

**A SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME FOR SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES  
BASED ON RELATIONAL THEORY**

by

**THAINAIGIE REDDY**

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**PROMOTER : DR S J KOKOT**

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Student Number : 394-750-5

DECLARATION

I declare that *A Support Group Programme for Single-Parent Families Based on Relational Theory* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*Reddy.*

.....  
SIGNATURE  
(MRS T REDDY)

1995 - 11 - 06

.....  
DATE

DEDICATION

I dedicate this effort to :-

- my husband, Bobby whose love and patient endurance is endless
- my children, Taariya and Tiren for the countless necessary escapes
- my mum who is the epitome of kindness and selflessness
- and especially my dad whose enthusiastic and untiring quest for greater knowledge and to pass on that knowledge has been the driving force of my achievements and this work.

**Title** : A Support Group Programme for Single-Parent Families Based on Relational Theory

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#### SUMMARY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the possibility of using Relational Theory as a basis for the design of a support group programme for divorced single-parent families. This programme aimed at improving their interpersonal relationships and then to form new identities realistically, thus helping them to self-actualise. The categories of involvement, experience and meaningful attribution as well as the stages of awareness, exploration, personalisation and change initiation formed the basis of the programme. The effects of marital disruption on the interpersonal relationships and identities of single-parent families were also examined through a literature review.

Pre and posttest interviews were conducted individually with single parents and their children to evaluate the effectiveness of the support group programme. The pretest interviews were administered a month before the implementation of the programme and the posttest interviews done two months after to gauge the longitudinal effect of the programme.

The interviews and the programme included the following aspects : awareness, exploration and evaluation of relationships (including aspects such as parental and spousal conflicts, parent alignment and parent availability, sibling rivalry and parent-child interaction); awareness, exploration and evaluation of identities (including identity conflicts stemming from role strain, role reversals and parent alignment); self-evaluation and self-actualisation.

The conclusions from the literature study, the outcome of the support group programme and the results of the interviews confirmed that marital disruption does adversely affect the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families and their formation of new, realistic identities. Single-parent families attribute unrealistic meaning to relationships and identities causing problematic relationships and identity conflicts. The nature and quality of the relationships also affect the formation of realistic identities resulting in a failure to self-actualise.

In conclusion, the support group programme helped the single-parent families to attribute realistic meaning to their relationships and identities, resulting in improved relationships and the formation of realistic identities.

**KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A DISSERTATION/THESES**

Title of Dissertation :

A Support Group Programme for Single-Parent Families based on Relational Theory

Key Terms :

Single-parent families; interpersonal relationships; identity formation; relational theory; awareness; exploration; personalisation; evaluation; self-actualisation; problematic relationships; identity conflicts.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The single-parent family is the fastest growing family life-style in the Indian community today. The high rate of divorce and the large number of children living in single-parent homes demand the attention of researchers. There are many problems facing single parents. Although attitudes are changing slowly in the Indian community single-parent families do not enjoy the same status and acceptance in society as two-parent families and face social stigmas, exclusion from some resources and other social problems. Like everyone else single parents have feelings, frustrations, fears and concerns. If they do not come to terms with these situations and circumstances then their role as single parents could be adversely affected (Reddy 1989: 34).

Concerned parents aim to bring their children up to be healthy and mature, with a full sense of being loved and accepted as normal persons. The commonly held view that this is not possible for children who grow up in a single-parent family has two significant consequences. First, single parents experience guilt, fear and frustration, which detrimentally affects their emotional security and self-confidence - two criteria for accomplishing this parental goal. Second, due to the social stigma surrounding single parents, the general public is unsympathetic and condemning. Thus single parents may consider themselves to be inadequate as suitable parents (Burgess 1970: 138).

The rising number of single-parent Indian families follows the trend of families in other culture groups. The frequency is said to be due mainly to the increasing number of

divorces (Cunningham and Brown 1984:144) and the single-parent family is the fastest growing form of family life in western countries today. It was estimated that by 1990 one half of all children in the United States would have spent at least some time in a single-parent family (Glick and Norton 1979:178), while in England one in every three marriages breaks down, with second marriages failing at an even higher rate (Brown 1980:537).

The increase in divorce rates in South Africa is evident from figures released by Central Statistical Service according to which the specific divorce rates in 1989 were 15,8 per 1 000 White married couples, 11,3 per 1 000 Coloured married couples, and 7,1 per 1 000 Indian married couples. Although these figures indicate that Indians had the lowest rates of divorce, there has been a steady increase since 1980 when a figure of 3,4 per 1 000 Indian married couples was recorded (Central Statistical Service, 1989).

The latest statistical figures (Central Statistical Service:1993) regarding the divorce rate in South Africa indicates that 15,5% (22 969) of White children, 12,6% (9 479) of Coloured children and 7,9% (3 619) of Indian children were affected by divorce.

This alarming data provides a rationale for an empirical investigation on the effects of such a disruption on single-parent families. According to Hess and Camara (1979:79-96) the family relationships that emerge after divorce can affect children as much, if not more, than the divorce itself. In fact, the nature and quality of children's relationships with their parents is more significantly affected after divorce than during the period of discord between parents before the divorce.

Johnston (1990:406) found that many children from single-parent families who became enmeshed in parental conflict remain emotionally distressed and manifest stress symbols and behaviour problems that indicate among other things an identity crisis. When the parental alliance breaks down and emotional boundaries are blurred, children may be induced to assume spousal parental functions. This situation is generally referred to as role reversal. Children's ability to function in role reversal with a parent is related to the quality of the emotional relationship between parent and child.

Goldberg, Greenburger and Hamill (1992:312) found an increase in negative child behaviours and negative parent-child interactions due to marital dissolutions and the level of conflict that prevailed in the post divorce spousal relationship.

Mussen, Conger and Kagen (1974:472) state that "relationships with parents remain for most children the most important factor in determining the kind of person the child will become". For this reason, children and their parents need assistance in overcoming these problems.

## 1.2 PROBLEM ANALYSIS

### 1.2.1 **Awareness of the problem**

The investigator researched the relationship between parent-child interaction and scholastic achievement of children in single-parent families during her study for her Master's degree in Education. The findings show that the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families are marked by emotional instability which then affects children's scholastic performance at school. It is evident, therefore, that some type of assistance for

both single parents and children is needed. This assistance could include various types of support systems for the relevant families. While a few programmes, organised by the Single Parent's Association and the Child Welfare Society for single parents exist, these are not always available to or suitable for them.

The investigator made the following recommendations in her M.Ed. dissertation and these serve as a rationale for this study:

- \* There should be stronger links between single-parent families and support institutions such as voluntary organisations, community and social service agencies and religious bodies.
- \* Attention needs to be given to re-establishing family networks where individuals may reach out to the extended family, for example, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and so on.
- \* Group therapy sessions could be created to include single parents and their children, and separate sessions could be held for parents or children respectively. These programmes should be planned to develop effective communication skills and reinforce a positive self-image for single parents and their children.
- \* The role of the school towards assisting single-parent families needs to be examined. Principals and teachers need to be responsive and receptive to the problems experienced by single-parent families so that an effective communication network between the home, school and community may be developed.

- \* Provision could be made for an inservice programme for educators to enable them to identify and assist children of single-parent families and provide support for them at school.

The programmes available to assist single parents and their children in adjusting after the divorce should be investigated to see if they are suitable for helping single-parent families improve their interpersonal relationships and form new identities realistically after the marital disruption.

One of the major challenges facing divorced single parents is helping their children maintain their self-esteem. Porter and Chatelain (1981:522) found that loss of self-esteem is usually one of the first things suffered by children of divorced parents. At first, children may feel abandoned and unwanted, or they may feel guilty, feeling that they are somehow responsible or partially responsible for the divorce. This is complicated by the fact that they are struggling with their own feelings at the very time that their parents are overwhelmed by the trauma of divorce. It is therefore important for parents to try to be sensitive to their children's feelings and do everything possible to reassure them of their worth. This can be a difficult challenge because children's behaviour does not always reflect their true feelings (Porter & Chatelain 1981:522).

Research by Burgess (1970); Clayton (1971); Cashion (1982); Harper and Ryder (1986); McLanahan, Wedemeyer and Adelberg (1981); Weinraub and Wolf (1983); Rosenthal and Hansen (1980); Gladow and Ray (1986); Colletta (1979), Parish and Dostal (1980); Smith (1990) and Raschke and Raschke (1979). Smith (1990) and Barber and Eccles (1992)

indicate that the trauma and emotional insecurity experienced by single parents and their children affect their personality to such an extent that this results, in many cases, in a low self-concept.

Jacobs and Vrey (1982:26-49) explain that the self-concept is the evaluation of one's identity. Since the self of a person is multifaceted, the person forms different identities throughout his life. After a certain identity has been formed it is evaluated by the norms and values of the person and the result of this evaluation is the self-concept which could be high or low, realistic or unrealistic. Both single parents and their children need to form new identities. They have to become aware of this new image by attributing significance to, becoming involved in and experiencing the situation (of marital disruption). Their identities would then be formed by ascribing realistic or unrealistic meaning to their new position. By personalising the result of the evaluation of a particular identity, individuals are able to form a realistic high or low self-concept regarding this identity. In most cases, however, the aftermath of divorce reveals a diffusion of identities and many single parents and their children feel confused, bitter and abandoned.

According to Hamachek (1978) as cited by Rosenthal and Hansen (1980:74) the child's self-concept following a parental separation develops in response to the perception of parental love and care.

Raschke and Raschke (1979:367) found that a relatively high proportion of children from separated or divorced families show low self-esteem and greater anxiety mainly due to a

diffusion of identities. Clayton (1971:327-328) points out that single parents experience an identity crisis after marital disruption.

Since children of divorced parents are almost always placed in the custody of the mother, the single parent is more often the woman. She is then left with all the responsibilities of providing emotional and practical guidelines for the child. While having to cope with home care and maintenance functions (many of which were previously handled by the father) and uphold an outside job in order to provide complete support for the family, she must also deal with her own emotional needs. For many this situation brings about an identity crisis that is difficult to resolve (Clayton 1971:327).

These families need a support system which provides a programme to assist them in establishing a sound identity so that they are able to actualise themselves in the new role of either the single parent or single-parent child. Numerous support systems have been established in various forms and made available to single-parent families who have greatly benefited from them; nevertheless, there is still a need for a specialised programme to assist single-parent families to improve their interpersonal relationships, form new identities in order to develop positive self-concepts and so be able to actualise themselves in their new lifestyle after the marital disruption. This programme can take the form of a support group which would assist in the formation of new identities for both the parent and child.

### **1.2.2 Exploration of the problem**

From the foregoing, it seems that single-parent families experience a considerable amount

of psychological distress which has profound implications for the mental health of parents and children. The question then remains as to what type of support programme could be planned or developed to assist single-parent families to adjust adequately. Cobb (1976) as cited by Gladow and Ray (1986:114) defines support as the exchange of information that provides individuals and families with

- \* emotional support - leading them to believe that they are cared for and appreciated;
- \* esteem support - leading them to believe that they are valued;
- \* network support - providing a network of mutual obligations through which they can obtain problem-solving information and a sense of belonging.

Social workers, family therapists, family life counsellors and other family professionals need to assure single parents that it is both human and helpful to need and rely on sources of support. Community services are effective to an extent but are regarded more as a patchwork remedy. Therefore there remains a need for a strong educational programme for these families that is continuous and easily available (Burgess 1970:137).

Research by, inter alia Gladow and Ray (1986); Berman and Turk (1981); Cantrell (1986); Stolberg and Ullman (1984); Pett (1982); Spanier and Castro (1979); Cashion (1982); Porter and Chatelain (1981); Stewart (1990) and Wanat (1993) suggests that positive post-divorce adjustment is strongly related to the existence and utilisation of support systems. However, these studies generally concern single parents in the transitional period immediately following the separation or divorce. With the current

recognition that single parenthood is for some a permanent lifestyle, it is also important to examine whether support systems continue to have a positive impact on the family well-being beyond the period of marital adjustment to single parenthood.

A study by Bronfenbrenner (in Christensen and McDonald 1976: 68 - 70) investigates the influence of a support system on the patterns of interaction which exist between a single parent and child. It was hypothesised that the support system should improve parent-child interaction. The findings of the research supports this hypothesis. One aspect of the study highlights the need for an educational programme designed to improve the self-concept of both parents and children. Although much research has been done regarding the provision of support systems for single-parent families, they nevertheless reveal that the self-concepts of both parents and children remain adversely affected after marital disruption. Few researchers have investigated the possibility of an educational programme to help single parents and their children establish and maintain a positive self-concept. Research in this aspect would undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of those factors that may influence these families' state of mental health and so encourage a well-adjusted, confident and successful family unit.

According to Burgess (1970:143), educationists and sociologists are concerned about the scarcity of research on the special problems that confront single-parent families, including the lack of support groups that exist to promote emotional stability and facilitate the effective establishment of a new identity for both parents and children. Recognition of this lack makes it obvious that a programme is necessary to understand the particular problems related to single parenthood.

In more recent years, a few studies were conducted to assess the effectiveness of support given to families and have resulted in some guidelines.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1976) as cited by Colletta (1979:29), support from individuals and institutions is important to a certain extent; however, it is clear that a more specialised programme is needed to evaluate the personalities of single-parent families after the divorce.

Rosenthal and Hansen (1980:81) studied the importance of post-divorce counselling and the provision of relevant support systems, noting, however, that there is a critical period in the development of children involved in the divorce process. They echo the earlier view of Burgess by ascertaining that the literature and specific counselling strategies dealing with single-parent families are surprisingly meagre when one considers the rapidly increasing number of people involved in divorce.

McLanahan et al. (1981: 602 - 605) outline different types of social networks which assist single-parent families. All these support groups are community service programmes designed to assist families to adjust after the divorce. Weinraub and Wolf (1983:1308) found that many single parents who seek support and emotional contacts outside the home face more difficulties and less satisfactory experiences with their children. For this reason many single parents are reluctant to seek a support group because they want to meet their needs in the company of their children as far as possible.

Gladow and Ray (1986:122) investigated the impact of certain support systems (including relatives, friends, the community and other organisations) on the well-being of single-parent families. They found that these families needed some form of support to cope with the adjustment and transition to their new lifestyle.

Stewart (1990:1144) believes that a network of single parents may be a source of instrumental support as when parents trade child care and parenting skills. A mentoring programme with experienced single parents providing assistance and support to new single parents could be established to assist in the transition to single parenting.

Research by Richards and Schmiede (1993:277) focused on role and task overload of single parents. They found that single parents experience role conflicts and social isolation and thus need a form of support that would focus on the sharing of family strength.

The literature regarding support for divorced family members is scarce. Those studies that have been conducted seem to aim at emotional support provided by empathy of others in similar situations, or network support, (as defined by Cobb), which aims at providing practical information or skills. None seems to address a fundamental issue underlying the commonly recognised low self-concepts of single parents and their children. This is, that these self-concepts result from the negatively or unrealistically evaluated identities that are newly formed, or re-formed after a marital break-up.

No particular, specialised programmes were identified which aim to establish sound identities in single-parent families to enable them to adjust adequately to their new roles.

Assuming that the single-parent family is here to stay, research focusing on strengthening single-parent families through support systems seems a positive direction for the future.

It was this lack of a suitable, effective, researched programme to assist single-parent families to establish sound and positive identities in order to adjust to their new lifestyle with confidence and success that led to the investigator identifying a particular need for a group intervention programme for divorced families aimed at improving interpersonal relationships for both parents and children. Relational theory perspective as an intervention method was deemed suitable in this respect. This theory is briefly explained herewith.

### Relational Theory

Relational theory centres on the participants in the educational act, that is, the educand and the educator as individuals within a specific relationship. It is concerned with the essential factors involved in being an educand (and educator) and the identified factors are described in terms of so-called categories. These categories are considered to be illustrative modes of thought or milestones that are essential in enabling the individual to develop a positive self-concept that will promote self-actualisation (Vrey 1979:28). Relational theory identifies the following categories: significance attribution, involvement, experience, identity and self-concept and self-actualisation.

Single-parent families need to form sound and positive identities after the divorce and since the existing programmes or support systems do not make provision for this, the investigator considered designing a programme to include relational theory categories.

These categories are briefly discussed to indicate their relevance to this study.

i) *Attribution Of Meaning*

It is essential for individuals to be able to attribute meaning to the phenomena around them in order to orient themselves in their environment and to get to know their world. Children thus attribute meaning in order to understand the other referent in a relationship, which may be an object, an idea, another person or even themselves. From these relationships, certain experiential events come to the fore, such as acceptance, rejection, success, failure, love and hate, which may be congruent or incongruent with reality (Vrey 1979:36). It is essential that single-parent families are able to effectively attribute realistic meaning to relationships in order to correctly interpret themselves and their new roles. Many children do not fully understand their parents' actions after divorce. Lack of understanding causes children to deal ineffectively with whatever comes their way and so feel insecure and unhappy. The parent-child relationship is consequently affected because the nature and quality of the relationship is determined by the meaning assigned to it after marital disruption has occurred. Vrey (1979:33) states that without attributing realistic meaning, there can be no development towards adulthood or growth to independence.

ii) *Involvement*

This describes the psychological vitality which motivates a person to action. It implies purposefulness, perseverance and dedication. A natural result of involvement is experience, such as success or failure, anxiety, peace, joy or frustration (Vrey 1979:41).

Stolberg and Ullman (1984:33) write that "the parent's physical and emotional availability to the child during the divorce adjustment process has been identified as another major determinant of child adjustment. Optimal levels of parent involvement, and conversely, less than required parent participation in the child's developmental processes may result in cognitive and behavioural problems". This is further complicated by the existing trauma of the divorce process that affects both parents and children.

iii) Experience

Experience is the emotive component in relationships that determines the meaning that a person attributes to a certain situation. This means that individuals' evaluation of an experience as either pleasant or unpleasant defines the quality of a certain relationship. It gives rise to the polarisation effect of attraction or repulsion, and serves as an incentive to the person's involvement in each act of attributing meaning (Vrey 1979:45).

Changes in children's behaviour and personality after the marital disruption seem to be manifestations of experienced anger and a feeling of loss and helplessness (McDermott 1968:1427). Single-parent children initially become involved in the marital disruption, experience the various emotions related to the divorce and then attribute meaning to the situation.

iv) Self-Actualisation

Self-actualisation implies a person's deliberate effort to realise all his or her latent potential. Parents wield great influence in determining their children's self-actualisation (Vrey 1979:43). Physiological needs, security, love and acceptance must be adequately

experienced before self-actualisation can take place. In single-parent families where parents must first deal with their own emotional problems before providing emotional stability for the children, children's potential to self-actualise may be impaired due to possible feelings of neglect, trauma and insecurity after the separation.

v) Identity

Identity is composed of

- i) individuals' evaluated conception of themselves in certain roles, situations, and so on,
- ii) the stability and continuity of the attributes by which they know themselves, and
- iii) the congruence between individuals' evaluations of conceptions of themselves and those of the people they esteem.

vi) Self-Concept

The self-concept comprises three mutually dependent components: identity, action and self-esteem. Vrey (1979:95) defines the self-concept as "a configuration of convictions concerning oneself and attitudes toward oneself that is dynamic and of which one normally is aware or may become aware". While identifying themselves with others, children form a self-concept which is the focal point of relationships in their life world. A positive self-concept is important for self-actualisation (Vrey 1979:45). After marital disruption children's self-concept can be adversely affected as many children feel guilty, angry and abandoned. According to Rosenthal et al. (1980:75), after parental separation, children's self-concepts are influenced by the love, understanding, real concern and affection displayed by the parent and the children's perception of this love.

Because these categories are essential to the formation of an identity, it is necessary that they be included in a programme aimed at helping parents and children realistically evaluate their situation and so effectively come to terms with their identity in their new situation.

### **1.2.3 Formulation of the problem**

The problem of the study is to ascertain whether a programme with special emphasis on identity formation may be made available and effective for use in support groups for divorced single-parent families.

A support group programme based on relational theory may assist single-parent families to improve interpersonal relationships and form new identities realistically.

The identity of single parents is of paramount importance in contributing to ongoing family stability and the mental health of the children. It is also important to note whether parents see themselves as defective or unworthy as a consequence of their single state.

Parents' perceptions of their children are significant; for example, are the children viewed as burdens who interfere with the pursuit of pleasure or a career?

Effective parenting demands that children are perceived as individuals in their own right (Klebanow 1976:42). Where the single parent's identity is diffused as a result of the marital disruption, this results in low self-esteem which is then transmitted to the children.

This is especially damaging to children who lack a buffer in the other parent (Klebanow 1976:42).

The person children identify with may influence their identities. Many children in a maritally disrupted home are the subjects of the parents' unresolved feelings about the absent parent. Children who are identified with the other parent are in most cases subjected to ridicule, blame and rejection (Kelly and Wallerstein 1976:53).

Since relational theory is used as the theoretical model for the design of a support group programme, its effectiveness and usefulness must be evaluated.

Unavailability after the marital disruption results in identity crises and personality disorders in children. These children therefore need a type of a support system to enable them to come to terms with their new identities. They maintain that the more support provided for single-parent families, the less the likelihood that these families will live through a period of disturbance, quarrelling or relationship problems.

It was also observed that the self-concepts of parents and children were affected in relation to the level of conflict experienced in maritally disrupted families. Conflict and parental unhappiness were found to be detrimental to children's personal and social adjustment (Harper and Ryder 1986:18).

Cashion (1982:78) found that support groups can provide ideas, suggestions and encouragement and can thus negate the pessimism and stigma associated with loss of identity and consequent low self-esteem in single-parent families.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Studies consulted support the view that marital disruption may result in personality disorders in adults and children that may be related to low self-concepts. These in turn may be due to unrealistic identities that are formed during and after the disruption of the marriage.

It is also fairly clear that while support is needed for the optimal adjustment of the families following a divorce, a suitable programme is not yet available to assist single-parent families to overcome emotional problems that may be affecting their identity formation. Unrealistic identities may lead to a low self-concept and the inability to relate significantly to people and situations.

As a result, the statement of the problem may thus be formulated:

- i) How do the emotional problems experienced by single-parent families affect their identity formation?
  
- (ii) What are the factors that influence the self-concept of single parents and their children after marital disruption?

- (iii) What type of intervention programmes are available for single-parent families and how effective are these programmes?
- (iv) Would a programme based on relational theory be possible for use as a support system for single-parent families?
- (v) Are the relational theory categories (of involvement, experience, significant attribution, self-actualisation, identity and self-concept) relevant aspects to consider for identity formation in single-parent families?
- (vi) Is there a connection between the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families and the formation of new identities?

#### 1.4 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The provision and implementation of an available, relevant and effective programme for single-parent families and based on relational theory is considered throughout the investigation, with the following aims.

##### 1.4.1 **General aims**

To design and develop a support group programme based on relational theory for divorced single-parent families to assist these family members to self-actualise.

## 1.4.2 Specific aims

1.4.2.1 *To ascertain whether the quality of interpersonal relationships is relevant to identity formation in single-parent families.*

1.4.2.2 *To ascertain whether the (emotional) problems experienced by single-parent families are related to their identity formation.*

1.4.2.3 *To evaluate the use of relational theory as a theoretical model for the design of a support group programme.*

1.4.2.4 *To evaluate the therapeutic effect on single-parent families of a support group programme based on relational theory.*

## 1.5 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The following concepts need to be clearly defined as they are used throughout the study.

### 1.5.1 **The Relational Theory perspective**

Relational theory is concerned primarily with the participants in the educational situation, namely, the child as a learner and the adult as an educator. It focuses on the perceptible, descriptive and experimental elements in a real situation, which is the developing child as a person with inherent needs, possibilities and limitations in his or her specific world (Vrey 1979:5). To achieve a well-adjusted state, individuals must develop healthy relationships in terms of themselves and their lifeworlds. Relational theory is guided by the principles

of significance attribution, involvement, experience, self-concept and self-actualisation (to ensure that the individuals needing assistance derive the best possible support) and guidelines based on this theory includes the stages of awareness, exploration, personalisation and change initiation.

### **1.5.2 Support groups**

The term "support group" implies that a group of people sharing a common problem come together to offer the individuals in the group reciprocal help and support with the aim of solving the problem (Eloff 1986:72).

### **1.5.3 Identity formation**

Individuals are continually forming identities. This intrapsychic activity is usually unconscious. This process involves becoming aware of an image and finally attributing personal meaning to the image. Individuals become aware of this image (for example, a single-parent child) through their attribution of meaning to, involvement in and experience of the situation (for example, marital disruption). Individuals' identities are evaluated on the basis of opinions and attitudes towards themselves of the people in their life world and on the meaning they attribute to their successes and failures. By personalising the evaluation of a particular identity, individuals develop a realistic high or low self-concept with regard to this particular identity which results in appropriate or inappropriate behaviour (Visser and Petrick 1989:24-126).

