than compete in parenting the children. Each party should put the interest of the children first in the choices they make on behalf of the children.

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Margaret Njoroge was born in Kiambu district in Kenya in 1954. She holds Certificate in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) obtained in 2018 from Mediation Training Institute (MTI), Nairobi, Kenya, MSc degree in marriage and family therapy obtained in 2017, and BSc in counselling psychology obtained in 2014, both from Pan African Christian University, Nairobi, Kenya.

Gabriel Kirori was born in Kiambu District in Kenya in 1950. He holds PhD degree in economics with specialization in rural development obtained in 2009, MA degree in economics obtained in 2004, both from University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya, and BStat degree obtained in 1984 from Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda.

Annex 1: Time spent with the stepparent

Table 1: Time spent with stepparent

		Never	Less often	Often	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	6	12	11	29
	Percent	20.7%	41.4%	37.9%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	6	9	10	25
	Percent	24.0%	36.0%	40.0%	100.0%

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.446 ^a	2	.800
Likelihood Ratio	.470	2	.791
Linear-by-Linear Association	.020	1	.886
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .80.

Annex 2: Closeness with stepparents

Table 3: Closeness with stepparents

		Not close	Close	Very close	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	10	11	8	29
	Percent	33.3%	40.0%	26.7%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	9	13	3	25
	Percent	36.0%	52.0%	12.0%	100.0%

Table 4: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.469 ^a	2	.791
Likelihood Ratio	.492	2	.782
Linear-by-Linear Association	.122	1	.727
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.60.

Annex 3: Source of help when in trouble

Table 5: Source of help when in trouble

		Stepparent	Other people	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	12	17	29
	Percent	41.4%	58.6%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	4	21	25
	Percent	16.0%	84.0%	100.0%

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.857 ^a	1	.009
Likelihood Ratio	8.434	1	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.429	1	.045
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.75.

Annex 4: Source of help when in financial need

Table 7: Source of help when in financial need

		Stepparent	Other people	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	9	20	29
	Percent	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	9	16	25
	Percent	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%

Table 8: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.556 ^a	1	.118
Likelihood Ratio	.884	1	.115
Linear-by-Linear Association	.247	1	.122
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.50.

Annex 5: Buying decisions in stepparent families

Table 11: Effect of buying decision in stepfamilies on stepchildren

		Very much	Much	Not at all	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	7	9	13	29
	Percent	24.2%	31.0%	44.8%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	10	7	8	25
	Percent	40.0%	28.0%	32.0%	100.0%

Table 12: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.254 ^a	2	.211
Likelihood Ratio	.350	2	.209
Linear-by-Linear Association	.373	1	.241
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.50.

Annex 6: Child-stepparent relationship

Tables 13 and 14 present the results of state of relationship of the children with stepparents.

Table 13: Child-stepparent relationship

		Bad	Fair	Good	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	4	21	4	29
	Percent	13.8%	72.4%	13.8%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	7	13	5	25
	Percent	28.0%	52.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Table 14: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.274 ^a	2	.118
Likelihood Ratio	3.383	2	.068
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.050	1	.152
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.31.

Annex 7: Close confidant in case of worry or fear

Table 14: Close confidant in case of worry/fear

		Never	Less often	Often	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	4	14	11	29
	Percent	13.8%	48.3%	37.9%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	15	5	5	25
	Percent	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%

Table 15: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.254 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	16.350	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.373	1	.041
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.5.

Annex 8: Parent trusted with secrets

Table 16: Parent trusted with secrets

		Stepparent	Biological parent/relative	Total
Stepmother family	Frequency	6	23	29
	Percent	20.6%	79.4%	100.0%
Stepfather family	Frequency	1	24	25
	Percent	4.0%	96.0%	100.0%

Table 17: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.286 ^a	1	.026
Likelihood Ratio	3.355	1	.038
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.653	1	.049
N of Valid Cases	54		

a. 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.22.