### **1.5.4 Single-parent families**

A single parent could be an unwed father or mother or a parent who has been widowed,

divorced, separated or deserted. The single-parent household most commonly comes about as a result of death, desertion, separation, divorce or the illegitimate birth of a child.

The greatest contributing factor to the rapidly increasing growth of families headed by a single mother is the increased incidence of divorce or separation. The high rate of divorce and the large number of people living in single-parent families demand the attention of a family life educator. For this reason divorced single-parent families were the focus of this study.

#### 1.6 METHOD OF RESEARCH

This study is aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and assisting single-parent families to form new identities realistically after the marital disruption. For this reason the nature of this research is highly sensitive and emotionally charged. The investigator decided to use the idiographic method of research, entailing interviews, questionnaires and a support group programme following a literature study. The participants were Indian primary school children and their parents. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect information concerning family background, interpersonal relationships, parental interest, emotional security, coping skills, role strain, role reversal, identity conflicts, availability and use of support systems and the nature of the transition from an intact to a single-parent family lifestyle.

#### 1.7 RESEARCH PROGRAMME

CHAPTER ONE provides an introduction, awareness, exploration and formulation of the problem, the statement of the problem and the aims of the research. This chapter also defines key concepts and the explains the research technique considered for the study.

CHAPTER TWO reviews relevant literature on various aspects related to single-parent families, with special reference to interpersonal relationships, emotional problems and the effect of marital disruption on their identities.

CHAPTER THREE is concerned with the availability, effectiveness, relevance and use of support systems for single-parent families. Relational theory is reviewed for possible use in a support group programme for single-parent families.

CHAPTER FOUR discusses the research design and the support group programme which was developed.

CHAPTER FIVE includes the results of the pre and posttest interviews and the report and findings on the support group programme for the three groups (one parent group and two children's groups).

CHAPTER SIX contains the findings of the study, conclusions, recommendations, implications for educational policies and suggestions for future research.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### **MARITAL DISRUPTION AND IDENTITY FORMATION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

A primary function parents perform is to provide an atmosphere of safety and security for their children. This atmosphere serves as a protective shield during their course of development. Sometimes, however, parents are unable to provide this atmosphere of safety and forces from within or outside the family prevail to breach the protective shield, - for example, the separation or loss of a parent. Thus in instances of death, illness, divorce or other kinds of parental loss, children may experience a traumatic disappointment in the adored parent and the childlike notion that the parents will always be together, or that at least one parent will always be available to serve as a protector is shattered (Rosenberg 1980: 140).

In this chapter, the investigator explores the literature concerning the effects of marital disruption on the identities of single-parent families. Well-documented research (by Hetherington, 1989; Kelly and Wallerstein, 1979; Cantrell, 1986; Glenwick and Mowrey, 1986; Johnson and Campbell, 1988; Johnston, 1990; Wanat, 1993; Jackson, 1994; Goldberg, Greenburger and Hamill, 1992) reveals the importance of viewing divorce as a major transition in the lives of both parents (custodial and non-custodial) and children, involving a sequence of experiences frequently characterised by disequilibrium, disorganisation and readjustment, rather than as a single event. The literature review examines the transition to a single-parent household, its effects on the relationships between parents (custodial and non-custodial), parent and child, child and peers, parent

and community and child and self. In this respect, relational theory becomes relevant when viewing the development and process of becoming in single-parent children with special emphasis on their reactions and readjustment after divorce. The literature review also highlights the importance of forming new identities after marital disruption and the effects of this disruption on interpersonal relationships and consequently on identity formation.

## 2.2 MARITAL DISRUPTION

Theus (1978: 364-365) notes that marriage creates a new social unit, and the identity and care of the children depend upon the maintenance of that social unit. While increasing numbers of families are disrupted by divorce, no adequate social provision has been made for the security and identity of children of broken marriages. Adults' preoccupation with their own problems during separation may mean that their children are neglected, or even rejected, if they are seen to identify with the rejected partner. Children may be used as pawns, with one parent using them to punish the other or to bolster a faltering ego. Furthermore, divorce can undermine children's security, and the turmoil preceding divorce can be even more damaging. There is evidence that parental conflict also complicates personality development in children. For example, when the mother deprecates the father, the son has difficulty in achieving appropriate masculine identification.

Rosenthal and Hansen (1980: 75-77) add that after divorce or separation single parents face many stressors which may affect family relationships. Among others, parents are expected to satisfy the family's emotional needs and motivate family members to achieve at school. In many cases single-parent families tend to be more disorganised in the year following the divorce or separation, and show a lack of consistency in discipline and a

failure on the part of parents to communicate adequately with their children. Children's feelings of powerlessness about the divorce are exaggerated and feelings of loneliness and sadness often result. This in turn fosters insecurity and results in an identity crisis.

Many newly divorced women with children encounter new problems such as a lower income, more work responsibilities, loneliness, grief, guilt and the stigma which society attaches to divorce (Bray and Anderson 1984: 102). These writers add that surveys conducted through various mental health services indicate that as single parents, women have higher levels of anxiety and are more depressed than any other marital status group, with the result that they lack confidence and regard themselves as unworthy in their new role as a single parent (Bray and Anderson 1984: 102).

To adjust emotionally after divorce is a difficult task. Porter and Chatelain (1981: 518) believe that only when parents learn to admit their feelings can they learn to cope with them. They further find that some single parents blame themselves for the divorce and so experience guilt. There is also the danger of single parents using children as a channel for emotional release and for venting their anger and frustrations, with traumatic effects on the children. Both parents and children experience loss and are unable to adjust to new roles without some form of support.

Children's affective experience of divorce, often resulting in anxiety, may have a resounding impact on their life after the event. Anxiety has perhaps more detrimental consequences in a single-parent home environment than in intact families where both the parents are available to provide emotional support (Fry and Grover 1983: 361). Many

children experience shock, anger and depression and may blame others for their problems. Most commonly, changes in their behaviour at school seem to be manifestations of vaguely experienced anger and feelings of grief, loss and emptiness (McDermott 1968: 1427). Misinformation or misunderstanding regarding the real cause and effects of the separation frequently results in emotional insecurity and loss of self-esteem is usually one of the first things suffered by children of divorced parents (Kitty 1984: 25). For this reason it is important for custodial parents to resolve their personal problems and nurture a state of well-being. Only then can they function effectively in the new role of a single parent and help their children resolve these problems (Wolf and Stein 1982: 7).

Divorce ruptures the relationship between husband and wife and its impact on their children depends on how well parents keep such disruptions from affecting other relationships within the family network (Hess and Camara 1979: 83). These researchers also found that conflict between parents results in a state of emotional disequilibrium. High levels of parental discord may keep children constantly depressed and confused and make it difficult for them to organise their perceptions of their new role or reality (of being a single-parent child). A close relationship with both parents increases children's confidence that the conflict does not involve them and that the primary bond with each parent will not be lost. This reduces an unhealthy preoccupation with the divorce, enabling children to pay attention to social and school-related activities.

According to Hess and Camara (1979: 83-84), divorce has the following implications for familial relationships:

- \* the family relationships that emerge after the divorce affect children more than the divorce itself;
- \* children's relationships with their parents are more important for good adjustment than the level of discord between parents;
- \* children's relationships with the father are separate from but equally as important to their well-being as their relationship with the mother.

Gehring, Wentzel, Feldman and Munson (1990: 294) found many parental and sibling conflicts within single-parent families and the focus of the conflicts included issues of autonomy, discipline, parent-child interaction and chores. They suggested that there should be a systematic identification of conflict in single-parent families and a development of interventions to address family conflicts with the goal of preventing future adjustment problems for single-parent children.

It is therefore evident that marital disruption not only affects parents, but influences the development of single-parent children, their reactions and adjustments, and their interpersonal relationships. The following sections examine these aspects in more detail.

### **2.2.1 Effect of marital disruption on the development of single-parent children**

According to Freud (as cited by Stuart and Edwin, 1981: 223) children between the ages of six and twelve enter a developmental stage that Freud refers to as latency. This stage is divided into the early latent (six to eight) and the later latent stage (nine to twelve).

Stuart and Edwin (1981: 223) state that this is usually a quiet period for children when all their efforts can be focused without distraction on learning, on moving towards

independence from their families and on forming their identity and self-concept. Free from emotional and psychological conflicts, these children are beginning to reason and even engage in abstract thinking. Parents are strong role models and they are regarded as the purveyors of what are becoming their own attitudes and social ideals. Children base much of their growing self-concepts on their approval or disapproval. Divorce during early latency can therefore be harsh. These children have developed a sense of family and a love of and trust in their family unit begins to emerge. With divorce, their fears escalate and children feel as if their very survival is threatened by the divorce as the loss of one parent implies the loss of the other (Franke 1983: 99).

According to Kalter (1990: 161-163), children in the later latent stage have gained some capacity for abstract thinking which permits them to conceptualise alternative future realities beyond their concrete perceptions and experiences. They develop clear coherent fantasies of 'what could happen'. For children whose parents divorce, frightening fantasies of being abandoned by the remaining custodial parent or of parents being hurt as a result of their rage at one another are more likely to arise. These fantasies burden children and heighten their distress over divorce. Advances in cognitive development make physical joint custody arrangements more viable than they are for younger children and the ability to anticipate when they will be with each parent allows children to adapt more readily to a schedule of moving back and forth between two households. However, they are by no means fully adept in their capacity for abstract thought, and the complex legal, interpersonal and emotional repercussions of divorce are still beyond their grasp. The tendency to develop egocentric causal explanations is still notably present, and children may easily come to believe that they are the cause of divorce-related events. Children still

depend a great deal on parents for feelings of safety, security and positive self-esteem. They need an internal base consistent with their image of a stable home in order to continue to feel confidently independent. When this mental image of a dependable family home base is disrupted by divorce, children are likely to experience a disturbance in their overall sense of well-being. Their efforts in the wider world of school and interaction with peers can therefore be undermined.

Kalter (1990: 163) also believes that boys consolidate their masculine identity through regular ongoing interactions with their fathers, sharing their interests and participating in activities with them. Girls also use this relationship to further their own development; although they identify with the mother, they look to the father for acceptance and validation of their femininity. When parents divorce, these valuable developmentally progressive characteristics of the father-child relationship may be lost or unavailable, and children's self-esteem may be damaged.

According to Sarnoff (1971) as cited by Stuart and Edwin (1981: 225) children in the early latent stage are old enough to understand some of the changes caused by their parents' separation. For example, they are able to understand that the parents intend to remain divorced forever. However, such understanding does not prevent academic achievement being affected and the development of appropriate peer relationships being harmed. The importance of the developmental tasks of this age group, the consolidation of previous stages and developing peer relationships with a less self-centred orientation all support the importance of the latent stage to development and several theorists have emphasised the importance of stability in the lives of children (Stuart and Edwin 1981: 225).

Children aged  $\pm 6$  to  $\pm 8$  years do not have the capacity to understand their parents' needs as separate from their own. The most striking response by these children to divorce is pervasive sadness and loss. Some parents find the sense of loss and pain so overwhelming that they avoid their children in an attempt to reduce the sense of loss. Since children's identities remain connected in some way with the father, abandonment by or lack of bonding with him is harmful to their self-esteem. Children tend to identify with each parent and are unable to gauge a parent's culpability in divorce without a personal loss of self-esteem.

The primary psychosocial task for children in this age group (6 to 8 years) is achievement. Magrab (1978: 234) states that the development of various intellectual, academic and physical skills and the motivation to master them is a dominant concern during this period. Children are already beginning to preoccupy themselves both psychologically, emotionally and socially with situations involving people outside the family. Because divorce interferes with children's ability to focus their attention outside of the family and into school and peer relationships, it can interfere with the development of a healthy self-concept. Rubin, Price and James (1979: 553) also stress that divorce focuses the attention of these children on the home, making it difficult to attend to the tasks of growth and autonomy which characterise this stage of development. Divorce at this age is most critical because children are old enough to realise what is going on but too young to have acquired the skills necessary to deal with it. According to a study by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976), one year after divorce children still experience difficulties brought on by the changes in their lives and many still struggle with the task of integrating divorce-related changes. These children also exhibit poorer performance and withdraw from school.

Franke (1983: 68) mentions the following psychological effects of divorce on the development of children in the latent stage. The early years (from the first to third grade, i.e. 6-8 years) are full of transition. Children now begin to enjoy relationships and daily experiences more fully. They can no longer count on being loved and appreciated simply on the basis of who they are within their family unit; acceptance and approval by peers now depends increasingly on performance in the classroom and in social situations. Consequently, these years herald the start of a quest for mastery in different areas, and are for most children pleasant and often treasured as relatively carefree, serene and happy. When divorce occurs during this rather idyllic period in children's lives, it can affect their ability to be happy and their sense of well-being. For this reason, this is probably the worst time for a child to experience divorce because not only are they lacking in the cognitive skills needed to deal with it, but also the emotional maturity.

Franke (1983: 68) also states that the cognitive development of children in the later latent stage (9 to 12 years) reaches a point where they can achieve a realistic understanding of divorce events. This is a period of transition from early childhood to adolescence, bringing an enhanced psychological maturity and a greater complexity to their experience of divorce. This is manifested in two ways. Firstly, children of this age are prone to developing internal conflicts over their perceptions and reactions to divorce. Secondly, they are burdened by frightening fantasies and self-blaming beliefs. Wishful thinking and personal concerns may, however, compete with a developing sense of interpersonal relationships. This forms the basis for internal conflicts. An example is the impulse to align with one parent against the other, which is at odds with children's need to be equally

loving towards each parent. The resultant feelings of divided loyalties become especially painful as one or both parents attempt to enlist the child on "their side".

According to Kalter (1990: 241-243) children also exhibit complexity in their reactions to divorce in their use of more elaborate psychological defences against experiencing emotional distress. These defences are invoked automatically and protect children from becoming aware of potentially upsetting feelings. Internal conflicts and complicated sequences of defences take on lives of their own which can be removed from the external sources of stress. This makes it difficult to discern links between the realistic environmental stresses of divorce and children's observable reactions to them, and often makes it harder for adults to understand and empathise with children's underlying anguish. They frequently convert painful feelings of helplessness and sadness to anger.

Kalter (1990: 243) also found that parental warfare and the loss (partial or complete) of the parent-child relationship usually negatively affects children's self-esteem. Whereas normally a close and comfortable relationship with the father enhances the self-esteem of children, now they experience an identity crisis which is difficult to resolve without support of some kind. Their complex psychological reaction to divorce frequently disguises the fact that they are struggling with painful feelings about their parents' divorce.

Bishop and Ingersoll (1989: 25-26) assert that individual identity has its roots in family unity. Even though children of divorced parents are often separated from their family members, they can maintain contact with them in fantasy if not in reality. Family ties and family continuity have an important effect on the psychological development of children.

There is a positive correlation between disrupted family lines and phenomena such as emotional and psychological upheaval. Because of divorce, children's perceptions of other people in relation to themselves could be negatively influenced. This may result in a withdrawal from socialising, culminating in loneliness. Children of divorced parents often feel that they are stigmatised and so feel uneasy and inadequate among their peers, resulting in a low self-concept.

Stuart and Edwin (1981: 223-227) find that children in this age group (9 - 12 years) are capable of empathy for other children who experience similar problems. The ability to understand the perspective of parents, which begins to develop in the concrete operational stage, leads children to be concerned about the pain parents experience. This concern leads to parent identification where parent and child reverse roles. The pattern of using children to unload the pain and loneliness begins and children are given increased family responsibilities. They then become confused about the various roles they have to assume and this results in an identity crisis. Since the child identifies with both parents, continuing parental conflict that includes character devaluations is likely to substantially reduce self-esteem.

Burns (1980: 161) points out that while parents have the greatest impact in assisting children in their development, children's relationships with their peers become increasingly more important as they enter the latent stage. Children increasingly seek clarification of their identity through their peer group. Concepts of self are developed or reaffirmed in children's efforts to gain a place in the group and in an attempt to achieve some degree of

recognition from peers. The peer group is a strong prescriber of behaviour during this stage, providing a milieu in which an identity may be formed.

Parents may consciously or unconsciously resent their children for restricting chances of remarriage and dating, providing additional unwanted responsibilities and necessitating contact with the former partner. Even if parents do not verbalise these resentments and frustrations, children are likely to sense them, contributing to feelings of low self-worth (Bloom - Fleshbach and Bloom Fleshbach 1987: 94). When psychological problems are present, feelings of low self-worth and inadequacy are further likely to arise. Guilt, too, induces feelings of lowered self-worth. Children may attempt to turn hostility away from a parent and direct it toward themselves by believing that they are responsible for the discord and subsequent separation and divorce. Such inward directing of anger may cause depression and associated disparagement which results in a loss of self-esteem. Children who play one parent off against the other in an attempt to win favour may also suffer guilt and feelings of disloyalty, which generally lower feelings of self-worth. Self-loathing is significantly related to poor self-appraisal (Gardiner 1979: 218).

Many factors contribute to children's psychological development. When a parent physically leaves the home, children lose one of the two people who provide them with a constant mirror of themselves, their ideas and behaviour. Opportunities for evaluating themselves through the parent's eyes are dramatically reduced once he or she leaves the household. The remaining parent is now busier and probably more stressed and anxious than before, so the children's other constant mirror is also somewhat changed. Thus many of these children's daily mistakes, failures and discouragement have to be interpreted by children

alone and in this way they may gain false notions about who they really are and what abilities they possess. Fears of being rejected or abandoned by a parent further lower self-esteem (Franke 1983: 87).

Fuller (1989: 11-12) believes that children's cognitive, emotional, psychological and social development is affected by interpersonal relationships and experiences with parents. Dramatic changes in the spousal relationship brought about by marital discord and separation therefore disturbs children's overall sense of family. They experience further trauma in the loss of harmony in the household due to parental strife, the loss of a particular quality in the parent-child relationship when a parent becomes distraught, the partial or complete loss of a relationship with the parent who moves out of the home and the partial loss of a close relationship with the custodial parent who increases her work efforts, becomes involved in other relationships or remarries. Together with the egocentric belief that they are responsible for causing the divorce, these issues batter children's self-esteem and their sense of identity depends on how they encode, interpret and experience the dissolution of the family.

The following section examines the reaction of children in the latent stage of development in terms of the different relationships in single-parent families.

### **2.2.2 Reactions in terms of different relationships**

Soehner, Zastowny, Hammond and Taylor (1988: 35) found that the process of separation and divorce has been associated with increased risk of family members to a variety of physical and emotional disorders. An investigation of a population of recently divorced

people indicated that marital dissolutions produced an unusual degree of stress in their lives and left them feeling unhappy most of the time. Parents are not alone in their experiences of distress associated with marital disruption. Children also experience distress as the family undergoes the transition to a single-parent family. Reactions noted in the research include feelings of humiliation, embarrassment, regression, grief, withdrawal and behavioural problems. Stereotypes associated with children of single-parent families can create a stigma and directly affect children's self-esteem causing expectations that children from single-parent households are not properly disciplined, are confused and more likely to get into trouble. During and after marital disruption, single parents are likely to experience depression, grief reactions, ill-health, and loss of self-esteem. Children are likely to react with a wide range of feelings including fear, confusion, embarrassment, guilt, depression and anger (Soehner et al. 1988: 35).

Parental conflict negatively affects children's adjustment to divorce. Soehner et al. (1988: 35) state that vast majority of children wish to maintain relationships with both parents. Criticism of the other partner by both parents leads to dissonance, questioning and often a harsh revision of children's perceptions of previously idealised parents. When the mother is hostile and critical of the father, children begin to view him in a more ambivalent or negative manner and he becomes a less acceptable role model. This affects children's perceptions of themselves as well, and as a result they evaluate their new identity as single-parent children unrealistically and negatively.

Green (1981: 250) found that, in an intact family, a loving, competent or well-adjusted parent can help counteract the effects of a rejecting, incompetent, emotionally unstable

parent, serving as a protective buffer between this parent and the child. In a single-parent family, the other parent is not available to mitigate the deliterious behaviours of the custodial parent. Thus both constructive and harmful behaviours of the mother are channelled more directly onto the child, and the quality of the mother-child relationship is more directly reflected in the adjustment of the child than it is in an intact family.

#### *2.2.2.1 Parents' reactions*

According to Glenwick and Mowrey (1986: 57-58) single parents may need to share their feelings on a wide range of personal issues, such as bitterness towards ex-spouses and frustrations due to the numerous additional burdens thrust upon them, financial concerns and social isolation. Single parents may rely on their children for emotional support and for the fulfillment of the role and functions of the absent parent. In this way children find themselves in a sort of pseudo-adulthood for which they are not prepared. Single parents may not even be aware of the many pressures they place on their children. Children are then caught in a tense no-win situation: they are pressured to assume the role of the absent spouse yet are punished for behaving like the spouse. This results in a identity crisis with children feeling confused about their role in the new lifestyle.

Parents typically react to divorce with denial of the reality of divorce and their feelings. This denial is followed by feelings of anger, sadness, vulnerability, guilt, shame, embarrassment, betrayal and resentment. Although anger seems to be predominant, other emotions, including a loss of faith, trust, security, self-worth and interpersonal and self-identity concerns are experienced (Glenwick and Mowrey 1986: 57-58).

Gravett, Rogers, Cosby and Thompson (1987: 69) add that many single parents find this transition period difficult and experience conflict in choosing a new role as either provider or caregiver to their children, wanting both to provide well for their children and yet be a good parent. Most single parents recognise the duality inherent in the provider-caregiver role. Many of them seek to enhance their role as provider by pursuing higher education, with the result that these efforts strain the caregiving role by limiting time spent with their children. Many single parents experience role strain when they take jobs in which their role as provider intrudes into the caregiving role, fail to be assertive in the workplace, give children major responsibilities at very early ages and deny their own feelings and those of their children in order to prevent value conflicts. These parents risk stress and damaged self-esteem.

A study by Jackson (1994: 36-40) examined the role strain of divorced single-parent mothers and their interaction with their children. It was found that the role strain affected the single-parent mothers' relationship with their children in terms of limited time spent in parent-child interactions and the distribution of added responsibilities to the children.

Role strain in single parents reveals higher levels of conflict, tension, and strain because they are solely responsible for both the roles of provider and caregiver; and this is especially true in the case of working single parents (Mahler 1989: 179).

Goldberg et al. (1992: 313) conducted a research regarding the role demands of divorced single-parent mothers and noted the following; depression appeared to be more closely allied with the stability and resources in single-parent mothers' lives, role strain was

experienced due to the time and energy demands of work and the level of support available. The study revealed that single mothers experience conflict between roles, strain within roles and a generalized role overload and this situation affected the psychological well-being of both mothers and children. Feelings of depression and helplessness are very acute (especially after the first two years following the divorce) and parent-child relations undergo strain during this time. The available network of support included workplace support, friend and kin support and support from neighbours.

#### *2.2.2.2 Children's reactions*

According to Bonkowski, Bequette and Boomhower (1984: 219) during the divorce process children lose their identity as members of an intact family. Divorce often affects children's ability to focus attention outside the family. Their identity and self-esteem is closely tied to the family, especially the parents. Researchers have indicated a need for an intervention programme to assist these children to improve their relationships with peers, relatives or parents.

Richards and Schmiede (1993: 278) noted that various research on single-parent children reveal that the children, suffered depression and emotional distress (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1985), exhibited behavioural and learning difficulties in school (Astone and McLanahan, 1991), may be forced to take on adult responsibilities at an early age (Glenwick and Mowrey, 1986) and have difficulty in forming meaningful and lasting relationships (Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989). Researchers have noted that an effective co-parental alliance after divorce is vital to the well-being of children but difficult to develop (Ambert, 1989). This study also examined the problems relating to role and task

overload and found that role strain affected the single-parent families' interactional relationships.

Du Plessis (1989: 36-39) studied the reactions of children of divorced parents and made the following observations. When parents announce their divorce, children's trust in their parents and the family as a centre of safety is deeply shaken. They fear that their needs may not be provided for and that life will never be the same again. Since children are egocentric, questions that appear selfish are uppermost in their minds. They worry that their father will forget them once he moves out and that their mother might also leave them. The father's absence can be experienced as rejection and so children may feel that they do not deserve love. While some children might take sides during parental conflict, others become lonely and withdrawn because of their inability to deal with the situation. Children may become more aggressive, aggravating a situation by alienating themselves from their peers and so accentuating loneliness. Children who feel responsible for their parents' divorce experience feelings of guilt since they relate their behaviour to the failure of the marriage. When parents' marriages disintegrate, the children's belief and faith in human relationships takes a severe blow. They lose their grip on reality and become confused about how to deal with the situation. They experience loss of faith and trust in their parents, loss of the pre-divorce mother-child relationship, loss of the pre-divorce father and loss of environmental supports (due to moving house, changing schools, etcetera).

Few children of divorced families see both parents daily, so grief from parental loss does occur, especially as the reality of divorce and the resulting absence of one parent sinks in.

Conley (1981: 43) states that, working through their sadness, helplessness and depression, children slowly come to the bitter realisation that the happy memories of the past will never recur with both parents. Furthermore, in mourning the absent parent and lacking cohesive family experiences, children suddenly become confused about life aims; they see life goals fading and ego ideals diminish. They feel guilty, thinking that maybe if they had been better behaved their parents would not have divorced. They also hope that they will get back together again. Often children feel that if they behave badly the custodial parent will "divorce" them too. If children perceive a further lack of parental attention, they may blame themselves rather than identifying this as a shortcoming in the absent parent. Many children, especially those in the later latent stage (9 - 12 years), are ashamed of their parents' divorce. Suddenly these children feel that they are different and possibly less socially acceptable than children from intact families. This shame occurs most particularly when divorce has resulted from embarrassing parental behaviour, such as alcoholism, infidelity or emotional instability.

Schoyer (1980: 3-5) found that even though children may continue to live with their mother, they lose her in the sense that their relationship changes dramatically. The mother is faced with role overload, isolation, increased responsibilities and emotional disequilibrium. Consequently, her behaviour towards and interaction with her children is erratic and inconsistent. Children are often terribly confused by these changes. A further loss encountered is that of the role model provided by the father. He may or may not be available and children must learn to deal with his ambivalence. Changes in or loss of a self-image presents emotional, cognitive and moral problems for children. On the emotional level, children's identification processes are disrupted. They may be afraid to identify with

or maintain an emotional closeness with the absent parent. They may idealise one parent and reject the other. On a cognitive level, children experience an unrealistic sense of guilt about their responsibility for the divorce. For young children, thought often equals action, and they may feel that they caused the parent to leave or that they are being punished for wishing (in a moment of anger) that the parent would die. On a moral level, children experience anxiety and fear that they will also be abandoned.

Pardek and Pardek (1987: 110-111) studied the reactions of children of divorced parents and make the following observations:

- \* feelings of guilt, anger and hostility are fostered because of changes in family structure;
- \* children experience a diminished sense of belonging which results from confusion, a divided sense of allegiance and a sense of being pushed or pulled by parents;
- \* loss of security, inducing real and imaginary fears related to family breakdown, is encountered;
- \* the family's loss of income may adversely affect children's physical needs;
- \* often children are angry with their parents for the breakup and may even blame themselves;
- \* children of single-parent families may have to assume increased responsibilities at home because of their custodial parent's employment;
- \* children living in blended or remarried families experience problems in the lack of clear roles, their unrealistic expectations and conflict and rivalry among step-siblings.

For children the threat of divorce lies in the disruption of relationships with their parents. Disruption of these primary bonds interferes with children's developmental progress and presents cognitive and emotional problems that may persist long after adjustments have been made in the routine of daily life (Hess & Camara 1979: 84). The isolation that single-parent families experience affects both parents and children. Parents' often tenuous hold on child management, coupled with an awareness of the child's vulnerability, create uncertainty on how best to deal with children's distress. Children who feel abandoned by one parent often choose to suppress their own fury and frustration rather than gamble with their parent's love. The stigma associated with a certain family structure is also related to children's low self-esteem; and as a result children are easily labelled as "problems" even when problems do not exist. Both single parents and children experience an identity crisis (Bray and Anderson 1984: 103).

McDermott (1968: 1427) notes that children in one-parent homes exhibit low self-esteem and a negative self-concept. In some children, regression and disorganisation are more severe. These children experience divorce not as a stress in itself but as a trigger to long-standing preceding disturbances in ego development. The most severely affected of these children tend to lose their personal belongings and wander around aimlessly, crying, bored, detached and disillusioned. These reactions indicate a loss of identity.

Berg and Kelly (1979: 363) believe that children often blame themselves for failing to keep the parents together and feel that they are on the verge of being orphaned. They have known a life with two parents, both of whom shared in providing for their physical and emotional needs. They now live with only one parent, whom they feel may also abandon

them. They are often ashamed of their parents' divorce and become self-conscious. These various emotional problems suggest that children of divorce may well suffer from a loss of personal worth or identity.

Wolf and Stein (1982: 29) noted that some parents do not know how to deal with children's reactions. Increased distraction, inattention, sleeplessness and withdrawal are some outward signs that indicate children's inner trauma. Parents find it difficult to find ways of helping their children to cope with emotional problems while they themselves struggle with their own often painful adjustments. Sometimes both parents and children may be too troubled to make the emotional adjustment without skilled professional help. Both parents and children need to evaluate their new lifestyle confidently.

The magazine Newsweek (cited by Brown 1980: 540) discusses some of the painful and damaging aspects of a family breakup for youngsters. These include a deep sense of loss, feelings of vulnerability in the face of forces beyond one's control, a conflict of loyalties, a lifestyle modified by financial straits, removal from familiar surroundings and temporary neglect by troubled parents. Educators need to be aware of these problems and of children's responses, which differ with age. The magazine also indicates that parental attitudes seem to be the most important factor in children's adjustment to divorce. Children who are able to maintain stable relationships with both parents are better able to adjust to their new identity as a single-parent child.

Preoccupied with their own distress and efforts to cope with divorce, many parents are less sensitive to their children's trauma and have little energy to deal with its manifestations.

Moreover, many mothers who work full-time are physically less available. Many children feel that they have nowhere to turn to for support, creating a loneliness that is at times overwhelming (Kelly & Wallerstein 1979: 51-58). Children need to be reassured that their parents still love them and are still parents despite the divorce. The fear of abandonment is reflected when young children cling to parents or teachers. Some of these children are acutely depressed and show it through restlessness, deep sighing, concentration difficulties, severe narrowing of their interests and creativity and various physical complaints (Kelly and Wallerstein 1976: 51-58).

Dissent and conflict among siblings is another problem facing single-parent families today (Kelly and Main 1979: 39-47). The presence of siblings in the single-parent family has a direct and significant impact upon the personality development of growing children and their need to define themselves as separate and distinct individuals. Children need to establish some special mark of distinction to stand out and be different. This process is known "sibling de-identification". The process of determining one's identity suggests a spirit of competition between siblings, possibly for the attention and responses of parents who are the prime dispensers of affection, attention and physical reserve .

Ritty, Fredericks and Rasinki (1991: 604) examined the role of the school in dealing effectively with divorced single-parent children. They noted that educators must be sensitive and perceptive when relating to these children because their attitude can influence the child's achievement.

#### 2.2.2.2.1 Children in the early latency stage

According to Simmons (1983:7) differences in children's responses to parental separation remains a central issue in the research literature. Research concludes that it is impossible to generalise about the psychological effects of divorce on children as a whole, since the psychodynamics of the family prior to the divorce, including the severity of marital discord, the nature of the marital breakup, children's age or stage of development of the time of divorce are all variable. Furthermore, the outcome must be evaluated according to both immediate and long term effects.

Although children in the early latent phase have begun to develop relationships beyond the home, the family is still an important source of security. Kelly and Wallerstein (1979:20-32) found that disruption of the family is experienced as an acute sense of loss. Typically, children in this age group experience pervasive sadness. With an incompletely developed cognitive ability to understand and organise their feelings, they reason that what happened between their parents could easily happen to them, a fear that persists even with professional intervention. They experience conflicts of loyalty and an intense wish to reconcile their parents.

Cantrell (1986:163) noted that another intense response of children during this developmental stage is a yearning for the non-custodial parent. Some children feel abandoned and rejected by the absent parent and exhibit behaviours similar to those involved when grieving a parent's death. When parents try to force them to choose sides, some children express a feeling of being physically torn apart which causes considerable pain. Children's anger at this stage is expressed towards teachers, friends and siblings.

Franke (1983: 68) found that some children find it very difficult to talk about their feelings. In the volatile climate of divorce, children may repress the churning emotions that threaten to provoke some of their parents' less desirable reactions. Custodial parents who are depressed or emotionally unstable are most likely to pressure children to assume unrealistic roles, for example, as the "man in the house" or the little homemaker. Children who must assume too many responsibilities too soon experience anxiety and feel neglected and angry that they are not cared for as their friends are. Household jobs assigned to children should be chosen to help children feel more competent and important in order to boost their self-esteem. Responsibilities beyond their capabilities ensure failure or frustration, making children feel inadequate and incompetent. Children also experience deprivation which is symptomatic of the anxiety they feel about the impermanence and inadequacy of their family support systems. All they see around them is the loss of a parent, of parental attention and of a secure future.

Kalter (1990: 15) believes that children's sense of helplessness and lowered self-esteem is heightened by the fact that they cannot prevent the divorce from happening. Anger, fear, betrayal and a deep sense of deprivation are characteristic responses of children of this age. They tend to channel their anger into every aspect of their lives but cannot effectively stem their feelings of shame, resentment, rejection, loneliness and eventual exhaustion. They readily use anger as a defence against their shock and depression and do not hesitate to communicate this to both parents. They often side with one parent to almost complete exclusion of the other. Their anger spills over in the classroom where their behaviour becomes disruptive.

Anger can be expressed in direct, physical fighting with peers or siblings or in bitter verbal aggression directed at one or both parents. Anger can also be displayed in quieter, more subtle ways, such as somatic complaints, most commonly headaches and stomach aches. These conditions can persist for days with no underlying medical cause. This defence is automatically triggered in order to protect children against feeling anger or to attract the attention of a non-custodial father or emotionally unavailable custodial mother (Kalter 1990: 15).

Spenser and Markstrom-Adams (1990: 305) also noted that many children exhibit hostility towards the departed parent, although they may suppress their resentment if unable to assert themselves in dealing with their anger. They then feel dissatisfied with themselves because of these pent-up resentments. Although spared the anticipated consequences of expressing their anger, the resultant depression and associated self-loathing cause an even greater loss of self-esteem.

Another problem that children must deal with when parents divorce is the feeling that they somehow caused the problem by their bad behaviour (Manfredi 1977: 19-20). They might have overheard their parents arguing about them, they might have misbehaved in some way the day that they are told of the divorce, they might have wished a parent away in a moment of anger. There are numerous reasons that might lead children to believe that they are responsible for the breakup of their home. Even when parents make it a point to inform themselves of the potential problems their children might face and do everything they can to ease their children's guilt, it takes constant, consistent reassurance from both parents over a long period of time for children to believe that they are in fact not

responsible for their parents' breakup. The combination of resentment and guilt forms an emotional cyclone. Children experience feelings of hostility and resentment against both the parent who left and the one who "stayed but let it happen". In addition, they feel tremendous guilt for such terrible but uncontrollable thoughts. The worry that they caused the divorce renews the fear of abandonment which in turn increases feelings of hostility, and so the cycle goes on until children are enmeshed in a resentment/guilt trap with no way out. Unfortunately parents also experience emotional turmoil created by the divorce and are in a bad position to cope effectively with their children's problems (Manfredi 1977: 19-20).

Patten-Seward (1984: 152) studied the reactions of children in this stage after divorce and their findings closely support the conclusions drawn by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976). Reactions were identified in children during the early latent stage and are described below.

- \* The most striking response is grief which is expressed in bouts of crying and sobbing for no apparent reason.
- \* Children may blame themselves as the cause for the divorce and suffer much guilt during this egocentric stage of development.
- \* They feel frightened by the collapse of the families.
- \* Poor school performance contributes to children's lowered self-esteem and self-image.
- \* Children yearn for the departed parent.
- \* Conflicting loyalties tear children between their parents.

#### 2.2.2.2.2 Children in the later latency stage

Although children in this stage ( $\pm 9$  to  $\pm 11$  years) are engaged in a broad range of outside independent activities, the family continues to provide an important source of stability. Simmons (1983:10) found that separation is a distressing event which diverts their attention from these activities. Although they are more in control of their responses to separation than younger children, they nevertheless experience a sense of shame and conflicting loyalties, and worry about what each parent might think of them. Intense anger is characteristic of this group who still struggles with the apparent inconsistency of feeling both anger and love for parents.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1976: 256-260) report that children of this age cope using denial, avoidance, courage and activity, and also seek support from others. It is therefore imperative that schools provide empathetic, informed support personnel to help these children.

Wanat (1993: 428) examined the role of the school in meeting the needs of the single-parent children who are between the ages of nine to twelve years. She concluded that these children needed a form of counselling programme to come to terms with their conflicting emotions and related problems.

Cantrell (1986: 164) found that children in this age group have the capacity to understand a complex reality; however, they struggle to deal with their conflicting feelings and to make sense of the disorder in which they find themselves. Their feelings include loss, rejection, helplessness, fear, loneliness and anger. Some children also feel ashamed and

embarrassed about the divorce and use denial as a way of dealing with their anguish. They experience intense anger which is well organised and clearly directed toward the parent whom they blame for the divorce. Siding with one parent often assists children in dealing with the ambivalent relationship with both parents. In addition, viewing one parent as 'good' and the other as 'bad' helps children to cope with feelings of loneliness, sadness and depression. Powerlessness is yet another feeling experienced, children feel unable to control their parents' decision to divorce. Because this feeling is so overwhelming, many children throw themselves into vigorous activities as a way of coping with this perceived helplessness. Children's identities are so closely tied to the external family structure that many children experience identity confusion. Threats to their identity also occur because of a sense of right and wrong which leads children to interpret their parents' divorce as immoral and irresponsible.

Hetherington (1989:98) noted that children during the later latent stage (+ 9 to + 12) seem to display more behavioural difficulties than younger children and adolescents. School counsellors, teachers and other school personnel have observed various behavioural manifestations which include poor concentration, verbal outbursts, physical aggression, withdrawal and inferior school work. Many children launch a one-man campaign to stop the divorce and try to make the custodial parent feel guilty. This anger is also directed towards the non-custodial parent, making visits unpleasant. As a result visits stop and children feel angrier.

Franke (1983: 82) found that children who are emotionally vulnerable may be used as pawns by parents, fostering an unhealthy parent-child relationship termed "alignment" by

Wallerstein and Kelly (1976). Children can be persuaded to think that the parent with whom they are aligned is the good parent while the other is the bad parent. Both parents and children who form these alignments are psychologically unstable, greatly distressed and highly vulnerable. A sad result of alignment is the damage it can do to the excluded parent whose self-esteem may be shaky after the divorce. Often this parent earnestly tries to establish a positive post-divorce relationship with his or her children, who are unable to view him or her outside of the distorted and hostile perspective of their alignment.

Children of this age may be hustled into premature adulthood by busy, tired or depressed single parents. Tessman (1978: 35) stated that although they appear to cope under an adult workload, they are still children and this is reflected in a recurrence of separation anxiety. They are not equipped to face life without the security and provision of a parent. Pre-adolescent children need parental guidance and the security of discipline, boundaries and rules to live by; they need parents to model themselves on and both parents to know and understand them in a meaningful way. They also need to know both of their parents really well. All this would enable them to form a new identity as a single-parent child.

Adults who depend excessively on their children for emotional support may cause children to feel guilty about leaving them in order to pursue their own interests. In a sort of role reversal with the parent, children lay aside age-appropriate activities to tend to their hurting parent. This makes it very hard for children to achieve the developmental task of breaking with childhood and surging towards the teen years. The emancipation from parents is difficult because of the emotional burden of 'parenting' their parents. They may feel torn and resentful when they realise that this is not meant to be their role. Furthermore,

this situation may make it almost impossible to make the necessary break from their overly dependant parent during adolescence, which will also affect this important transition (Tessman 1978: 35).

Children in the later latent stage of development typically react in the following manner:

- \* Children consciously experience intense anger.
- \* They often engage in vigorous activities.
- \* They experience a shaken sense of identity.
- \* Children are persuaded to align themselves with one parent.
- \* They perform poorly at school.

From the foregoing literature review on the reaction of single-parent families to marital disruption it is evident that interpersonal relationships, and therefore identities which are formed in these relationships, are affected. Section 2.2.3 examines the readjustment and transition of families after divorce or separation and reviews the specific phases that various theorists have identified.

### **2.2.3 Readjustment in terms of different relationships**

Houser, Daniels, D'Andrea and Konstam (1993: 18) found that the interactional quality of family relationships affects the single-parent children's adjustment after divorce or separation. The adjustment problems experienced by these children include lower academic performance, depression, anxiety, aggression and other psychological problems. Several investigators have attempted to determine whether it is the single-parent family

structure that contributes to such problematic outcomes for children in single-parent families or some other variable (Borrine, Handal, Brown and Searight, 1991; Dancy and Handal, 1984 and Flenelling and Bauman, 1990). Bayrakal and Teresa (1990:4) found that children in single-parent families displayed significantly more adjustment problems compared to those in intact families.

Marital dissolution has legal, social and emotional consequences for single-parent families. According to Green (1981: 250) interpersonal relationships undergo obvious changes as a result of divorce. Mothers, for example, lose the identity associated with their married status; and frequently feel estranged from family and friends. The emotional effects of divorce vary but are frequently characterised by a see-saw pattern of extreme highs and lows (especially of self-esteem). They tend to range from anger, bitterness, depression and anxiety to euphoria, relief and elation with the newly-found freedom and independence.

#### *2.2.3.1 Parents' readjustment*

Single-parent mothers must deal with both their own and their children's emotional needs, and feel the burden of being alone in this respect. Children react with depression and sadness over the breakup, fear concerning future instability and disruption, guilt at having caused the divorce and anger at both parents for disrupting their lives. These changes are overwhelming as they not only concern a personal identity, but also extend to adjustments in their family identity. Children must now adjust to the concept of being part of a single-parent family establishing a new lifestyle. For many this is a very difficult task. It is clear that the adjustment correlates highly with the degree to which the single parent is able to cope in establishing a sense of personal security and satisfaction. Parents' adjustment to

a new lifestyle includes dealing with many other crucial issues, such as achieving economic and financial stability and security, establishing supportive personal relationships and learning coping skills (Green 1981: 250).

Keshet, Finkelstein and Rosenthal (1978: 15-16) conducted research on the adjustment of the non-custodial single parent (usually the father) after the divorce according to various stages. The period immediately following the marital breakup is one of severe stress during which people typically experience depression, sadness, anger, loneliness, anxiety and severe and frequent mood changes. At the same time, they most commonly experience guilt as the overwhelming emotion regarding their children. The anxiety they experience is multifold, and involves the fear of losing their status (identity) within the family as a source of self-definition, of being criticised by their ex-spouse, of being rejected by their children and of losing the roots, structure and continuity provided by family life. The fear of being rejected by one's children stems from feelings of guilt and inadequacy as a parent. All these things result in an identity crisis. Developing new priorities to make time for parenting appears to be difficult for most separated and divorced fathers because they had always expected to live their lives within a nuclear family. The greatest difficulty for many single-parent fathers lies in dealing with their children's emotional needs. The similarity between the sense of loss experienced by father and children creates new opportunities for increased emotional attachment. After the marital disruption, the father feels rejected by the family and regards himself as a failure. The boundaries between his own needs and the needs of his children become blurred. Unfamiliar and emotionally exhausting as the experience of divorce proves to be, combining empathy with a sense of increased

responsibilities proves to be a first step towards accepting their new roles in the new life of single parenthood.

Openshaw and Thomas (1986: 260) noted in their research that in the traditional parent-child relationship, children learn from their parents. In single-parent families, however, fathers learn their new role from their children. At the beginning of the transition from married parent to single parent, individuals are likely to become dependent on their children's reactions to their behaviour, giving their children a kind of authority over them. Parents constantly re-evaluate their performance on the basis of the children's responses, and any sign of dissatisfaction on their part is regarded as a personal rejection and as proof of their inadequacy as a parent. It is through their children's reactions that parents are able to define their roles, and are indeed their only source of self-esteem. Several studies have investigated the effect of the transition to single-parent family status on the self-concept and self-esteem of family members. The findings reveal a relationship between parental conflict, role reversals, role strain and social stigmatisation and the individual's self-esteem (Openshaw and Thomas 1986: 260).

According to Jackson (1994: 39) the transitions elicited by separation and divorce require parents to make a number of changes, including the reorganisation of perceptions of the self, new roles and identities, new relationships and the tasks of daily living. Preoccupation with these changes influences parents' involvement with their children. Empirical evidence shows that parents are less available, less affectionate and are erratic and inconsistent in their parental roles during the post-divorce period. Kelly and Berg (1978: 49) also noted that as marital discord increases, the capacity of parents to provide guidance, support and

active involvement for children may be restricted as priorities shift away from conjoint executive, nurturing and guidance functions to coping with increased strain in the marital system. Children also may find it difficult to maintain a positive relationship with both parents and may see themselves as responsible for the discord. All these factors make the transition to a new lifestyle more difficult.

Richards and Schmiede (1993: 278) found that the need for a human support network is greatest during the period of heightened distress which is usual before, during and after a separation. The format of a support group includes an emphasis on providing information on issues ranging from practical approaches to problems associated with living without a spouse to compassionate descriptions of various emotional reactions people can expect to experience from the time of separation or loss until divorcees reorient themselves toward new or resumed life goals. Many single parents define themselves as misunderstood, betrayed, stigmatised and even personally flawed and unworthy. Many single parents feel socially isolated and further complicates the transition to single parenthood.

Richards and Schmiede (1993:284) recommend that support groups need to focus on the sharing of family strengths. A mentoring programme should also be established, with experienced single parents providing assistance and support to new single-parents to assist in the transition to single parenthood.

#### 2.2.3.2 *Children's readjustment*

Divorce in the lives of children must be viewed as a sequence of experiences in a transition

(Hetherington 1981: 851). This transition involves a shift from the family situation before divorce to the disequilibrium and disorganisation associated with this separation or divorce, through a period when family members experiment with a variety of coping mechanisms. This is followed by reorganisation and eventual attainment of a new pattern and equilibrium in a single-parent household. Although divorce may be the best solution for a destructive family relationship, almost all children experience the transition as painful. It is usually not until after the first year following divorce that tension is reduced and an increased sense of well-being begins to emerge.

Hetherington (1981:852) points out further that although most children can cope with and adapt to the short-term crisis of divorce, unless they are able to cope with factors such as changes in their life situations, the loss of a parent, the marital discord and family disorganisation, alterations in parent-child relationships and other real or fantasised threats to their well-being, within a few years. If the crisis is compounded by multiple stresses and continued adversity, developmental disruptions may occur. Children must deal with alterations in support systems; the availability of the custodial parent; the absence of one significant adult to participate in decision making and who serves as a model or disciplinarian; increased responsibility for household tasks and childcare; and finally, changes in family functioning due to the continued stresses associated with practical problems of living. Long-term adjustment depends on sustained conditions associated with the quality of life in a household headed by a single parent. Children's adjustment varies according to their developmental status, and the experience of divorce differs qualitatively for children of varying ages (Hetherington 1981: 851-852).

Marital transition and reorganisation in the family has been found to have marked effects on family functions and various aspects of child development, including self-esteem (Ganon and Coleman 1985; Hetherington, Cox and Cox 1978, 1982 and Wallerstein and Kelly 1980) as cited by Pasley and Healow (1986: 263).

For children of  $\pm 9$  to  $\pm 12$  years, this is a salient period of identity formation when the effects of variations in the family structure and family processes on self-concept and self-esteem are particularly apparent (Pasley and Healow 1986: 263). This period of development is characterised by heightened self-awareness, an intense preoccupation with one's imagined evaluation by others and comparisons of oneself with others. In this way self-evaluation is closely linked to self-esteem. Children who hold confident pictures of themselves develop a sense of identity more readily than children who have confused and ambiguous self-concepts. Because of the development of identity and the individual's need to develop positive self-esteem, children are particularly vulnerable to changes in family functioning and organisation at this time. (Pasley and Healow 1986: 263).

Children seem best able to cope with distress caused by separation when other meaningful relationships remain undisrupted (Tessman 1978: 35). When grandparents, other relatives and friends are available, they may fulfil a helpful role. Social isolation and stigmatisation creates a rent in the support network which may disastrously lower the self-esteem of both parents and children. How families experience separation is affected not only by the quality of the previous parental relationship and the developmental stage of the children, but varies according to the meaning children attribute to the loss of this relationship. The

meaning of loss has a major impact on whether children view themselves as useless and blameworthy or as worthwhile and still a potential source of joy to themselves and others.

Numerous studies identify particular phases of readjustment after divorce which are discussed in section 2.2.3.3.

### *2.2.3.3 Phases of readjustment according to different theorists*

Schiff (1985: 36-37) identifies three stages encountered by divorced families. In stage one (orientation), the changes brought about by divorce are not integrated into children's lifestyles but are blocked out until they are ready to deal with them. It is at this stage that changes in school performance, confusion, lack of initiative and lack of comprehension of the new lifestyle become apparent. During stage two (integration) children confront the situation. Anger, sadness and depression may surface here and the realities of the divorce become paramount in children's lives. In stage three (consolidation) children learn effective ways of coping and reinvesting in daily life.

Studies by Shapiro and Wallace (1987) and Morawetz and Walker (1984) identify four phases in the post-divorce period. The first phase occurs during the aftermath of divorce and is a time of intense emotion, confusion and pain in which children's assumptions about the stability of their world can be deeply shaken. The custodial parent (usually the mother) may be temporarily unable to provide adequate nurturing and then children fear abandonment. The second phase, realignment, is often a stormy period when families accept major undesirable changes, such as a decline in family income, the children's reduced access to both parents and a changed social life. In the third phase, re-

establishment of social life, family members adapt to their new status. Children learn to live without one parent or to move between two households. Parents learn to communicate with each other in their common parental role, or to get along without each other. Finally, during the fourth phase, separation, parent and child separate as children move on to lives of their own, confident that their parents have their own lives in hand and can manage without them.

Kalter (1990: 7-19) establishes three stages of divorce: the immediate crisis stage, the short-term aftermath and the long-term period. Each stage is discussed in detail.

i) The immediate crisis stage

The first stage of the divorce process begins as parents separate and file a petition for divorce. Children realise that the conflict or emotional distance between their parents is not merely a normal part of family life that will continue indefinitely. Changes in the household now become apparent as one parent leaves and children begin to sense that their lives are to be altered dramatically. For children in the latent stage, this is initially a time of shock and disbelief. Even if children have witnessed a high degree of parental conflict prior to the decision to divorce, they are nearly universally surprised, frightened and saddened by the knowledge that divorce will occur. The implicit unspoken assumption that the family will always be together is shattered. Conflict between parents is one of the most serious stressors children encounter during the immediate crisis of parental divorce. Feelings of rejection and bitterness of both spouses elicit the common and automatic self-protective response of anger. Wounded pride and self-esteem results in an almost reflexive impulse to vent anger on the source of the pain. The usual sensitivity to their children's

needs temporarily disappears in the maelstrom of anger. The intensity of these expressed feelings is highly disturbing to youngsters of all ages. In addition to impassioned outbursts, children witness subtler attempts by their parents to demean and derogate one another.

While many divorces are characterised by unpleasant confrontations, a few parents approach their divorce in a friendly manner. Mutual respect and caring are still very much in evidence. While this "friendly" divorce may be enormously reassuring to youngsters, it poses another more subtle problem. For many children it becomes more difficult to understand the need for a divorce, and they harbour futile hopes for reconciliation and a fully reunited family. A moderate level of conflict between parents is surprisingly helpful in enabling children to come to terms with the reality and finality of their parents' divorce. The first stage of the divorce process is usually psychologically painful for one or both parents. Regardless of how much a couple wants a divorce and believes it is essential to their personal well-being, it is one of the most socially, emotionally and financially debilitating experiences.

Divorce requires each person to carve out a new identity as a divorced, unpartnered adult after years of functioning as a member of a couple. The transition to the new identity and lifestyle is confusing, unsettling and downright frightening. The parent who feels responsible for the divorce often experiences guilt and remorse along with relief, while the one who feels rejected must grapple with a sense of being unlovable and unworthy. The first stage of divorce has been identified as a period of diminished parenting capabilities. Social isolation, loneliness, irritability, depression and anxiety collectively threaten to

overwhelm even a psychologically well-adjusted parent. It is difficult to be attentive, caring, tolerant and empathic in the face of these emotional pressures.

Parent and children find the transition to the new family status (single-parent household) difficult and struggle even more to form positive new identities. Now both parents and children have to deal with different identities and evaluate each other accordingly and realistically. Parents' new identities include being an employee, sole parent (if other parent is unavailable), caregiver, provider, etcetera.

ii) The short-term aftermath stage

This phase usually lasts for up to two years after the immediate crisis has passed. The turmoil and shock of the first stage gives way to a deepening recognition of the realities of divorce. Conflict and hostility between parents continues to be common and serious sources of stress for children. Children are usually drawn into this conflict as allies or go-betweens.

It is not unusual for hurt, angry parents to turn to their children for help in this ongoing war. Many parents try to justify their position in the divorce to their children and in doing so burden them with private, adult aspects of divorce. The other parent's drinking, sexual activities, insensitivity or other shortcomings are presented to children as evidence for self-vindication. Lonely parents turn to children as sources of emotional support and comfort, allowing, for example, their children to sleep in their beds, stating that the children are lonely or frightened. In nearly every instance this is merely the rationalisation for the parent's own unconscious wish to feel especially close to a child and relieve his or her own

feelings of loss and isolation. Though children may enjoy these sleeping arrangements, they may interfere with the achievement of the developmental stage of independence in youngsters who need to acquire a firmer sense of independence, autonomy and competence by being able to manage this sort of separation from parents. Letting children share the bed with the parent exhibits a vote of no confidence in children's ability to be on their own, and can affect their relationships at school and with friends. Children are also given more responsibilities in preparing meals, babysitting, doing the laundry and general housekeeping. The child in effect becomes parent-like at the very time of their lives when it is developmentally appropriate to loosen emotional ties with parents in favour of building and consolidating peer relationships and exploring the possibilities of the world beyond the home. Parents often start dating during this phase of divorce, and children fear losing this special parent-child relationship. The obvious pleasure parents take in a new dating partner threatens children's sense of their importance to that parent. Grandparents, friends, religious affiliations, parent support groups and individual counselling are resources many parents and children find helpful during this difficult stage.

iii) The long-term period

This phase usually begins two or three years after the initial separation. A major stressor for children in the long-term phase of the divorce process is continued hostility between their parents. Protracted, bitter conflict, rather than representing a reaction to the understandable pain and general distress associated with the earlier phases of the divorce process, is nearly always indicative of a serious problem in accepting the finality of the divorce. This situation is frequently instigated by one parent who is unable to let go of the relationship, and bitterness marked by feelings of self-justification and a desire to punish

the ex-spouse emerges. More recently, divorce-related parent warfare seems to result in increasingly dangerous actions, such as kidnapping and false accusations of child abuse. Children who are faced with ongoing serious conflicts between their parents at this stage of divorce risk developing emotional and behavioural disorders.

When custodial mothers take a part-time or full-time live-in partner they change the interpersonal dynamics of the entire household. The children are aware that she has a serious commitment to another adult; they observe her displays of affection towards the partner and worry about their own welfare. Children often resent their mother's live-in partner because he is a threat to a cherished if unspoken hope that their mother and father will reconcile their differences and get back together. If the partner is likeable and caring, children experience conflict about being disloyal to their father for enjoying his company. If he is too distant and unfriendly, children feel rejected by him and excluded from the relationship between their mother and the partner.

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985: 479-481) state that in the first year following divorce, both divorced mothers and fathers feel more anxious, depressed, angry, rejected and incompetent. Perhaps because he left home and suffered the trauma of separation from his children, the divorced father seems to undergo greater initial changes in self-concept than the mother, although the effects generally last longer in the mother. The continued presence of children and a familiar home setting gives mothers a sense of continuity that fathers lack. Mothers complain most often of feeling physically unattractive, having lost the status and identity associated with being a married woman, and of a general feeling of helplessness. Fathers complain of not knowing who they are, of being rootless and of

having no structure or home in their lives. The separation induces great feelings of loss, previously unrecognised, dependency needs, guilt, anxiety and depression. Changes in self-concept and identity problems are greatest in parents who are older or who had been married longer. One of the most marked changes in divorced parents in the first year following divorce is a decline in feelings of competence. They feel they have failed as parents and spouses and express doubts about their ability to adjust well in any future marriages.

According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1977: 4-22), the reorganisation, readjustment and transition after divorce for single-parent families is challenging for all the family members. Certainly children's adjustment within the family is a major influence on their capacity to successfully navigate this tricky phase. Factors like unresolved conflict, qualified support or non-support for the children, and continued deprivation or exploitation of the children are formative in this respect. Nevertheless, it is ultimately children's personal handling of the situation which enables them to effectively adapt to a new situation. There is no particular recipe for dictating a successful outcome for any child. Each situation requires separate scrutiny and understanding of the child and depends on children's efforts on their own behalf.

Wallerstein (1977: 23-37) and her colleague formulated three psychological steps that children follow after divorce.

(i) Acknowledging the reality of the marital dissolution

Children have to understand the family and household changes that ensue, separate from

the frightening fantasies which have been evoked in their mind. Divorce elicits vivid and terrifying fantasies of parental abandonment and disaster triggered by parental conflict and by the departure of one partner from the home. Children's fear of being overwhelmed by intense feelings of sorrow, anger, rejection and yearning further block acknowledgement of the family rupture. The powerful need to deny reality and so avoid these terrifying thoughts and feelings is greatly strengthened by the comfort derived from fantasising. Difficulty arises in separating reality from fantasy and anxiety and regression may result.

(ii) Disengaging from parental conflict

Children have to resume customary activities and school and peer relationships. Interest in learning and appropriate recreational activities is impaired by the family crisis. Children need to establish and maintain a psychological distance and separation from the parents and disengage from parental distress and conflict with little or no help from parents. They need to take appropriate steps to safeguard their individual identity and separate life course.

(iii) Resolution of loss

Divorce results in many losses, the most central of which is the partial or total loss of one parent from the family. Other aspects include the loss of a familiar daily routine, of the continuity of an intact family, the protective physical presence of two parents, and the loss of a higher standard of living which could occur if the family has to move away to another place. Children are expected to overcome their profound sense of rejection, humiliation, unlovability and powerlessness. Many children fail to negotiate this step and feel trapped for many years by their inability to renounce the vain hope that the absent parent will return, despite the knowledge that this is unlikely to occur. Many children who experience

rejection by one parent seemed unable to master their sense of unworthiness which results in a poor self-image and an identity crisis.

According to Rubin, Price and James (1979: 553), denial needs to be worked through with activities such as role playing, fantasy, sentence completion and general catharsis. Children need assistance in understanding the sources of their anger and expressing it in acceptable and productive ways. During a stage known as the bargaining phase, obsessive attempts at bringing the parents together or arbitrating between parents is common. During this phase, children must come to understand that they have no responsibility for or control in the parental situation. Children should be focused on their ability to affect their own life and emphasis placed on their self-worth and their personal responsibility for their behaviour. Feelings of helplessness usually result in depression. Children need to verbalise emotions and be reassured that their sadness and grief is normal but temporary. By the time children reach the acceptance stage, their self-esteem and confidence should have grown to the extent that they are able to hold realistic expectations of their relationships with both parents. Emphasis on communication, interpersonal relationships and self-esteem is essential to enable children to realise their potential and to be able to form satisfying and positive relationships throughout their lives.

Smith and Smith (1981: 412-415) assess four areas of adjustment to the new role of the single parent: supervision and protection of the children, home-making, and meeting the emotional needs of the children. They found that the primary difficulty experienced by single-parent fathers was that, as the result of socialisation in our society where fathers are not expected to participate in child care and nurturing, they had not learnt behaviours

necessary for meeting their children's emotional needs. When interviewed, fathers admitted that they were unable to comply with all the expectations of the new role and so experienced role strain. Fathers reported that the following areas caused stress: child care, household management and time synchronisation of all family members and activities. The greatest role strain reported was fathers' concern about their own performance as single parents in relation to their perceptions of social expectations and role performance levels.

According to Schorr and Moen (1976: 15-18), single fathers are in a markedly different position to single mothers. Changing conceptions of the roles of men and women have led women to seek identities apart from that of wife and mother, and more men see themselves in roles other than wage earner. Nevertheless, it is difficult for fathers to adjust their working hours to meet the needs of their children. Unfortunately, many single fathers who are especially vulnerable after the trauma of divorce accept and believe society's conviction that they are unable to care for their children. They blame themselves for their perceived incapacities, adding to existing insecurities about financial responsibility, judgement, concern about their children and their own self-worth.

Several studies have investigated the effect of the transition to single-parent family status on self-concept and self-esteem. Findings reveal a relationship between the parental conflict, role reversals, role strain and social stigmatisation and the individual's self-esteem (Openshaw and Thomas 1986: 260).

Berg and Kelly (1979:369) noted that during the period of heightened distress which is usual before, during and after the parting of parents, the need for a human support

network is greatest. The format of support groups includes emphasis on providing information about issues ranging from the many practical problems associated with living without one's spouse to compassionate descriptions of various emotional reactions one can expect in oneself, from the time of separation or loss until one begins to orient oneself toward new or resumed life goals. Many single parents define themselves as misunderstood, betrayed, stigmatised and perhaps personally flawed and unworthy. Many single parents feel socially stigmatised and isolated which makes the transition to single parenthood even more difficult.

#### **2.2.4 Synthesis**

The interpersonal relationships of single-parent families are adversely affected by marital disruption, and families experience difficulty in forming satisfying and positive relationships during and after marital disruption. This chapter reviews the literature on parent-child relationships (including custodial and non-custodial).

This review of the literature discusses how single parents (both custodial and non-custodial) and children experience the readjustment and transition to a new role. While some have fewer difficulties many are subjected to numerous stressors that prevent a smooth transition after the divorce which may persist for several years after the divorce. Factors which cause or exacerbate a painful adjustment are highlighted, among others, the quality of interpersonal relationships, social stigmatisation, peer pressure, traumatic experiences due to severe stress associated with marital conflict, difficulty in accepting change, role strain, role reversals, and so on.

Many of these problems are related to individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, and consequently affect their self-concept and self-esteem. This then creates a need to form new identities in order to accept the new roles realistically.

Parents' readjustment during the identified stages of divorce may be characterised as follows:

\* Immediate crisis stage

Parents may experience

- severe stress and frequent mood changes
- anger, depression, loneliness, anxiety, guilt (towards children), fear (of being rejected), inadequacy
- difficulty in dealing with children's (emotional) needs
- dependence on children
- diminished parenting capacities
- conflict with the ex-spouse

\* Short-term aftermath stage

During this phase, which lasts for approximately two years after the divorce, parents may experience

- conflict and hostility towards other parent
- reversal of roles and role strain
- loss of self-esteem

\* Long-term period

This period may last for three years, and may be marked by

- continued parental hostility and protracted bitter spousal conflicts
- a decline in feelings of competence
- a need for human support network
- social isolation
- inconsistent parental behaviour.

Children's readjustment (in the early and late latency stages) during and after marital disruption is characterised by the following :

\* Immediate Crisis Stage

Children may experience

- fear of abandonment, yearning for the absent parent, self blame, helplessness, guilt, aggression, hostility and anger towards sibling and parents
- conflict in loyalty between parents (parental alignment)
- sibling rivalry

\* Short-term stage ( $\pm$  2 years)

Problems here include

- continued conflict between parents (child used as a "pawn")
- reversal of roles
- fear of losing a good relationship with both parents is real
- social stigmatisation

- loss of self-esteem
- continued sibling rivalry
- \* Long-term period ( $\pm$  3 years)

#### Children must deal with

- the acknowledgment of the reality of the marital disruption
- the disengagement from parental conflict
- the resolution of loss (of one parent and the previous daily routine)
- role strain and role reversal.

Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 in the literature review indicate ways in which marital disruption may adversely affect identity formation in single-parent families. Evidence for this is discussed in section 2.2.1 in children's development towards adulthood and in families' reactions (section 2.2.2) and readjustment (section 2.2.3) after marital disruption. It therefore becomes necessary to examine the effect of marital disruption on the identities of single-parent and to view its relevance and significance for families.

### 2.3 THE EFFECT OF MARITAL DISRUPTION ON THE IDENTITIES OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

Any experience constitutes a potential threat to an individual's identity (Breakwell 1988: 5). Divorce or separation, with accompanying intense emotions, constitutes a severe threat to the identities of individuals within a single-parent family. Parents and children respond to this threat by re-evaluating and reconstructing their identities.

When analysing the effects of divorce on children, we need to consider how developing children acquire an identity and how divorce may interfere with the process. To this end, their relations to other people and objects must also be considered. The quality of relationships with significant others affects their identities and assists them to adjust to their new roles either realistically or unrealistically.

In the research by Barber and Eccles (1992: 108) particular focus was placed on aspects of family interactions that impact on identity formation. It was noted that parental conflicts have a negative effect on single-parent children especially in respect of their school performance and lowered self-esteem. The role conflict experienced by single-parent mothers affect the quality of family interaction in terms of role reversal and unrealistic distribution of family responsibilities.

The primary task of developing children is to formulate an identity by assessing who they are, determining what kind of person they want to be and then figuring out how they are going to become this person (Erikson 1968:37). According to Erikson (1968), developing children move towards establishing an identity by forming a series of notions about themselves called ego ideals: ways people choose to behave to gain satisfaction from living. The total dependence of children on parents as the source of warmth, food and security provides their first experience of what is desirable in life. They thus form a rudimentary ideal of what they like (comfort, cuddling, being talked to) and what they have to do to get it (cry, smile, etcetera). As children grow older and improve motor and thinking skills, they still depend on their parents to maintain a safe haven, filled with protection and as much love as possible. Children are alert to what pleases and does not

please their parents, and in this way form further ego ideals. It is normal for these ego ideals to imitate parents' behaviour. As children grow older they encounter a wider circle of people (peers, teachers, and relatives) and form additional ego ideals from the behaviour, characteristics and mannerisms of some or all of these people. Parents (or the primary caregiver) continue to remain the greatest influence on the formation of children's ego ideals (Erikson 1968:29-65).

Parents provide an emotionally safe, secure environment which promotes healthy development (Conley 1981:49). In addition, they provide their children with the opportunity to observe how people may approach the world, how they may solve or avoid problems, how they may interact with others and how adults cope with anxiety or depression. Constructing an identity for ideals is called the identification process.

Breger (1974:334) maintains that identification requires the internalisation of emotionally charged relationships. While anxiety can block or prevent change, competence promotes change. Children identify with those they love and admire and model themselves on older siblings or competent friends and parents. Identification with significant others is relatively easily incorporated into an expanding self. However, during and after marital disruption marked by parental conflict where one (usually the non-custodial) parent is devalued and demeaned by the other, children's process of identification is then affected by fear, anxiety, frustration and rage.

After divorce, children's bitterness, loneliness and need for love may be overlooked until they eventually feel unable to identify with those close to them in any meaningful way

(Weinreich 1980: 80). If children deal with traumatic relationships with denial, relegating them to fantasy where they are experienced as happening to someone else, they may then react with passivity and dissociation .

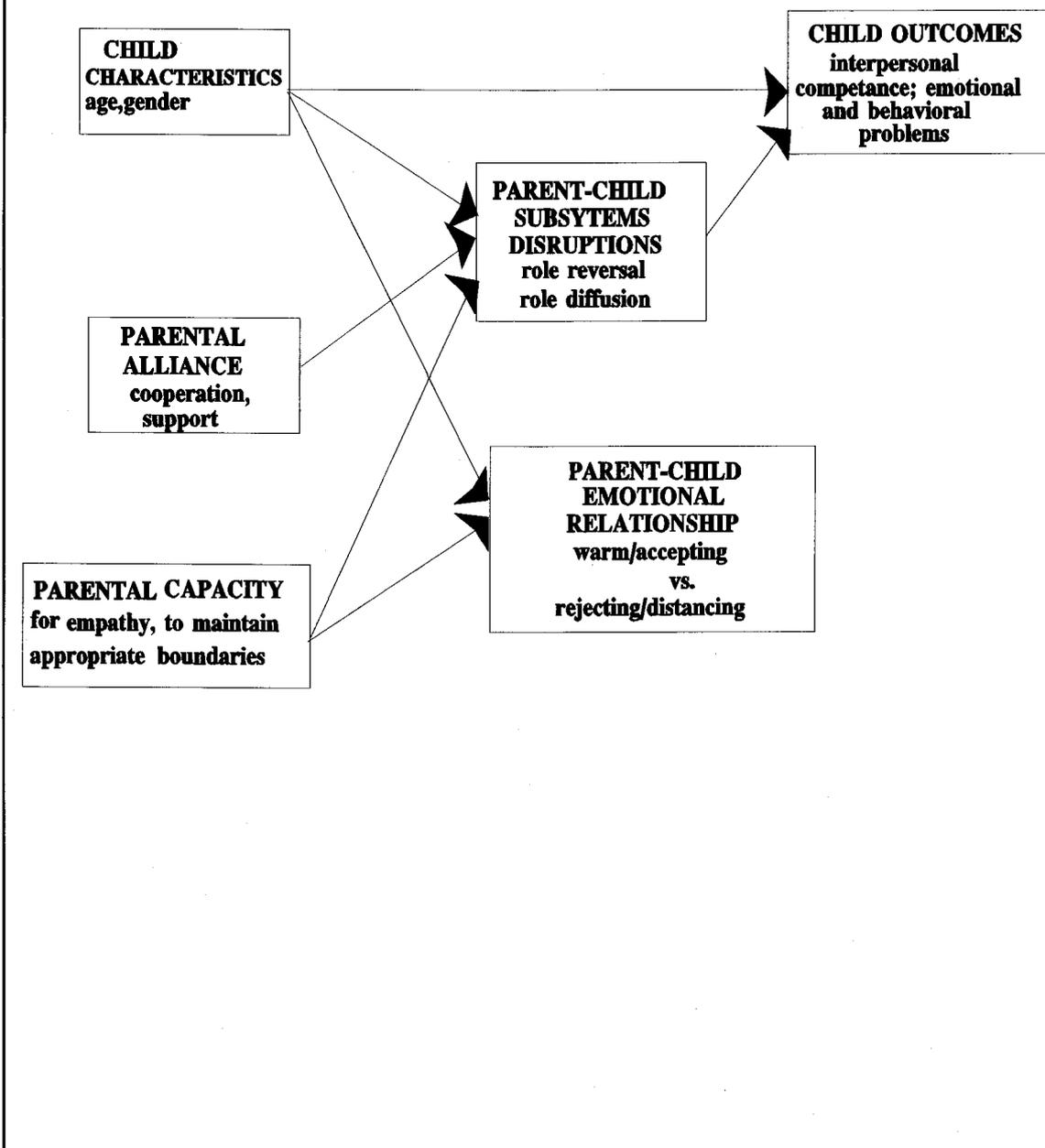
In the absence of a loved attachment figure, children may fantasise by identifying themselves with the imaginary role of the father or mother. This alleviates the anxiety caused by separation to a certain extent; however, this type of identification arouses not only anxiety but also rage, feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. Children feel both love and hate, joy and anger towards their parent. The mixture and intensity of emotions varies with the individuals involved and their particular experiences (Breger 1974: 343).

Wijnberg and Holmes (1992:159-164) examined the ways in which divorced single-parent mothers perceived their own role transitions. They found that some mothers wanted to maintain their pre-divorce roles (mother and caregiver) and regarded being employed as a violation of their primary interests. These parents experienced difficulty in reorganising their family life structure and felt conflicted, despondent and incompetent. Other single-parent mothers wanted to establish new identities and began immediately to restructure the roles in the family to fit their new circumstances. These parents gained a sense of competency as a result of their effectiveness as a breadwinner and decision maker.

The results of this study suggest that the meaning and value a divorced single-parent mother attaches to the mothering component of her role as well as the comfort she feels in accepting a work identity affect the ways in which she adapts to being a single parent.

Johnston (1990:405) found that many children from single-parent families who become enmeshed in parental conflict remain emotionally distressed and manifest stress symptoms and behaviour problems that indicate among others an identity crisis. When the parental alliance breaks down and emotional boundaries are diffused, children may be induced to assume spousal or parental functions. They take on the role of confidante and mentor to a distressed parent, and become parental figures to their siblings. This situation is generally referred to as role reversal. If no-one in the family is able to assume leadership and nurturing functions, the family unit may remain in a state of role diffusion, where both parents and children experience a shaken sense of identity. Inappropriate role reversals can overburden younger, less skillful children who sense that their acceptance by the parent is contingent upon meeting that parent's needs. Children who fail to meet a parent's expectations may be rejected and psychologically abandoned (Johnston 1990:406). The extent to which children reverse roles with a parent and become enmeshed in a parent's distress depends on the children's age and gender and their relationship with the parent. Hence the competence with which children function in role reversal with a parent is reciprocally related to the quality of the emotional relationship between parent and child as illustrated in figure 1 (Johnston 1990:406).

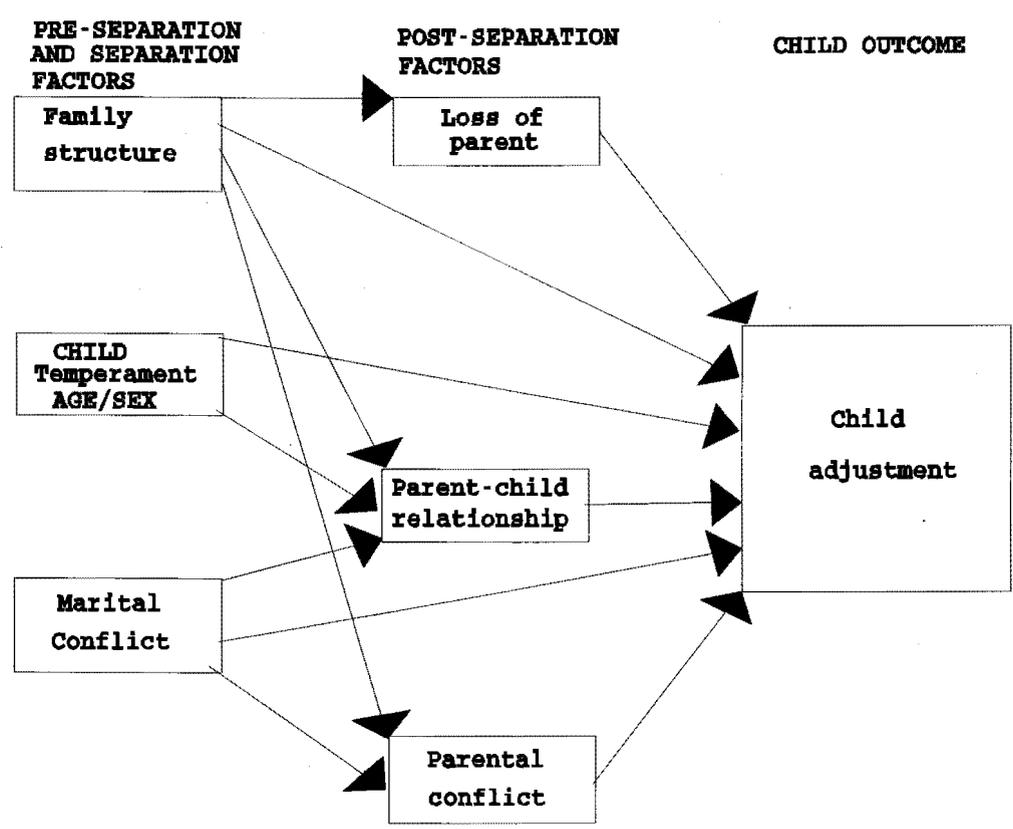
FIGURE 1



During the divorce process children lose their identity as a member of an intact family. Because of their dependency on their parents, young children are unable to escape the turmoil created by extreme changes in the family situation. Parents are either emotionally unavailable or emotionally unable to provide the support and guidance necessary for children to adapt and adjust to a changing environment. Children in the latent stage (6 to 12 years) of development have problems choosing one parent over the other and their fear of antagonising either parent makes open, honest communication threatening, if not impossible. These children are also concerned about the emotional stability of their parents and are less likely to speak freely of their own fear, anger and sadness in order to spare their parents further emotional harm. This affects their ability to form new identities positively. This situation may also result in role reversal and role diffusion as indicated by studies of Johnston and Campbell (1988), Riseman and Park (1988) and Semchuk and Eakin (1989).

Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein (1989) identify the following factors as affecting single-parent families' ability to form sound identities after the divorce or separation: parental discord both before and after the divorce, parental unavailability (emotional and physical) and parent alignment. Children respond differently to these stressful experiences depending on their age, temperament and gender. This is illustrated in figure 2.

**FIGURE 2**



According to Marcia (1989:402), too often divorced parents fail to discuss the effects of the transition from an intact to single-parent family with children, forming yet another barrier to identity formation from within the family. These effects are, among others, changes in new lifestyles, roles, responsibilities, neighbourhood and school, and so on. Society's negative stereotype of single-parent families could explain this reluctance by reflecting a defence strategy on the part of parents that leaves their children exposed to the continuing problem of alienation by members of the society. The lack of adult role models who have achieved a stable identity and the lack of specific support group programmes further create difficulties for these families. There are therefore several factors which complicate the task of identity formation in divorced families.

Morino and McGowan (1976:173) report four major areas that affect single-parent families adversely. Firstly, single parents attempt to assume the role of both parents, which may affect the emotional, psychological and intellectual development of their children. Secondly, financial stress may result in emotional and physical unavailability to children. Thirdly, children may assume increased responsibilities at home because of parents' increased job commitments. These aspects affect children's role development, academic achievement and social development. Similarly, the (custodial) single parent experiences role strain because of added responsibilities and these stressors affect their new identity as a single parent, employee, sole breadwinner, etcetera.

Alessandri (1992:418) noted that single-parent mothers suffer from task overload and have difficulty in dealing with economic problems, job stress and household maintenance and

their emotional and physical unavailability to their children. They are often socially isolated and lack social and emotional support.

The literature has demonstrated how interpersonal relationships in single-parent families are adversely affected by divorce, and the significance of relational theory as a basis for a support group programme is relevant. This theory is therefore discussed in the next section.

## 2.4. RELATIONAL THEORY

### 2.4.1 Definition of the concept "relationship"

Little, Fowler and Coulson (1974: 169) as cited by Sonnekus (1988: 20) define the following:

- \* Relationship : "The state of being related"
- \* Related : "Having relation to, or relationship with, something else... of persons: connected by blood or marriage".
- \* Relation: "The action of relating in word; ... The position which one person holds with respect to another on account of some social or other connection between them; the particular mode in which persons are mutually connected by circumstances ...".

According to Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1993:200) relationship is a particular mode in which persons, things, ideas, self and God are mutually connected. Such

relationships are usually dynamic and interactive and are initiated by the individual through his involvement and the assigning of meaning in his life-world.

Relationship implies an association between two referents and the child is busy throughout life with these associations, giving them meaning and so forming a relationship. Central to such a relationship is understanding - the attribution of significance or meaning through involvement and experience. This relationship, or mutual interaction, can manifest itself in an attraction to or a repulsion of the poles, in an acceptance or a rejection, friendliness or unfriendliness, which draws the two referents together or which drives them apart. Such repulsion or attraction is not always of similar magnitude. Relationship is therefore experienced as pleasant or unpleasant and is then either encouraged or avoided. The poles attract or repel each other. For example: the nature of the relationship between a child and a peer will depend on their knowledge of each other and the psychological distance between them.

The bond formed in a relationship is both cognitive and affective. The two references get to know each other and the relationship should be caring, loving, trusting, accepting (pleasant) relationship or it may be a neglectful, ignoring, distrusting (unpleasant) relationship. From the relationship which the child experiences emanates acceptance or rejection. The nature of the relationship is affective in quality love, care, trust, respect, acceptance, security, rejection, neglect, disinterest - and is demonstrated as pleasant or unpleasant; it is cognitive in quality concerning perception, memory, differentiation, understanding and knowledge. The relationship which a child forms with his parents is

basic to the formation of relationships with others. The child initiates the relationship and its effectiveness depends on the education (Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg, 1993: 201).

#### **2.4.2 Forming of relationships**

Relationships are formed by being involved (involvement), by experiencing (experience) and by attributing meaning to other people, objects and concepts as well as to the self (Kokot 1992:82). A relationship between an individual and an aspect of reality is said to be formed when the individual understands the particular aspect of reality. Understanding comes about when the individual first becomes aware of an aspect of reality, then explores the aspect and finally gives, or attributes, meaning to the aspect. When the meaning is congruent with reality in that the individual has logically and correctly interpreted reality, we say that the meaning attributed is realistic or rational. It is, however, also possible to attribute unrealistic or irrational meaning.

Individuals always experience some feeling when they are interacting with something or someone else. This experience thus constitutes an important component of a relationship and determines the quality of the relationship. This means that individuals evaluate their relationships on the grounds of whether they are experienced positively or negatively. Positive experience is translated into the interaction being evaluated as 'good' and negative experience is translated into the interaction being evaluated as 'bad'.

Another component of a relationship is called involvement. No relationship can be formed unless the individual is involved with the aspect of reality so this component is essential to

the forming of relationships. It also is affected by the experience of the individual, because if the relationship is experienced as 'bad' the individual will not want to be further involved in that relationship. On the other hand, if the relationship is experienced as 'good', the person feels drawn in and will be willing to become further involved.

A fourth component of a relationship, without which a relationship cannot be formed, is action or behaviour. This behavioural aspect of an interpersonal relationship involves a series of interactions between two people and it is these interactions that are experienced by the people in a relationship and to which people attribute meaning.

Three of these components of a relationship, namely the attribution of meaning, involvement and experience, are called the categories of a relationship and in addition to explaining how relationships are formed, they are also used to assess or evaluate a relationship. As such, they are used as criteria to assess the nature and quality of a relationship. For example, to understand children's relationship with a parent, one can investigate how the children are involved in the relationship (little contact, as in the case of a very busy or absent parent; too much contact, as in the case of an overprotective parent), how children experience the relationship (do they have feelings of happiness, security, calm, or feelings of rejection, fear, anger) and what meaning they give to the relationship ("My father loves me because he likes to spend time with me and I love him' or 'My mother rejects me because she does not bother about me or my affairs and she does not love me').

Should the criteria not measure up to what children need in their relationships, it is possible that children in such faulty, or unsound relationships may experience problems (Kokot 1992: 82-83).

Relationships are formed with somebody or something. The poles in a relationship are bound by interdependence (Kelly 1981:31); by reciprocity (Schaffer 1986:106) and by an interaction similar to that between the poles of a magnet (Vrey 1979:22). Moller (1979:17) states: "hierdie dinamiese tweeheid is die grondslag van menswees as menswording". A measure of selectivity in behaviour is present (Duck & Sants 1983:33) as is represented by "the establishment of social bonds to certain specific individuals" (Schaffer 1986:115).

The behaviour of one participant can be determined by the other (Schaffer 1986:109) and the nature of the relationship can be determined by the personality of the individuals and vice versa (Hinde 1979:6).

Constant interaction takes place between individuals and their life world (Vrey 1979:14). Relationships are formed as a result of this interaction between individuals and all the people (including themselves), objects and ideas that make up their world. Individuals who develop and maintain healthy relationships with themselves and their life world are well-adjusted. Conversely, individuals who are unable to form or maintain efficient, sound relationships are maladjusted.

Each child lives in his or her own, unique life world. Children constitute their life world through experience, involvement and the unique meaning they attribute to it "based on the totality of an individual's experience" Vrey (1979: 15). The meaning which children assign to each particular relationship within their life world is therefore also unique and it is evident that the becoming of each particular child must be studied in terms of his or her own unique situation. However, since children cannot function in isolation, they form relationships to satisfy their basic needs, and the emotions experienced and behaviour manifested as a result of interaction within significant relationships indicate the satisfaction or frustration children are experiencing in their relationships.

The components of a relationship, namely attribution of meaning, involvement and experience will be briefly discussed in the next section since they are used as criteria to evaluate a relationship.

#### **2.4.3 Categories of a relationship**

Vrey (1979:28) explains that attribution of meaning, involvement and experience are core categories and essential aspects of relational theory. These three interrelated concepts are the means by which children form relationships and in so doing learn to understand themselves and their world.

Attribution of meaning is explained by Kokot (1988:13) as referring to "the cognitive component of relationships and implies activities such as recognising, knowing and understanding which enables the child to orientate himself in the world and progress along the way to adulthood".

Personal understanding of a situation or relationship allows one to orientate oneself to one's surroundings (Jacobs 1980:26). The cognitive ability of individuals influences the nature and quality of their relation with their surroundings. "The question of the meaning of actions is a matter of interpersonal communication which has to be solved through a focus on interaction and joint effort rather than through isolated reflection or the other's imposition" (Youniss 1980:5).

The discovered logical meaning always implies an emotional experience. Emotional overtones can veil true meaning. This causes anxiety which can have a negative influence on relationships (Sonnekus 1988:34).

"Involvement is characterised by purposeful effort in order to achieve, to overcome obstacles and to solve problems" (Vrey 1979:28). It therefore requires a willingness to become involved in a situation, and reflects the conative dimension of children's process of relationship formation. Wilful, active exploration is manifested in secure children, and withdrawal and avoidance in insecure children.

The intention to act within a relationship implies that the person has been drawn into the relationship and is involved willingly or unwillingly. Psychic vitality is needed within every relationship. Jacobs (1980:28) believes that " 'n innerlike krag, 'n drang, 'n behoefte, 'n hunkering na ontwikkeling, ontplooiing en selfaktualisering" should exist in a relationship. Should the relationship be meaningless to a person he or she will endeavour to disentangle himself or herself from it.

Englert (1957:63,72) stresses the movement of the participants in opposite directions. They are actually involved only for a short time but contact is possible due to the tempo of movement. Although participants part, something of the one remains with the other. Genuine involvement does not imply the actual presence of the relational participant.

Experience defines children's evaluations of a situation. Since each child's evaluation of a situation is unique, the experience will, because of its emotional nature, determine the quality of the relationship.

Raimy (1975:44) states that "spontaneous affective reactions are certainly influenced by cognition and also have cognitive consequences". Emotional factors come into play when people evaluate the circumstances in which they find themselves. Qualitative aspects of a relationship are uniquely personal and play an important role in the continuation or termination of the relationship. Emotions can only be experienced when there is an interaction between relational participants (Jacobs 1980:29).

"Self-actualisation implies a person's deliberate efforts to realise all his latent potential" (Vrey 1979:43). This means that people must know the total person that they are so that they can set realistic goals which they strive to attain by transcending all immediate, seemingly unsurpassable obstacles. Within a bipolar relationship both participants should have scope to actualise themselves or else the longevity of the relationship cannot be assured. Sullivan and Piaget refer to this interpersonal understanding, which comprises the joint establishment of criteria or norms for nurturing the relationship, as social maturity (Youniss 1980:3 as cited by Sonnekus 1988:35).

The significance of relationships for the healthy development or self-actualisation of children is well documented in both theoretical and research studies from various disciplines. Sullivan (1953), La Gaipa (1981) and Vrey (1979), representing the related fields of psychology, sociology and education, have formulated theories showing that children's needs are met within the network of relationships that make up their life world. Psychotherapists recognise that sound relationships are essential for mental health.

#### **2.4.4 Synthesis**

Section 2.3 establishes that the interpersonal relationships of the single-parent families are indeed negatively influenced by divorce, and that families experience role strain and role reversal. It is clear, then, that there is a need to explore identity formation in single-parent families. This can be done by considering the principles of relational theory. Section 2.2.3 discusses the adjustment of single-parent families after marital disruption and its effects on their interpersonal relationships. For this reason, the importance of forming sound positive relationships after the marital disruption and its significance for realistic identity formation must be considered.

Section 2.4.2 - 2.4.3 explored the important components of a relationship clarifying how relationships are formed and how they are used to evaluate a relationship and assess the quality and nature of a relationship.

The next section examines the effects of marital disruption on various relationships, as viewed according to relational theory.

## **2.5 EFFECTS OF MARITAL DISRUPTION ON RELATIONSHIPS (ACCORDING TO RELATIONAL THEORY)**

The personality of individuals is, to a large extent, determined by their involvement in and experience of relationships. In addition, the nature and quality of children's relationships is markedly influenced by the personalities of the participants. Kokot (1988: 16) asserts that if relationships are considered in diagnosis and therapy, a deeper understanding of the nature, contents and dynamics of relationships is necessary.

It is well-documented that single-parent families experience problematic interpersonal relationships after marital disruption. The relationship areas most frequently affected are those with parents, child, the self, peers, work or school and objects and ideas. An examination of these relationships reveals the nature of single parents and their children's emotional problems.

### **2.5.1 Single-parent children's relationships**

Kokot (1988:73) states that "it is important to note that some evidence exists that the presence of a stable parent with whom the child has a good relationship will moderate or even cancel out the otherwise negative effect of a pathological or highly distressed parent. This implies the value of investigating not only those relationships which cause the child distress, but also giving attention to other, positive relationships in the child's support system which may be used to compensate for irreversibly negative relationships".

The relationships that are important to the child and, therefore, probably important for the child, change markedly as he develops (Hinde 1979: 319). Children in most cultures form

their first relationship with their mothers. Thereafter, researchers have noted that relationships with others follow very rapidly.

With the passing of time, the relative importance of the child's various relationships inside and outside the family change, with siblings and peers increasing in importance over adults (Hinde 1979:319).

Bercheld and Peplau (1983:3) describe family relationships as being "central to human existence, health and happiness - a fact that is almost universally recognised". Vrey (1979:24) explains that the relationship children form with their mother forms a vital anchorage point for their relationships with other people and objects. Children who attribute positive meaning to the relationship with their parents and experience unconditional acceptance are adventurous and expand their network of relationships - and so satisfy their needs. Inadequate relationships with parents result in feelings of rejection, failure and insecurity, as this anchorage point for the formation of relationships with other people and objects is absent. The negative emotions experienced as a result are manifested in negative behaviour. Vrey states that "the parent-child relationship can lead to deviant behaviour in the child". According to Sommers (Vrey 1979:26), "maladjustment among children is preceded by unsatisfactory relations between the parents at home".

Hamachek (1978:183) emphasises the role of the family, asserting: "how any of us feel about ourselves and others is linked to the relationship we had with our mothers and fathers". Mussen, Conger and Kagan (1974:472) state that during the middle-childhood years, "relationships with parents remain, for most children, the most important factor in

determining the kind of person the child will become and the kinds of problems he will face in the quest for maturity " (as cited by Mattheus 1992:21).

Douvan (1977:21) states that, based on research done by Hess and Shipman concerning the effects of different styles of parent-child interaction, "the more interpersonal the relationship between mother and child, the greater the child's development will be".

Children are born into a world of meaning. Once children begin to understand, a relationship is formed which is at first ineffective and may be improved through greater involvement. The surrounding world can be divided into broad categories: people (parents, family members, relatives, peer group and teachers); objects (all the objects they come into contact with) and ideas (concepts that concern their dealings with the world). Children's relationship with the self must also be considered. Their readjustment and transition to a new lifestyle depends on the quality of relationships they encounter with the various systems mentioned above. Section 2.2.3 indicates how parental conflicts, parents' emotional and physical unavailability, social stigmatisation, unrealistic expectations from peer groups and children's own negative perceptions of themselves adversely affect their adjustment and identity formation.

\* Relationship with parents

Vrey (1979) makes an invaluable contribution in his research on relational theory concerning the child, stating that primary school children (+ 6 to + 12 years old) during this stage of development know their parents well, especially their mother. If her behaviour toward them is consistent then she remains an anchorage point or beacon for the ✓

formation of further relationships. The mother-child relationship is significant in that the quality of this relationship determines the quality of later relationships. A healthy relationship is characterised by love, security, acceptance, trust and esteem. Parents who know their children have empathy for them and therefore know what they need. Reciprocally, children are easily able to understand parents' intentions concerning them. Even if parents reject them (during the marital conflict and divorce), children will, after a considerable time, approach parents. They are emotionally bound to parents in such a way that separation brings pain.

Children who feel accepted and secure can leave their parents on occasion with far less tension and anxiety. This security is very important for development as children are able to venture and explore without fearing separation from parents. Love is the most important attribute of the parent-child relationship and this quality is significant in the child's involvement. The components of knowledge, care, respect and responsibility are interwoven in the love relationship between parent and child. Parents and children should know each other so well that their perception of each other is accurate. Their mutual involvement leads to shared experiences and the possibility of empathy within a fulfilled, complete relationship.

In such a relationship, parents cannot hide feelings of dissatisfaction, aversion or unhappiness from children who, because they have co-experience of parents' moods and emotions, sense their feelings; indeed, without this mutual intuitive knowledge or empathy parents and children cannot love each other. If parents are not physically or emotionally available to children, children may retreat, adversely affecting the relationship. Knowledge

of the child is only possible if the parent lives with the child and not merely alongside him or her. Once children are assured of their acceptance at home, they feel free to leave in their quest for peer group acceptance, with the knowledge that they still have a safe haven to return to (Vrey 1979:42).

Parental care for their children's well-being, health, joys and sorrows, is vital for children's wholesome development. Parents are concerned about their children's welfare even if children think that they do not need it. When children are given the opportunity to be independent, parental care is not reduced but becomes more reserved, and children should expect neither overprotection nor rejection. It is rather indifferent parents who cause children to feel insecure and rejected.

Mutual respect is another important facet of the parent-child relationship. Respect implies the recognition of the uniqueness and integrity of others without wanting to shape them according to one's own image. Parents should also respect children's needs, limitations and potential, and not have unrealistic expectations. In a single-parent household, children are often expected to assume responsibilities beyond their capabilities and this results in role reversal and role strain (Johnston 1990:409). This aspect, and its effects on the identity formation of parents and children, are discussed in more depth in chapter 3.

Parents of primary school children retain full responsibility for their children's welfare and educational support. On every level of development, new demands are made on parents' responsibilities. After marital disruption, the parent has to assume too many responsibilities, including full-time or part-time employment, financial responsibilities,

household management, and so on, causing role overload and neglect of responsibilities towards children (Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein 1989:437). ✓

Children have learned to depend and rely on their mother's sameness, stability and her continuous provision of their needs (Vrey 1979:97). They trust their mother unquestioningly. This trust depends on children's internalisation of these motherly qualities, and the experience of trustworthiness, dependency and stability fosters children's trust so that they surrender themselves to the parent without effort or anxiety. Trust is a basic prerequisite for sound and satisfactory interpersonal relations. During parental conflicts (during and after the marital disruption), children's trust in their parents is questioned and shaken.

The relationship that parents maintain with their children enhances or impedes their development at school. Support and encouragement incite children to participate more fully, which helps them to develop a more realistic perspective of their experience and also affects their personality development (Hargreaves 1991:103).

Although divorce marks the legal end of the marital relationship, the parental relationship continues to be critical to children's adjustments to family transition. A high degree of discord frequently characterises family relations in the period surrounding the divorce and conflict may even intensify following divorce. This intense, often irrational acrimony may be a way for divorced spouses to maintain an emotional relationship following divorce. The result is that children often are exposed to parents' arguments and may feel conflicting loyalties. The balance between conflict and cooperation and the conflict resolution

strategies used by divorced parents seem to play an especially important role in children's relationships with their parents and their later adjustment (Hetherington et al. 1989:307).

Research by inter alia Camara and Resnick (1988), Forehand et al. (1988), Hetherington (1989), Fry and Scher (1984), and Mullis et al. (1987) indicates that most children wish to maintain relationships with both parents. Continued positive relations with both parents has been shown to be an important factor in children's successful adjustment to family transitions.

\* Relationships with peers

Spenser and Markstrom-Adams (1990: 307) reveal that children in the latent stage ( $\pm 6 - \checkmark$   
 $\pm 12$  years) find a source of extra-familial identification in their peer group. Peers are  
employed as a reference group during this phase, and much of the interaction of children  
with their peers during this stage includes comparisons between them and their families.  $\checkmark$   
Children of this age are still highly dependent on parents and are likely to use the family  $\checkmark$   
context and its values to judge their own worth. Children often see their parents' divorce  
as a stigma that reflects upon themselves. They are ashamed of their parents and their  
behaviour and of their implied rejection, marking them in their own eyes as unlovable.  
They may feel different and may become ashamed to bring other children to their home,  
possibly even going to great lengths to conceal the fact of divorce from their friends for  
fear of rejection.

Mussen et al. (1979:392) state that peers contribute directly and indirectly to the  $\checkmark$   
development of children's self-concepts. Acceptance by peers is likely to augment

children's overall self-concept, while general rejection lowers self-esteem. Children who try to hide their parents' marital discord from their friends protect themselves from anticipated ridicule, but usually suffer from lowered feelings of self-worth associated with fears of discovery and the inner shame associated with the knowledge of what they are doing. When this secret is revealed children suffer even worse feelings of shame and perceived social alienation.

A peer group is an intimate and select group and admission depends on mutual choice and the fulfilment of various conditions for admission. Peer groups are made up of children of similar intellectual abilities, because such children share the same interests. Single-parent children may sometimes be considered the "black sheep" and are not accepted. Family type and family structure does have an adverse effect on children's acceptability in the peer group. Social stigmas and social isolation further alienate single-parent children from the peer group (Bray et al. 1984: 108).

According to Kelly and Wallerstein (1979:29) acceptance to the peer group is enhanced by characteristics such as friendliness, cooperation, daring, enthusiasm, emotional stability and trustworthiness. There is a strong correlation between an hostile attitude and rejection by the group. Thus children who are aggressive, unfriendly, uncommunicative, introverted and emotionally unstable are unlikely to be accepted. Many children from divorced families display these negative characteristics and so risk their acceptance in the group.

There are certain developmental tasks that children realise in their relationship with the peer group. Children's physiological maturation and socio-psychological relations must

be such that their friends accept them in the group on the strength of their abilities. ✓  
Requirements regarding skills become more complex as children grow older. Self-realisation is geared to the mastery of physical skills. Children must successfully conform to the standards set by the group. Personal whims must be sacrificed or kept "under control". Children must remain friendly in spite of others' unfriendliness, they must retain their emotional stability in spite of adversity so that their dignity as a person may remain unaffected. After divorce, children find it extremely difficult to conform because they are exposed to many conflicts, stressors and changes. Their behaviour and attitudes change and they feel that they cannot conform to the standards of the group and are rejected and even abandoned by the group (Kelly and Wallerstein 1979:31).

Primary school children leave the safety of home to venture into this unknown world. They must be physically and emotionally capable of moving about on their own. Psychologically they must be prepared, in spite of a measure of anxiety, to let go of parents and to value identification with the peer group more than their attachment to the home; and to make more decisions for which they accept responsibility. The peer group provides the opportunity of acting independently. However, children who are subjected to rejection and abandonment by a parent (usually non-custodial) due to divorce, and who experience emotional and physical neglect (even by the custodial parent), feel insecure and hesitant to leave home, and are further traumatised by the fact that acceptance to the peer group is dependant on certain standards. They feel ostracised by their friends and can no longer fit in with the group (Kalter 1990:79).

Belonging to a peer group is extremely important to children who go to extreme lengths to be accepted in a group in sometimes ridiculous attempts to conform to peer group pressure, norms and standards. Robinson (1980:77) states that children fear nothing as much as rejection and therefore conform to peers in every respect and increasingly identify with them.

The significance of the development of children's relationships within the peer group depends on various factors. Children need a safe home in order to attribute meaning and orient themselves effectively. To make the transition from the role of child as subordinate, the parental home as a sanctuary is functionally replaced by the peer group as a basis of safety. Since children are accepted there, they conform in matters of dress, speech and conduct. However, children from broken homes may be unable to confidently detach themselves from the role of the child at home because they are subjected to feelings of inadequacy, rejection and insecurity (Vrey 1979:104).

Once children are accepted in a group, they are more able to accept themselves in a positive and realistic manner. They feel as if they belong to the group and this supports their dignity as a person. However, children from single-parent households may feel as if they do not belong in their peer group due to their adjustment and transition to a new lifestyle, which result in feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. Attitudes and behaviour may change, affecting conformity to the peer group. Hence children feel unable to fit in and seek out other friends who may better understand their needs and feelings. Very often then, children join a peer group where negative values are accepted and reinforced.

In contrast to the role as "child in the home", children now find themselves in the company of equals. They can hold their own and meet peers on equal terms, and their opinions are regarded as highly as those of any of the others. In this position of equality and dignity children can experiment and explore. Similarly, children of divorced parents tend to form their own groups because they share common interests and problems. Among their peers they are capable of achieving and asserting their identity. Children come to know themselves and evaluate their identity more realistically. The demands made on them by the peer group address their level of competence and allow for self-actualisation (Vrey 1979:105).

Children join the peer group in order to obtain status, recognition and security. Self-assertion and the development of the self-concept takes place in the peer group. The relation of children to their peers which is characterised by identification and conformity is made possible by the fact that at this stage children no longer see the other person as an object that must succumb to their whims, but as individuals with ideas and feelings like their own - by virtue of which the other person forms a relation with them and with many others. Children learn to appreciate the other person's point of view without forfeiting their own. Because of voluntary identification with the age group, the values of the group are absolute and binding. Each member of the group must accept these values or face rejection. If values of the teacher and school coincide with those of the group, striving towards scholastic achievement produces no anxiety or tension (Burns 1979:258).

Research identifies a relationship between single-parent children and low self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem frequently present a false front to their friends and to the

world at large. This creates tension and results in anxiety (Burns 1979:259). Self-concept is related to the effectiveness with which individuals function in groups. Keeping up pretences (for example, pretending that the individual's parents are not divorced) is essentially a coping mechanism used to overcome feelings of worthlessness as experienced by single-parent children who feel different and inferior. The result of keeping secrets is constrained interaction with peers which is augmented by children's physical and emotional isolation based on their feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy.

Children form a concept of themselves through interacting with others. In striving to be consistent with that concept, they behave in ways that are rewarded or punished by significant people. This affects the self-concept which in turn contributes to a particular behaviour pattern. The self-concept of children from broken homes is influenced by this perceived feedback from others, essentially peers, who form a reference group, and by their interpretation of a situation compared with that of peers. It is therefore clear that the relatively low self-concept of single-parent children influences interaction in peer activities.

Kokot's research (1988:72) into peer relationships reveals that

- \* peer relationships appear to contribute to children's social development ✓
- \* peer relationships provide children with the experience of interacting with others who are on an equal level, but who are different enough to be a source of enriching experience
- \* the peer group provides a unique social context in the developmental stage of the pre-adolescent ✓
- \* children learn to form and maintain friendships through the peer group ✓

- \* these relationships provide opportunities for more intense socialisation while allowing children to express their individuality.

Negative peer relationships can then be seen to have serious implications for the emotional adjustment of the child. ✓

- \* Relationship with school work

With the advent of school, the child's network of relationships widens. The school is thus a significant vehicle of cognitive and affective experience. Smith (1990:107-118) notes that the school supplements rather than duplicates the child's experience elsewhere, and places much emphasis on the role and influence of the teacher. "The most important single factor in determining the nature of the experience for the child is the teacher ... Her ability to help the individual child improve in skill, in perceptiveness of social situations and in his interpersonal relationships will determine the progress he will make in social skills" (Smith: 1990:118). Teacher expectations can strongly influence both the cognitive and affective development of the child. ✓

Children must orient themselves in a world of objects and ideas. This occurs to a large extent by the manipulation and understanding of ideas, which constitutes the basis of relationship formation (Vrey 1979:106). The self is the centre of significance attribution. This can be seen clearly from the functional meanings assigned to things, example a chair is for "sitting" and a spoon is "for eating". These definitions stress the functional relation between children and things. The activity of primary school children improves muscular ability and coordination, with the result that they increasingly assign more efficient ✓

meaning to the things they climb on, handle and manipulate. The meaning of what children can do with things and what they can do to them becomes more complex but retains its dimension of utility. The personal meaning that children give to things has both a denotative and a functional dimension, often imbued with affective overtones. When children enter school, denotative meaning becomes more important. Children do not only encounter physical objects and people; but as people living among people, they must have knowledge of concepts. They must orient themselves regarding concepts, and, as they assign meaning, form relationships with them. Language plays an increasingly meaningful and important role. We need to consider how single-parent children assign meaning to objects and concepts (Vrey 1979:106)

According to Piaget (as cited by Vrey 1979:107), the primary school period is the stage of concrete operations. Children are able to apply logical ways of thinking to concrete problems, including concrete objects and events. These logical operations are directed by cognitive activity and meaningful and structured representations or images rather than dominated by perceptions. Piaget identifies the following four features characteristic of these operations: internalisation or execution (mentally or physically), reversibility, conservation and interdependency. Once children have mastered the concrete operational phase, they are then able to perform the operations of seriation, classification, assimilation and accommodation. In order to orient themselves in their environment they must, by meaning attribution, integration and differentiation, find a balance between accommodation (or the designing of new schemata) and assimilation (the incorporating of experiences into existing schemata). Parents and teachers can only guide and assist children in making their own discoveries. Once they are helped to master the concrete operation phase and the

operations of seriation, classification, assimilation and accommodation, children are able to establish intellectual security and see the world from a new vantage point. Children's ability to face continual change is founded on a conviction that there is stability. This ensures an increase in physical, perceptual and cognitive functions.

Personal security and the experience of safety rest on the conviction that parents' love and acceptance of the child will remain unchanged. Children must distinguish between reality and appearance, and their relationship with the physical world depends on their ability to assign meaning to the concepts of space, time and quantity in relation to the concrete world (Vrey 1979:110).

However, numerous studies indicate the extent to which marital disruption affects children's developmental progress (psychological, cognitive, emotional and intellectual), and a relationship between the emotional instability (mainly due to the emotional and physical unavailability of parents) and the scholastic performance of children has been identified (Reddy 1989). The literature review further highlights the effects of marital disruption on children's developmental processes and their perceptions of people (himself, parents, peers, relatives), concepts and ideas.

Vrey (1979:116) believes that teachers contribute to children's self-concept. This applies particularly to the junior primary school child. Based on studies by Lang (1960), Vrey (1979: 117) concludes that "the more positive a child's perception of the teacher's attitude towards him, the higher is his scholastic achievement".

Mussen et al. (1974:525) comment that "the child whose school experience and interactions with peers are constructive and rewarding and whose relationships with parents are favourable will develop a clearer self-image, increased competencies, and enhanced self-esteem. Unfavourable experience in any of these areas are likely to limit the child's development and to foster crippling conflicts, anxieties, and an impaired self-image".

Mussen et al. (1974:491) further add that "among the situational factors affecting the child's adjustment and progress within the school setting, probably none is as important as the teacher-pupil relationship".

\* The child's relationship with the self

Vrey (1979:112) states that a dynamic self-concept is the result of children's relations with the self, and is an integrated structure of perceptions, ideas and attitudes which the individual has formed of him or herself. Vrey (1979:113) states that "during the primary school years the child gets to know himself in a wide variety of new relationships. His conceptions of himself will not only develop and expand, they will also change both positively and negatively". He adds that "the self-concept is the focal point of relationships in the life world". Furthermore, Vrey (1979:47) believes that "the self-concept acts as a moderator variable in behaviour which means that the concept of self regulates the child's behaviour". It can then be concluded that "if one is able to understand the child's conceptions of himself, one will similarly be able to understand how he experiences and gives meaning to his relationship structures" (Kokot 1987:10).

Children's relationships with family members and objects and their identification with parents and others generally results in a fairly well defined identity. Single-parent children

need to come to know themselves thoroughly. Their perception of themselves depends on their relationship with people and things, the manner in which they attribute meaning to them and become involved, the quality of ensuing experiences and their evaluation of their actions.

During the primary school years children come to know themselves in a number of new relationships. Their conceptions of themselves develop, expand and change either negatively or positively. It is during this development and the process of becoming that children's relationships are important as it is here that they attribute meaning and are actively involved, evaluate experiences, explore situations and form positive or negative concepts which mould a particular identity through the process of exploration and personalisation.

### **2.5.2 Single parents' relationships**

#### **\* Relationship with children**

Parents undergoing divorce often exhibit marked emotional lability characterised by euphoria and optimism, which alternates with anxiety, loneliness, depression and associated changes in self-concept and self-esteem. It is not uncommon for custodial mothers to become self-involved, erratic, uncommunicative, non-supportive and inconsistently punitive in dealing with their children (Camara and Resnick 1988: 312). It is unfortunate that at a time when children need stability in a rapidly changing life situation, their parents display these behavioural fluctuations.

Research indicates that the parent-child relationship is adversely affected after the divorce mainly due to the parent's emotional and physical unavailability, and the resultant emotional instability experienced by both parent and child during the adjustment to the new lifestyle (Reddy 1989).

Tessman (1978:32) asserts that parents' ways of coping with loss affects the parent-child relationship since the meaning of loss is inextricably tied not only to this relationship but also to the human network surrounding the parent and child. Children are deeply affected by parents' responses to the separation and by the image of the missing parent conveyed implicitly or explicitly by the custodial parent. The well-being of children is related to the well-being of the single parent.

The parent's reaction to the separation has an effect on children's identity formation. Parents' depression, bitterness and anger has an effect on the emotional resources already available to children. During the most friction-filled period prior to separation, children experience irritability and emotional withdrawal from the parents; and the manner in which parents, in the midst of the turmoil, communicate, empathise or interact with children affects their perception of their parents and themselves.

Tessman (1978:56) finds that many children tend to be more clinging, anxious, irritable and demanding in the period following divorce, and due to the limited time available to (working) single parents, parents are not sufficiently available to them either emotionally or physically. Parents need to be attuned to their children's needs and provide the necessary assurance that they will try to be available whenever needed.

The custodial parent also is responsible for the amount of emotional freedom given to children to continue to care or talk about the other parent. Maladaptive behaviour patterns in adolescence seem to develop in reaction to children's perceptions that they may no longer love or admire the absent parent. This perception assaults children's need for a loving investment in both parents and this, in turn, affects their identity.

According to Glenwick and Mowrey (1986:55), many single parents feel free to share their feelings with their children on a wide range of personal issues, such as bitterness towards the ex-spouse, frustrations, the numerous burdens thrust upon them, especially financial concerns and feelings of social isolation, with the result that the parent-child relationship may become more like that of a peer, friend or confidante. At its extreme, a reversal of roles occurs in which children take care of parents, providing support and nurturance and assuming parental responsibilities. In seeking to relate to children as a peer or partner and relinquishing the parental role, single parents gratify their needs without reciprocally assuming a fair portion of the responsibilities. They may rely on the child for emotional support and for the fulfilment of the role and functions of the absent parent.

Single parents further regress to adolescence when they depend excessively on children's opinions, simultaneously pulling children up into a pseudo-adolescence for which they are not prepared. Many single parents put their children in the role of the absent parent, and in doing so, unconsciously create a parent-child conflict similar to the previous parental conflict. Children are pressured to assume the absent spouse's role but are then treated punitively for behaving like the spouse (Corneau 1991:153).

Divorce places new burdens on both parents. Swartzberg (1982:85) found that parents may consciously or unconsciously resent their children for restricting chances of remarriage and dating, providing additional unwanted responsibilities and necessitating contact with the former partner. Even if parents do not verbalise these frustrations and resentments, children are likely to sense them, contributing to feelings of low self-worth. This in turn affects the process of identity formation. Swartzberg (1982:85) believes that the most serious mistake a parent can make is to make children choose sides in the parental dispute. Children risk alienating themselves from their parents and feel guilty, resentful, disloyal and frightened.

\* Relationship with peers

Most parents struggle with feelings of depression, guilt or doubt in reaction to divorce, and wonder whether they have made the right decision (Tessman 1978:32). Furthermore, parents strongly wish for someone who may validate their perception of the situation, yet find that seeking emotional support from pre-divorce circles of friends is complicated as friends seem to avoid them. The continuity of some friendships is particularly important to some parents, and while some make new friends, others feel terribly isolated. Many social events are "couple oriented" so that single adults are perceived (or perceive themselves) as out of place and no longer sharing common interests with a previous set of friends. Social problems further foster low self-esteem.

Due to negative feelings experienced towards ex-partners, exacerbated by the involvement of children in the dispute (for instance, in aligning with one parent against the other), Kalter (1990:28) found that custodial parents may become self-involved,

uncommunicative, non-supportive and inconsistent in their interaction with the ex-spouse. Furthermore, custodial parents who have not come to terms with their new identity as a single parent may blame the ex-spouse for their predicament. They are faced with new responsibilities, role strain, social isolation, parent-child conflicts which often result in diminished parental competence. Their physical and emotional unavailability to children at times when they need them most further increases their dilemma about respective roles, intensifying her resentment towards the ex-spouse.

Hess and Camara (1979:83) agree that the quality of the parental relationship influences children's adjustment processes. A good relationship between parents after divorce assures children that the conflict does not involve them and ensures that the primary bond with each parent is not lost. They also found that high levels of parental conflict cause children to feel constantly depressed and confused, negatively influencing their acceptance of their roles and identity as a single-parent child.

\* Relationship with self

Many divorced or separated parents encounter emotional difficulties, new responsibilities and the social stigma associated with divorce. It has been found that these single parents experience more depression than any other marital status group and regard themselves as unworthy as single parents (Bray and Anderson 1984:102).

Both parents experience changes in self-concept and self-image after the divorce. Parents experience a loss of identity and need to re-evaluate their role as a single parent. Loss of self-esteem is usually one of the initial problems suffered by divorced single parent

(Kitty 1984:25). Non-custodial parents (usually the father) also experience depression, sadness, anger, loneliness and anxiety. They fear losing their status or identity, fear being criticised by their ex-spouse and being rejected by their children. This fear stems from feelings of guilt and inadequacy as a parent. Any sign of dissatisfaction on the part of children is regarded as a personal rejection and proof of parental inadequacy (Keshet et al. 1978:16).

\* Relationship with work

Tessman (1978:33) discovered that single parents find it difficult to communicate their distress to peers and colleagues at work, and found that some parents describe their time at work as unreal to them because of the discrepancy between what they feel and what they do.

According to Mahler (1989:179), many single parents experience role strain and conflict in choosing between the roles of provider or caregiver. Working single parents have sole responsibility for both these roles and at times allow the one role to intrude into the other, with the consequence that they then feel guilty, fail to be assertive at work, and experience feelings of inadequacy both as a parent and as an employee.

Hargreaves (1991:33) identifies an additional problem working single parents face in the difficulty of finding suitable child-care facilities for children. Parents fear losing their jobs if they take leave unexpectedly or too often (especially when the children are sick).

### 2.5.3 Synthesis

The literature review indicates that marital disruption has an adverse effect on the interactional relationships of single-parent families. The children's relationship with others are influenced by the frequency of parental and sibling conflicts and acceptance or rejection during peer group interactions.

On-going spousal conflicts after the divorce triggers problematic relationships with children and a conflict of roles for the single-parent mother. Faced with added responsibilities the mothers experience task overload and this results very often in the distribution of some adult responsibilities to children. Role reversals occur and the increasing parental unavailability (custodial and non-custodial) and added responsibilities has a negative influence on parent-child and sibling relationships. It is evident that the negative aspects of family interaction impacts on the identity formation of single-parent families. The effect of marital disruption on the identities of single-parent families was explored in section 2.3. There is a need to review the process of identity formation in single-parent families after the divorce or separation.

Research clearly indicates how the various stressors experienced by single-parents families are somehow linked to identity problems. There is a need to clarify the concepts of identity, identification, self-concept and self-esteem and identity formation, since all these are linked to problems experienced by single-parent families. The next section explores the definition and significance of identity and identity formation after marital disruption.

## 2.6 IDENTITY FORMATION

This section investigates various theoretical viewpoints in order to understand the concept of identity.

According to Breakwell (1988:3), the terms identity, self, character and personality are all used as labels for the uniqueness which differentiates one individual from the next, and theorists use them interchangeably. Weinreich (1980:82) defines identity as the totality of a person's self construal in which individuals incorporate the way they saw themselves in the past and the way they aspire to be in the future. While identity defines who individuals are, self-concept refers to individuals' reflections about this identity. Erikson (1968 in Vrey 1979:45) defines the identity of individuals as an integrated whole made up of people's conceptions of themselves: the stability and continuity of the attributes by which they know themselves and the agreement between individuals' conceptions of themselves and others' conceptions of them.

Kaplan (1987:93) states that identity is formed by accepting some values and rejecting others, which are embodied by other people, especially parents. Children are in the process of becoming a person and as such their identity is still in a fluid form, shaped by the quality of the dynamics involved in their upbringing.

According to Vrey (1979:29), babies' first discovery of their own hands and feet is one of the first indications of the knowledge of an own identity. The process of this identification continues until a personal identity is formed. This identity, with its physical and psychological properties and its extensions, enables children to answer the question "who

are you?". He further adds that individuals form a concept of themselves in their association with others (1979:45). This identity must be stable and continuous so that individuals may know themselves and so that others may know them. Once individuals become aware of the self, the conception of a personal identity arises.

Visser, Petrick and Sonnekus (1989) define identity from the perspective of relational theory. According to this theory, the term self-identity refers to individuals' convictions that they are indeed the person whom they picture through their self-image and whom they consistently profess to be. The self-image is therefore the representation of one's self-identity. Identity originates from the interaction between self and the phenomenal world. This identity implies action and action identity. True self-actualisation requires free realistic interaction between being and doing. To be someone, and to be involved in something typical and relevant, presupposes that individuals experience the typical in totality and their involvement in what they want to do and can do, and their experience of its actual performance therefore contributes to the establishment of their identity.

The development of identity requires involvement and attribution of meaning to the physical and psychic self. Individuals form relationships with themselves and others. One result of these relationships is the need to identify with others, an identification which continues until a personal identity takes shape. The concept of identity is closely related to that of self-concept because individuals' evaluations of themselves will largely determine their own answer to the question "who am I?" (Visser, Petrick and Sonnekus 1989:25-29).

Erikson, Vrey and the advocates of relational theory all agree in their belief that the concept of identity is formed on the strength of relationships with the self and others.

### **2.6.1 The formation of identity**

It is necessary to investigate how identity is formed, and the viewpoints of various theorists are therefore examined below.

Erikson (1968:307) states that identity formation begins where the usefulness of identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identification and its absorption in a new configuration. When forming an identity children must have a knowledge of their own abilities, aptitudes, interests, personality and limitations. Children have to interpret knowledge in different areas and circumstances until they know, understand and accept themselves in the various situations where they must make decisions and find meaning in their activities. This development towards knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the self is called identity formation. As research referred to above has already established, divorce adversely affects children's perceptions of themselves and therefore undoubtedly negatively influences their identity formation.

Identity is a process occurring within individuals and their community. Single-parent families may develop a negative identity as a result of accepting the negative self-image projected onto them, especially by the larger society. According to Erikson (1968:315), the development of identity is a process involving personal reflection and observation of oneself in relation to others. Individuals then evaluate the judgments others make about

them and compare the self with others. Identity develops in part out of this process of judgment and comparison. Children's relations with family members and objects and their identification with parents and others results in a fairly well-defined identity. Erikson (1968:308) argues that components of the self-system, in particular self-esteem and self-concept, are operative prior to identity formation and later become part of the identity. Identity encompasses both life in a past and links it to a life in the future, establishing in the identity construct an awareness of the sameness and continuity of the self in time and space. The continuity of these ideas is apparent in Erikson's assertions that successful identity formation is mediated by the resolutions of earlier developmental tasks. Younger children's establishment of certain identifications, preferences and attitudes also contributes to identity formation.

According to Vrey (1979:76), identity formation is dynamic and continuous. As identity takes shape the need to test roles diminishes. The self-concept is expanded by evaluating the burgeoning identity. Acceptance by parents, family and friends brings self-acceptance, which leads to heightened self-esteem. A positive self-concept is largely the outcome of loving, caring and accepting education within clearly defined limits. It enables children to forget themselves (their own identity) and to take risks, to explore and to form relations. This is characteristic of the self-actualising child. In order for children to self-actualise, they must become oriented in terms of their relations with the self and others in their life world, and be able to understand the significance of people, objects and ideas in this life world.

Oosthuizen, Petrick and Weichers (1990:21-22) believe that children's development towards knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the self enables them to form an identity. Identity formation enables children to answer the question "who am I". They form identities on the strength of their involvement with people, things and themselves, their attribution of meaning to and experience of their own potential. Children develop a concept of themselves as a person in various spheres of life: for example, me as a single-parent child, me as a friend, me as a confidante, me as a pupil. In this way children develop a particular identity as a single-parent child, a friend, and so on. These may develop in different ways, and may be realistic identity or unrealistic.

According to relational theory, involvement, significance attribution and experience are prerequisites for identity formation. When individuals become involved and give attention, interest and commitment to an area where identities are formed they satisfy one of the requirements for identity formation. They must also be able to attribute meaning to themselves. Another criterion for identity formation is an individual's understanding of his or her own emotions. If individuals have no comprehension of their own happiness, joy, anxiety, acceptance or rejection, positive identity formation is greatly retarded.

### **2.6.2 Significance of identity**

This section investigates the viewpoints of various theorists on the significance of identity and identity formation.

The awareness or sense of identity is very much influenced by factors affecting perception of the external world, psychological factors as well as stability and change in the

environment. Children identify with their parents and wish to be like them yet also need to define their own uniqueness. They weigh and compare real and wishful images of themselves and adjust them accordingly. Although the individual's self-image forms the core of identity, identity is maintained and vitalised by the continual redefinement accompanying comparison and contrast with others. Children's recognition of their likenesses to and differences from others is fundamental to the development of identity. Aggression also plays a significant role in the development of identity. The frustration, envy, rivalry and hostility felt by children for loved ones impels them to recognise differences between their real and wishful image of the self and the other. These experiences stimulate children to learn about these differences, which may account for frustrations and feelings of inferiority and later feelings of superiority and competence. The most important patterns of separation and individuation are played out with those to whom children are most attached as part of the process which fosters the separate self, identity and self-esteem (Bloom - Fleshbach and Bloom - Fleshbach 1987:94-95).

It is important to consider whether the loss of an important identification figure causes children to identify more favourably with their peer group or other (perhaps unsuitable) people (Kaplan 1987:107).

The process of identification is central to children's development and performs a special function in their attempts to compensate for the partial or total loss of a loved one. The dynamics of this process are reflected in transformations in both the image of the person identified with and the self. Identification plays an important role in enhancing the personality of children who have lost a parent through divorce. Giving up the parent and

the associated wish to be like him or her also involves giving up the part of the self that identifies with that parent. Although at first, parents are idealised as magically powerful and fearful, these perceived qualities recede as children develop a separate identity that is derived in part from the internalised attributes of both parent figures. There are two types of identification: the first is derived from the wish to be one with the loved person, to experience intimacy through sharing, and occurs mainly during infancy. The second type occurs after discrimination is made between the self and the loved person. In order to involve parents, children begin to identify with those who are central to parents' interests, including the spouse and siblings (Tessman 1978:42-44).

Identification with the parent has been presented so far as a component necessary to young children's growth and the progressive stabilisation of their identities. However, the growth and sense of continuity of his identity also demands a recognised self-image. Hence, children's differences from those around them must also become valid and valued aspects of their self-image. As long as their own sense of identity is primarily bound to identification with only one or two others, children remain vulnerable to sudden loss of self-esteem or more seriously, loss of a sense of own identity, when relationships with the identification figures are disrupted (Factor and Stensank 1988a:20-21).

During the process of identification, children require a sense of closeness to their role models. Any disruptions in the relationships with the identification figures (for example, the non-custodial parent) can interfere in the development of an acceptable, individual sense of identity. Even when children broaden their social circle, which normally occurs in play with other children, and when they enter school and become aware of the diversity

of values among peers, teachers and family members often help them to recognise qualities in themselves. Early identification with parent figures is central to determining their later affective experiences, goals in life and their sense of a personal, distinct identity. When such identifications help children to experience gratification and tolerate the sense of separateness derived from bearable disappointments discovered in previously idealised parents, the process of identification becomes more realistic, selective and increasingly under the control of the individual. The relationship between the use of identification as an ego mechanism and its role in constructing a secure identity highlights those aspects of identifications which result in not only identity growth but defences against inner pain experienced with the loss of a parent (Grotevant 1987:99).

The bitterness parents may feel towards the estranged partner may lead to the fear that the child will turn out to be like the spouse. Simultaneously, parents may place further pressure on children to achieve parents' cherished hopes and ambitions as a way to assuage disillusionment and assaults on self-esteem incurred due to the trauma of divorce. Although complicated and often contradictory attitudes are expressed to children concerning their identification with certain people, children become more vulnerable to them in one-parent families where a balance or perspective in their identifications is lacking. It is in such cases that identification figures outside the family become especially significant (Tessman 1978:39).

Disorders of the self are characterised by an underlying lack of self-cohesion and self-esteem. They can arise from the failure of parental figures to provide children with a mirror for normal age appropriate behaviour or from their failure to be available as objects

of children's normal idealisation. Without a firm sense of self, the person lacks the capacity to empathise with others, is vulnerable to criticism, separation and loss and cannot formulate realistic life plans (Allen 1990:57).

According to relational theory, children who have established an identity will adopt realistic standpoints and act accordingly (for example, I can/cannot, I am/am not, I should/should not). Children who have arrived at a realistic self-definition are able to actualise this defined self. They are able to do so because they now have clearly demarcated limits for their essential self within which they may proceed to self-actualisation. Within these limits, they can adapt, compromise and negotiate, although not beyond the limits of the essential self, as this would be in conflict with their established identity. If the identity is not fully established, children are diffuse, unsure and unrealistic about what they can, want to and ought to become. There is no feeling of self, the anchor of identity formation, and consequent self-realisation is unrealistic or diffused. In these circumstances, the influences of peers or parents may rule children's actions. The only way children can give significance and direction to their life is by knowing who they are; without establishing their identity, they live in a vacuum (Oosthuizen, Petrick and Weichers 1990:21-22).

### **2.6.3 Synthesis**

Section 2.3 indicates how marital disruption affects the identity formation of single-parent families. Various theoretical viewpoints examine the definition of identity, its significance and formation. All agree that the individual's identification process is adversely affected by marital disruption. Erikson (1978), Vrey (1979) and the advocates of relational theory

add that individuals form an identity on the basis of their interaction with themselves and others. Sections 2.2 and 2.5 discuss how marital disruption affects the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families.

Research based on relational theory demonstrates that people form identities and concepts of themselves based on the strength of their involvement with people and objects, their significance attribution to and experience of their own potential. It is only through this involvement, significance attribution and experience that individuals are able to form relationships and achieve identity formation. This theory is therefore considered as an ideal basis on which to design a programme for single-parent families to help them form realistic identities and make positive and confident adjustments in the transition to a new lifestyle.

The following sections examine the significance and dynamics of identity formation after marital disruption according to relational theory.

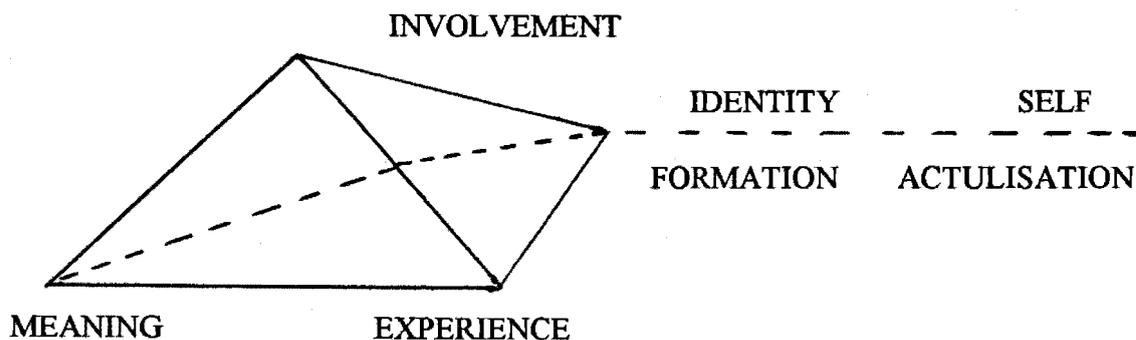
## 2.7 IDENTITY FORMATION AFTER MARITAL DISRUPTION ACCORDING TO RELATIONAL THEORY

This section examines and indicates the relevance of relational theory to the process of identity formation, with regard to the effects of marital disruption on single-parent families.

When individuals display involvement, attention, interest and commitment to an area where identities are formed, they satisfy one of the requirements for identity formation (Oosthuizen, Petrick and Weichers 1990:28). People (parents and children) must be able to attribute meaning to themselves as well as to a variety of constructs, phenomena and

other people. This involves aspects such as knowledge, understanding and perception and the ability to apply these in situations. Another criterion of identity formation is individuals' understanding of their own emotions. If they have no comprehension of their own happiness, joy, anxiety, aversions, acceptance, rejection and so on, then proper identity formation is impeded. It is only through involvement, attributing meaning and experience that individuals may achieve identity formation, make decisions and evaluate themselves; all of which are necessary for gradual self-realisation and self-actualisation. The following diagram (Figure 3) illustrates the relationship between involvement, experience, identity formation and self-actualisation (Oosthuizen, Petrick and Weichers 1990: 30).

FIGURE 3



The essences of relational theory are discussed herewith to illustrate how single-parent families are affected by divorce and therefore need to form new identities.

Individuals are unable to attribute meaning to something if they are not involved in it and unless they experience the situation positively or negatively. Vrey (1979:53) states that "no attribution of meaning is possible without involvement, and experience determines the quality of meaning".

\* Meaning

After marital disruption many single parents feel disorientated and are unable to attribute realistic meaning to people, and therefore find it difficult to understand their children's actions or behaviour (Chapter 2, section 2.2) Lack of understanding causes both parents and children to deal ineffectively with problems and so feel insecure and unhappy. The parent-child relationship is affected because its nature and quality is determined by the meaning assigned to it after the marital disruption. If children are able to understand the reason for the divorce they are more able to deal with their confusion and disorientation.

However, numerous research findings (Reddy 1989) show that many parents do not explain the reasons for the marital disruption, and as a result children feel confused, rejected, disorientated and abandoned. Likewise, parents too need support to help them come to terms with their feelings of inadequacy and attribute meaning to their situation (as a single parent).

\* Involvement

Research shows that single parents do not interact adequately with their children (Reddy

1989). Role overload, isolation and social stigmas are some of the difficulties they face to the detriment of their degree of involvement in meaningful relationships. The quality of children's involvement in learning activities, manifested in characteristics such as attentiveness, interest and perseverance, is to a large extent determined by the quality of their relationships with their parents and teachers (Hargreaves 1991:89). According to Stolberg and Ullman (1984:33), parents' physical and emotional availability during the divorce adjustment process is a major determinant of child adjustment. A lack of involvement can result in indifference, listlessness and apathy. Uninvolved children are detached from people significant to them; and do not relate to significant events, adversely affecting their scholastic performance. Children's cognitive and affective abilities and their expectations all play a part in the nature of involvement (Vrey 1979:23).

\* Experience

Due to the confusion, rejection, bitterness and disillusionment felt by many single parents after divorce, their relationships with their children and others degenerate. When individuals suffer a distressing experience their factual description of the event will probably be dominated by the affective experience (Brown 1980:54). Research by Brown indicates that single parents and their children who are able to maintain a stable relationship with the non-custodial parent are able to adjust to a new lifestyle with less difficulty and more confidence. According to McDermott (1968:1427), children who have hardly any contact with the non-custodial parent experience difficulty in accepting their roles as single-parent children. Changes in their behaviour at school seem to be manifestations of experienced anger and feelings of loss and helplessness. Vrey (1979:24) maintains that the affective component of experience, influenced by knowledge and feelings, is expressed in

acceptance and friendly advances. On the other hand, the lack of feeling and knowledge gives rise to avoidance, rejection and estrangement. A positive affective relationship is characterised by mutual trust, esteem, understanding and unconditional acceptance. Sonnekus (1979) as cited by Steyn (1988:128) mentions that such a relationship has a stabilising influence on emotional life and promotes mutual trust. The meaning attributed to such a relationship gives rise to feelings of security because of the sympathetic and consistent behaviour displayed. In a negative affective relationship, inconsistent behaviour is anticipated and instability is experienced. Because experience is emotional by nature, it defines the individual's evaluation of a situation and determines its quality.

#### \* Identity Formation

Research by Rosenthal and Hansen (1980), Raschke and Raschke (1979), Harper and Ryder (1986), Kelly and Wallerstein (1979), Hamechek (1978), Berg and Kelly (1979), Johnston (1990), Spenser et al. (1990), Johnston and Campbell (1988), Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein (1989), Barber and Eccles (1993), Richards and Schmiege (1993) and Riseman and Park (1989) reveals the extent to which divorce affects the self-concept of both parents and children. Many single parents experience a negative self-concept and diffusion of identities immediately after the divorce or separation. They feel unworthy, isolated, stigmatised and burdened by role overload. This disequilibrium and disorientation is transmitted to children, and in turn influences their self-concept. Feelings of emotional insecurity and inadequacy negatively influence children's self-image, consequently affecting scholastic performance. Children feel diffident and emotionally unable to master the skills and the learning process. Coopersmith (1969: 368) suggests that the most important

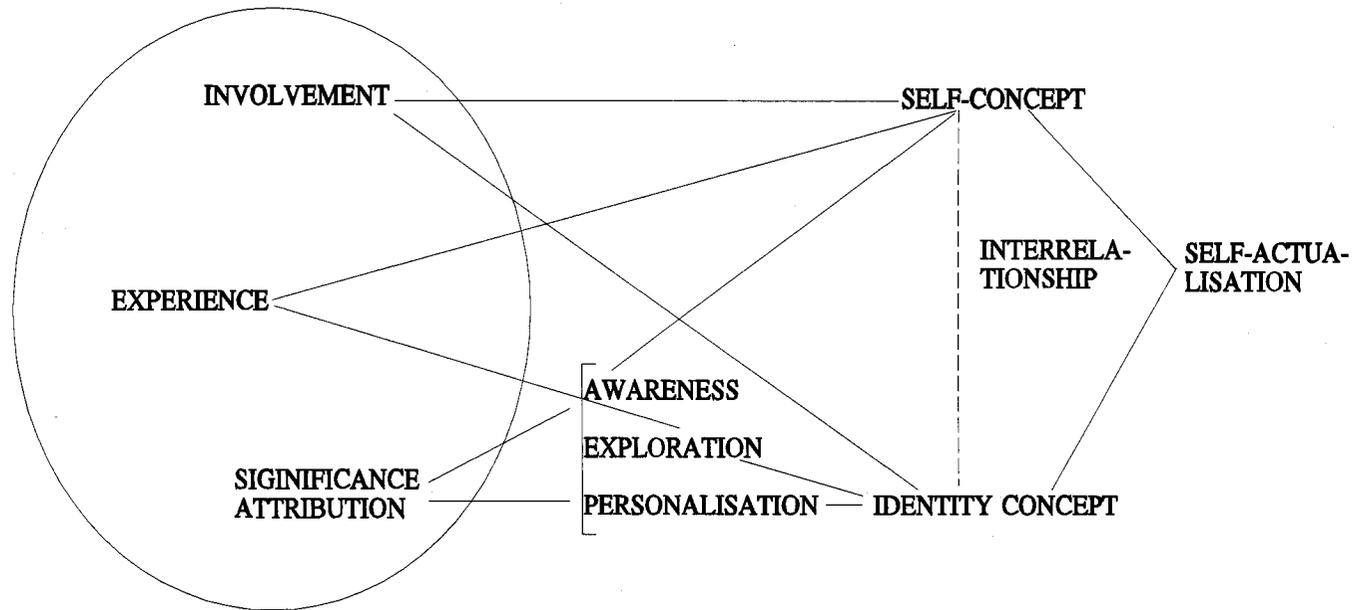
determinant of children's self-esteem is the attitudes and behaviour of parents. Children who feel rejected and abandoned by their parents have a lowered self-concept, and experience an identity crisis. They need some form of support to adjust to their new role as single-parent children.

\* **Self-actualisation**

Physiological and psychological needs must be met before security, love and acceptance are adequately experienced. McLanahan and Wedemeyer (1981: 609) found that parents must first deal with their emotional problems before providing emotional stability for children. In order for many parents to maintain a steady income, they have to realise all their latent potential, including manual skills, intellectual and emotional capabilities. Only when parents' physiological and psychological needs have been satisfied can their adjustment to work become meaningful and enjoyable. Roberts (1976: 374, 477) states that parents also have an important role in helping children realise their potential. Children must have human models with whom they may identify. Single-parent children may feel neglected, traumatised and insecure after their parents' separation, adversely affecting the ability to self-actualise. This could harm their scholastic performance. Single-parent children's self-actualisation would be facilitated with repeated assurances of security, love, acceptance and encouragement to build positive self-esteem.

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between these essences (Oosthuizen, Petrick and Weichers 1990:8).

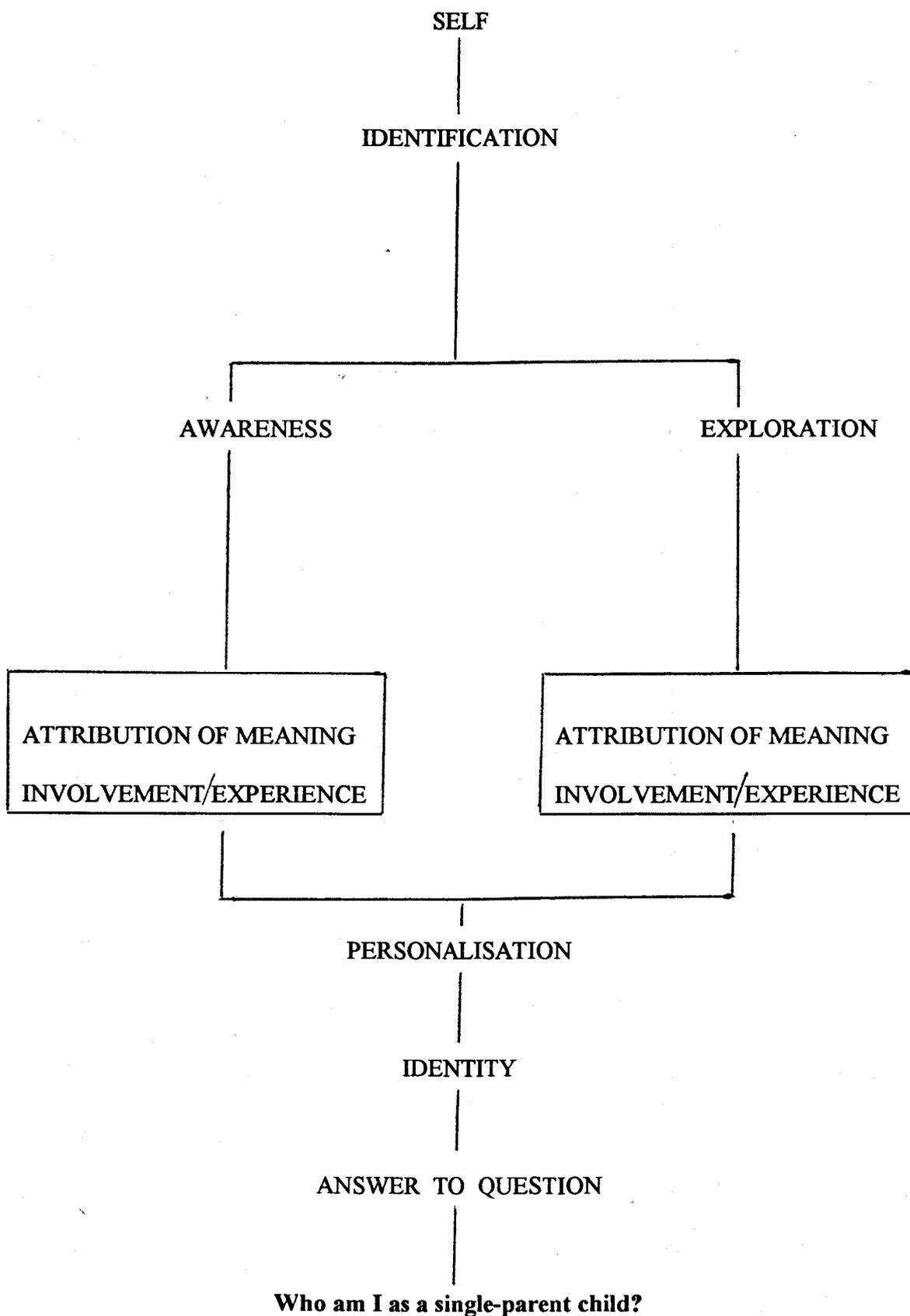
**FIGURE 4**



### **2.7.1 The dynamics of identity formation from the perspective of relational theory**

This section deals with the dynamics of identity formation according to relational theory. The development of identity depends on the formation of relationships with other people, things, concepts, ideas and the self. The essences of relational theory, significance, attribution, involvement, experience, self-concept and self-actualisation are vital for identity formation in single-parent families.

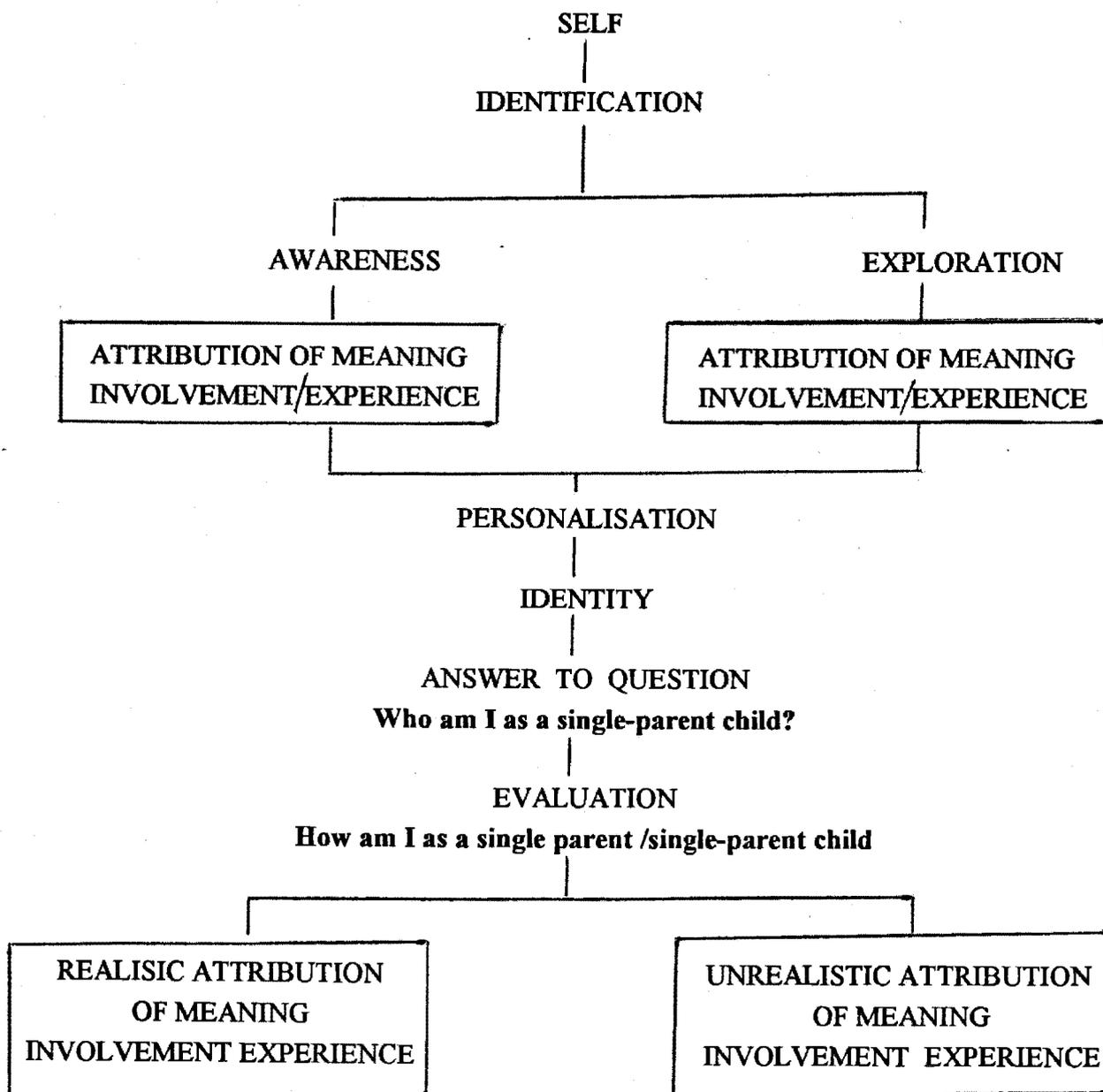
Individuals form certain identities according to their particular situation (Kokot and Weichers 1991:140). This intrapsychic activity is usually unconscious, and begins when individuals construct and explore an ideal identity through which they are able to attribute meaning to themselves in that situation. This is achieved by applying the processes referred to in relational theory: attribution of meaning, involvement and experience. For example, children of newly divorced parents unconsciously form an identity as a single-parent child and identify in some way with the ideal image of a single-parent child. They become aware of their role through attributing meaning to an image ("single-parent child"), and through their involvement with and experience of this image. They then explore what it is to be a single-parent child, attributing meaning to aspects of themselves which concern the identity, being involved with and positively or negatively experiencing the role. Before an identity can be formed, personalisation must occur. Children must assimilate or accept their situation and be able to identify with the ideal image of a single-parent child. If they fail to do this, the identity remains diffuse, giving rise to feelings of insecurity and confusion. This process is illustrated as follows (Kokot and Weichers 1991:142-143).



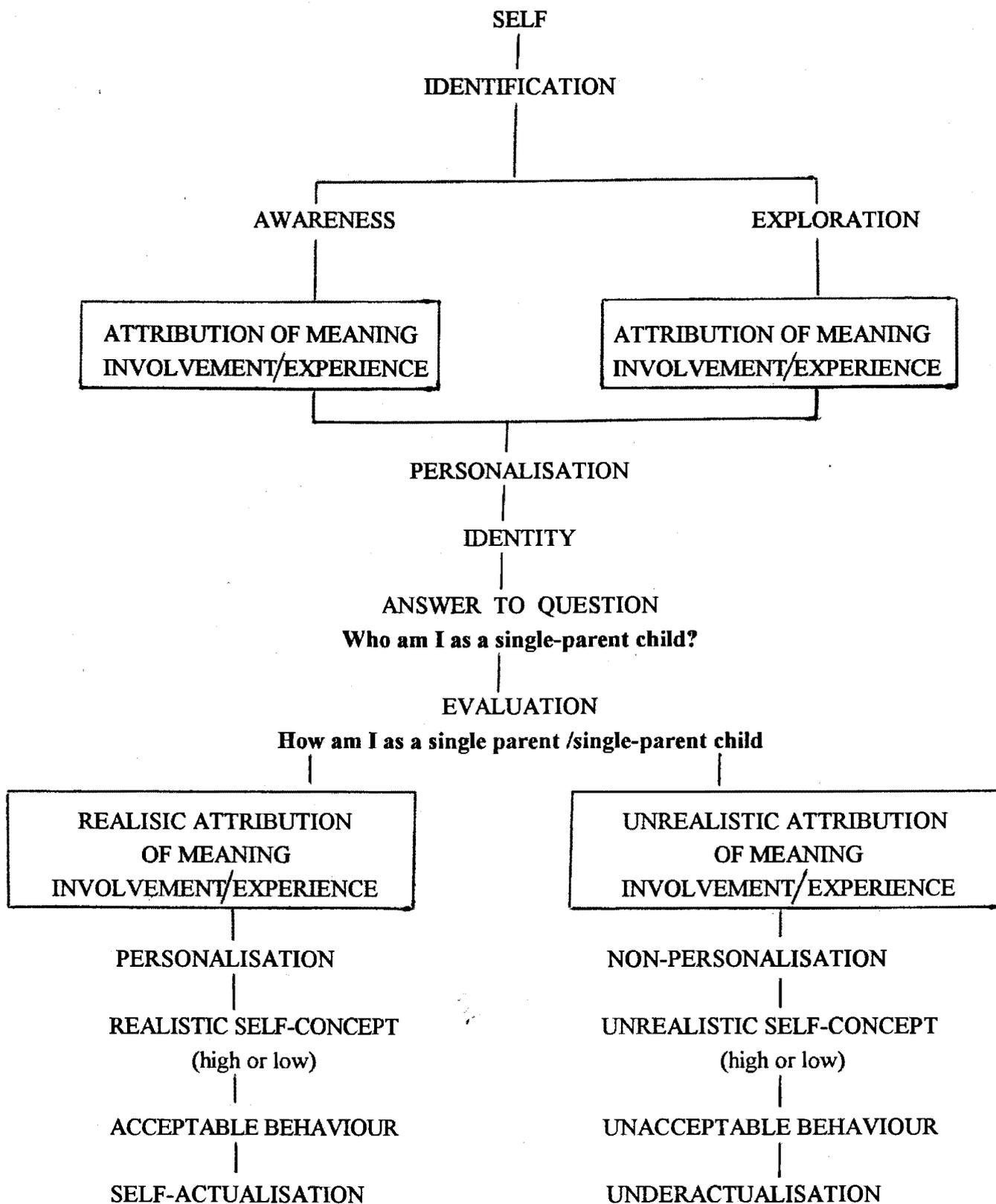
All individuals have important people in their life world who express certain opinions about them and who manifest certain attitudes towards them. An identity is evaluated on the basis of such opinions and attitudes, and on an individual's successes and failures. This is done by ascribing realistic or unrealistic meaning to the identity that has been formed. If individuals can personalise the evaluation of a particular identity (e.g. as a single parent), a realistic high or low self-concept with regard to the particular identity is formed, leading to acceptable behaviour. Personalisation enables people to accept or assimilate an evaluation (as a single parent or single-parent child). If personalisation does not occur, an unrealistically high or low self-concept results with regard to a particular identity which leads to problematic and unacceptable behaviour. Single-parent children who attribute meaning realistically personalise the result of the evaluation accordingly to construct a realistic self-concept. Single-parent children who attribute meaning unrealistically do not accept the new identity, do not personalise it and therefore construct an unrealistically low self-concept. They may adopt various psychological defence mechanisms to protect this unrealistically low self-concept, possibly resulting in unacceptable behaviour. A realistic self-concept enables single-parent children to actualise at school according to their abilities. They forget about themselves and concentrate on work. An unrealistic self-concept causes single-parent children to underactualise since all their psychic energy is directed at themselves and they become unable to concentrate in school (Kokot and Weichers 1991:142-143).

Even well-adjusted, confident and self-actualised children may suffer after divorce as their focus is diverted from school and the outer world back to the home. Their relationships with significant others and ideas, and their identity formation are all affected.

The following diagram illustrates this (Kokot and Weichers 1991:143).



The process of identity formation can be illustrated as follows: (Kokot and Weichers 1991:144)



### 2.7.2 Synthesis

The dynamics of identity formation highlight the interrelatedness of the relational theory categories, and how these categories or essences form an essential part of an individual's life world. Although the single-parent child was used as an example to illustrate the process of identity formation, this process also applies to single parents. Identity formation is affected by experience, involvement and attribution of meaning; and positive self-actualisation depends on the self-concepts formed as a result. It is evident that if single-parent families are provided with a programme to help them form positive new identities, the adjustment to life after divorce would be facilitated.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the literature indicates that single-parent families are traumatised by divorce to the extent that they experience emotional, psychological and cognitive problems. This in turn has an effect on their identities during their adjustment to new roles (as a singleparent or single-parent child). The dynamics of identity formation reveal the interdependence of relationships children and parents form with people and objects. The significance of the essences of meaning attribution, involvement, experience, self-actualisation, self-concept and identity in the formation of new identities for single-parent families is also investigated. Since various research reports note that single-parent families' transition to a single-parent household is made much more difficult because of stressors which are compounded by the inability to perceive and evaluate problems realistically, it is clear that a need exists for a specific support group programme for enhancing identity formation. Although research mentioned in section 2.6.2 shows how the divorce situation affects the self-concept, esteem and identity of families, no research has yet indicated

evidence of a support group programme to assist families in forming new identities and evaluating each identity problem realistically. It is evident from the literature in this section that many single parents experience difficulties that can be considered as identity problems.

Section 2.7 discusses how, due to the role strain, many single parents make unrealistic demands on their children, resulting in role reversal. This situation indicates how inadequate or unsuitable single parents feel about having to assume complete control in decision making and assuming responsibility for parenting, management and coping.

Section 2.2.3 addresses the problems experienced during readjustment, which further causes parents to feel alienated and unworthy as a parent, friend, employee or head of the household.

The feelings of non-custodial parents (usually fathers), who also feel rejected by their families and regard themselves as failures, are discussed also in section 2.2.3. Many fathers admit to experiencing role strain and feel unable to comply with all the expectations of the new roles. They were found to be concerned about their own performances as single parents in relation to their perceptions of social expectations and role performance levels. It was clearly established, therefore, that the transition to the new identity and lifestyle is confusing, unsettling and undoubtedly frightening.

The relevance of relational theory to the process of identity formation, and the significance of identity formation after marital disruption is discussed in section 2.6.1-2.6.2. The necessity of considering relational theory in the analysis of the process of identity

formation is revealed in the relationships existing between the theoretical categories of this approach and the dynamics of identity formation. The literature referred to in sections 2.5- 2.52 discuss how marital disruption affects relationships of single-parent families. The effects of separation on families' identities and the impact this has on the relationships, analysed in these sections, undoubtedly warrant an investigation into what type of programme can be devised to help single-parent families cope with transition and form realistic new identities.

The literature referred to in section 2.6 indicates how single-parent children's perceptions about themselves and their parents are negatively influenced by divorce, affecting the formation of sound identities. In order for children to form new identities a close stable relationship with one or both parents is needed, so that their ventures away from home into the outside world, where they are able to engage in other activities and relationships, are made with confidence and realistic expectations. This is not possible, however, if parents expose them to the confusion and trauma associated with parental conflict and alignment.

The literature review supports the importance of identifying specific intervention strategies that can be utilised by single-parent families to help them form identities in order to adjust to their new lifestyle with realistic expectations.

Section 2.2.2 focuses on the reaction of single-parent families to divorce and their adjustment to the status of a single-parent household and how these reactions positively or negatively affect the process of identity formation. The reaction of single-parent families to divorce with the emphasis on effects on interpersonal relationships and the adjustment

of single-parent families during the various stages of divorce and the transition to a new lifestyle is also explored in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3. Single-parent families become aware of new roles, demands, changes, expectations and coping strategies associated with the transition from a two-parent household to a single-parent household. Section 2.3 of the literature review explores the effect of divorce on the identity formation of single-parent children.

From the literature reviewed in this chapter, it is clear that the problems experienced by single-parent families are related to identity (Section 2.6). Identities which need to be evaluated realistically by parents, and which seems to cause them concern, include those of sole provider, caregiver, head of household, employee, financial organiser, role model and ex-spouse. It is thought that a support group programme could be helpful in assisting parents in coming to terms with their evaluations and to accept each role (or identity) according to its merits with realistic expectations. Similarly, each identity problem should be evaluated according to the processes involved in identity formation during the implementation of the programme, based on relational theory, which may be relevant and useful in this regard.

Single-parent children also experience identity conflicts when they cannot evaluate each identity realistically without some form of support. For example, single-parent children may consider themselves very good "parent substitutes" to the exclusion of all other roles, making them feel inadequate in coping with their other identities.

The identity problems of both parents and children need to be addressed with the provision of a support group programme to help them realistically identify and evaluate their various roles and identities. The significance of relational theory is demonstrated in section 2.7, warranting an examination of the merits of this theory as a basis for the design of a support group programme.

Chapter three reviews the availability and types of support systems, the need for a specific programme aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and the formation of realistic identities, and the design of a support group programme based on relational theory.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### **SUPPORT GROUPS**

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The emotional problems and the subsequent adjustment problems accompanying marital disruption that are experienced by families were discussed in chapter two.

Marital disruption complicates the lives of those concerned and makes the attainment of secure, integrated identities increasingly difficult (Breger 1974:335). Single-parent families experience identity diffusion and need support to assist them to re-evaluate themselves and form sound new identities. This process implies a rearrangement or realignment of previous identities with an acceptance of some and a rejection of others (Breakwell 1988: 153).

Thus there is a need to devise a support group programme to assist these families to form realistic new identities. Society has not yet developed effective support systems to help alleviate some of the problems divorced people face; and in spite of existing support, divorce usually causes a measure of personal suffering. The word "divorce" implies the disintegration of a marriage in legal terms. In general, society does not approve of divorce and is therefore unable to be totally supportive of the individual involved in a divorce situation (Potgieter 1986:41).

This chapter reviews the availability and types of support systems, and explores justification for the establishment of a particular support group programme based on

relational theory. The aims, value, criteria and development of the support group is also examined.

### 3.2 DEFINITION, AVAILABILITY, RELEVANCE AND TYPES OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Cobb (1976) as cited by Gladow and Ray (1986:114) defines support as the exchange of information that provides individuals and families with emotional esteem and network support. Burgess (1979: 137) indicates that there are various community services that are effective to an extent but are regarded more as a patchwork remedy.

Friedlander and Watkins (1984: 349) define a support group as "... a self-help or mutual endeavour in which individuals work together in an attempt to overcome a common problem, to change themselves or society. According to Wong (1978:46) support groups are distinguished from other groups on the basis of the following three characteristics: the voluntary participation of members, activities that are planned with community objectives in view and the fact that the course of events in the group is determined by the members themselves without interference by a professional person.

A support group may be called an emotional crutch which offers mutual support to the group members and within which uniqueness of each member may be discovered and cherished in an atmosphere of trust and open-heartedness (Verreynne 1991: 59).

According to Eloff (1986:72), the term "support group" identifies a group of people who share a common problem and who come together to offer the individuals in the group

reciprocal help and support with the aim of solving the problem. Parks (1981:73) believes that a support system implies the existence of activities at a personal level that help people master stress and facilitate coping behaviours. Social support furnishes information that tells people that they are valued and part of the functioning social network, and should promote contact between individuals with common problems.

Milardo (1988:137) acknowledges that social participation affects one's physical and psychological well-being after marital disruption. For recently divorced or separated parents networks may provide emotional and instrumental support to alleviate the stress of single life, to provide integration into social groups and the wider community and to ease the transition into the new lifestyle.

The five year "Children of Divorce Project" developed by Wallerstein and Kelly (1979) emerges as the most comprehensive programme thus far offered, and consists two intervention models. The first is designed primarily for children too young to allow the therapist direct access to their feelings or conflicts. Three or four diagnostic sessions with individual children are followed by interviews with their parents who focus on interpreting the crisis for their children, planning post-divorce arrangements and discussing ways of easing damaging effects. The second model is an extended crisis-focused intervention designed for older children. Because many children in the early latent stage (6-8 years) are unable to discuss divorce without marked denial and anxiety, a technique described as "divorce monologue" is implemented. Direct counselling proves reasonably effective in dealing with children in the later latent phase (9-12 years), although the researchers note that children's feelings of guilt and anger prove resistant to short-term intervention.

Counselling failure is also attributed to the parenting process and to family situations in which high levels of hostility between parents continues (Simmons 1983:15).

Guernsey and Jordan (1979:289) developed a community-sponsored support group. The support group programme was implemented with volunteer participants aged from nine to ten years. The programme goals were developmental and not therapeutic. The goals were aimed at: helping children develop realistic appraisals of their life situation, improving problem solving in relation to their specific situation (example, how to talk to teachers and friends about their experiences regarding the divorce), improving their self-concept through self disclosure, peer support and leader empathic understanding.

Stewart (1990:1144) found that a network of single parents is a source of instrumental support when parents exchange parenting and child care skills. He recommended that a mentoring programme with experienced single-parents providing assistance and support to new single parents could be established to assist in the transition to single parenthood.

According to Farmer and Galaris (1993:40-42) group affiliation has proved to be a valuable means of reducing stress and social isolation for adults coping with divorce and the groups. It was noted however that the support groups designed especially for children affected by the divorce of their parents have been slower to take hold. Services offered to these children have often been limited to individuals or family psychotherapy. This trend has continued despite the research (by Hetherington et al., 1989, Kalter, 1987 and Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 1989) that has shown that parental separation or divorce can

have an adverse affect on any child's immediate and long term emotional, social and academic functioning.

Benedek and Benedek (1979:165) advocates readily available, goal-directed counselling. In a similar vein, Renouf (1981:79) developed a general Introductory Group Programme, suitable for implementation in community health centres. In addition to providing supportive psychological service for parents and children, the system itself includes sensitisation of the community as well as education and training for teachers who are generally uninformed of even basic psychological principles relating to separation and divorce.

In South Africa a self-help group does exist called the Single Parent Association. This association was established for all single parents, whether that single parenthood is due to death, divorce or any other cause. Organised social activities, discussions and lectures are provided for members and their children. The self-help group model typically does not include specific education, goal-directed counselling or prescriptive therapy as part of its programme. As a consequence these groups are not designed to help parents explore and deal with the feelings of their children other than at a relatively superficial level. However, research to evaluate the effects of such self-help groups on both parents and children has not yet been undertaken and the impact of these programmes has not yet been systematically studied (Potgieter 1986:45)

The existing service provided by the Single Parent Association is essentially inadequate in dealing with problematical attitudes and poor self-concept of children of divorce. There

is a profound lack of and urgent need for goal-directed counselling which aims at identifying divorce-related problems and designing a programme to assist single-parent families. It should focus on the feelings children have regarding divorce, such as guilt, anger, shame, and a sense of loss; and their identity crisis (Potgieter 1986:46). The overall goal should be to facilitate children's successful transition to new roles and lifestyle and to assist families in forming realistic new identities.

According to Kessler and Bostwick (1977:38), during and after a divorce, friends and relatives commonly express great concern about how single-parent families might be affected, but for most families little or no assistance is offered in coping constructively with their feelings with the new changes divorce makes in their lives.

Kelly and Wallerstein (1977:30) claim the following as the goals of their intervention programme:

- a) reduction in suffering, where suffering is defined as intense anxiety, fearfulness, depression, anger, longing and other symptoms causing distress;
- b) reduction in cognitive confusion relating to the divorce and its sequence;
- c) successful resolution of various idiosyncratic issues, for example, dealing more comfortably with an emotionally disturbed non-custodial parent or working through the dilemma of having to choose between parents.

Hozman and Froiland (1977:531) describe possible interventions for the five stages of divorce based on the concept of loss. They state that some direction must be given to counsellors to assist children in reconstructing their worlds.

Dlukoginski (1977:23) maintains that in coping with the crisis precipitated by divorce, children often follow a regular evolutionary pattern involving three progressive stages of orientation, integration and consolidation. All three stages above are directed at children in both the early and later latent stage.

In view of feelings expressed by the children of divorce in his study, Freed (1979) recommends time-limited, small supportive groups for children as an intervention strategy. Rogers (1973) studied the impact of a structured group counselling process on children in the latent phase residing with a separated or divorced parent, and found that this programme did not facilitate attitudinal changes. It is thought that by the short length of time allowed for each session with the total number of sessions and the evaluation procedure within a short treatment period may be significant in this regard.

Kessler and Bostwick's (1977) model offers a one-day, small group session for divorced parents and children. The general goal is to provide a catalytic climate for the acquisition of specific therapeutic skills.

Specific therapeutic goals are:

- a) for parents to explore their own and others' values and assumption about marriage and divorce;

- b) for children to recognise, express and cope constructively with their own and their parents' emotions;
- c) for families to develop communication skills in handling difficult situations.

Wilkinson and Bleck (1977:205) discuss the Children's Divorce Group (C.D.G) which has been offered in various schools in Florida in the U.S.A., and claim that the C.D.G. provides a means of dealing with the crisis of divorce in a way that is familiar and acceptable to many primary schools. The C.D.G. is a developmentally based unit consisting of eight 45-minute sessions intended for small groups in elementary schools and involves various activities aimed at dealing with divorce. In a group of peers (of divorced single-parent children); children can find support and freedom to work through problem areas and to develop self-confidence, thereby enhancing their self-concept.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1977:12) devised a programme called the Single-Parent Family Project which attempts to provide supportive and coping interventions during the transitional and acute stages of the divorce process. The project is directed specifically at custodial parents and their children and is based on theory targeting divorce-related problems. The project is unique in that it provides parents and children with simultaneous services. The project is designed to help parents and children to improve their personal adjustment and lessen their experience of distress associated with marital disruption.

According to Cebollero et al. (1986:220), an increasing number of single-parent families are seeking counselling to help them deal with the process of post-divorce adjustment and

change. Services that have been provided in the past include individual therapy for mothers and fathers, short-term group treatment (Wallerstein and Kelly 1977), educational workshops (Granvold and Welch 1979; Stolberg and Garrison 1985; and Warren and Amara 1984) and single parent support groups (Jauch 1977). Hetherington et al. (1978) devised a crisis model to help facilitate transition and help children deal with the short-term effects of divorce. These services focused on interpersonal skills, on the maintenance of emotional and social adjustment (Magid 1977) and on the effects of divorce on children (Pett 1982).

Burgess (1970:141) stresses the need for an educational programme to help single parents and their children re-establish self-confidence and positive identities. Research by Knive-Ingraham (1985:327) also emphasises the value of a support system to help single-parent families increase their self-esteem and adjust confidently to new roles.

Prince (1984:39) stresses the importance of an effective support system for single parents which positively influences their self-concepts. The support group assists in dealing with emotional issues, helping parents talk about their experiences and feelings, developing good self-esteem and an awareness of one's skills and qualification and how these can be used in the employment situation. He further suggests that assistance in building up self-esteem and good presentation skills should be dealt with in the group session.

Hetherington et al. (1989) believe that the most salient support system for the single-parent family is a continued positive, mutually supportive relationship between the divorced couple and the continued involvement of the non-custodial parent and child.

Custodial mothers were found to be more effective in their parenting if both parents agree on child-rearing practices, if both hold positive attitudes towards each other, if there is low conflict between the parents, if fathers maintain frequent contact with the children and if both parents are emotionally mature enough to deal with the situation.

Services have also been provided in a variety of settings to meet the needs of children. Interventions found most effective with children in the latent phase were facilitated through dialogue which enabled children to see that other children have similar problems (Kelly and Wallerstein 1977). In order to reach as many children as possible, group interventions have increasingly been implemented in schools (Campbell 1984; Cantor 1979; Hammond 1979; Kalter, Pickar and Lesowitz 1984) and in the community (Guerney and Jordan 1979; Kessler and Bostwick 1977; Magid 1977). Goals for these groups are to provide children with support, emotional catharsis and information. The groups facilitate interaction with peers who experience similar difficulties, assist children in gaining a realistic view of divorce and provide an opportunity to understand and express feelings and develop and enhance coping strategies.

Hammond (1979:55-62) suggests that to maximise the effectiveness of direct psychological services, a truly comprehensive programme should be aimed at providing indirect supportive services. She believes that primary school teachers can do much to model acceptance of various family lifestyles and thus reduce the social stigma of divorce. Teachers need to be sensitive to the feelings of children experiencing parental conflict, separation and divorce.

The school as a form of support for single-parent children was reviewed by Kelly and Wallerstein (1976:56-59). The school represents the most stable continuous institution in the lives of many children whose parents divorce. To what extent can children in crisis use the school as a supportive network? Schools serves as a support system in diverse ways for different children of different ages. The school provides structure in children's lives at a time when the major structure of family life is crumbling. Going to school daily, being required to perform certain tasks in and out of school, having routine social contact all potentially help children adapt to divorce in a positive and realistic manner. However, the school was found to be a good support system only for those children who enjoy school, who have above average intelligence, who achieve academically and are not necessarily dependent on the teacher to be a supportive figure. In some instances teachers also offer support during the period of stress through their close relationship with single-parent children.

The comfort teachers provide is important to those who seek it because it temporarily reduces anxiety and brings a small measure of security. However, such support merely provides short-term relief and aid influencing children's capacity to cope with divorce. The richness of the school experience is in some cases insufficient to stave off the eroding effects of turmoil at home or within the child. It is imperative that teachers are able to perceive children's continuing need for reassurance and solace and to discuss their vulnerability with their parents before their progress in learning is seriously compromised.

Since learning is one of the central developmental tasks for all children, the extent to which the divorce crisis interferes with the process of learning is cause for concern.

Temporary interruptions in this process may become significant academic problems if children are unable to return their attention to learning within a reasonable period of time. Divorce-engendered stress compromises children's receptivity to learning, their willingness to explore new concepts, their ability to concentrate and their overall attitude to learning. It is imperative that teachers and principals be sensitive to the ways in which the stress of divorce can disrupt children's ability to participate in the learning process. Such awareness and the willingness to provide a supportive setting makes the school more responsive to the changes brought about by divorce. In this way schools can continue to meet their primary responsibility of helping all children to utilise their potential to the best of their abilities.

Kalter, Gavin and Leber (1991:441) noted that many support group programmes for latency aged children experiencing divorce or separation are school based and are time limited. (Tedder et al., 1987, Alpert-Gillis et al., 1989 and Wanat, 1990). These programmes involve several core objectives, including increasing self-esteem, development of coping strategies through clarification of divorce-related issues and improving communication and problem solving skills. While focusing primarily on the children as identified targets of intervention, there has been a shift toward greater familial involvement in children's support group programmes.

Wanat (1993:427) examined the role of the school in meeting the needs of the single-parent children. The research goals of her exploratory study were to discover special needs of the children, to evaluate the effectiveness of schools in addressing these needs and to suggest additional school programmes and practices that are needed to better

address the needs of these children. School principals, single parents and representatives of educational and social service agencies participated in the interviews. The findings indicated the importance of providing support group programmes for single-parent children.

While research available to date generally shows that improved adjustment to separation and divorce can be attributed to children's support groups and intervention programmes, detailed descriptions of the structural components and protocols of such programmes have been lacking.

Although the various types of support explored here provide invaluable services to families in assisting them to deal with emotional problems, to cope with transition and improving relationships, to date no form of support has been provided to help them gain insight into the correlation between interpersonal relationships and identity formation. The literature reviewed in Chapter two indicates that single parent families' identities are affected after marital disruption (section 2.3.1) and that their identity formation is influenced by the quality of their interpersonal relationships, thus identifying the need to devise a support group programme to assist these families in this respect.

The next section discusses the need to establish support groups according to relational theory criteria necessary for effective support groups, relational theory as a basis for the programme, the theoretical foundation of relational theory, the developmental stages of support group work and the creation of an appropriate climate for successful interaction within the support group.

### 3.3 SUPPORT GROUPS

#### 3.3.1 **Need for a support group programme**

A specific support group programme is essential to assist single-parent families to improve their interpersonal relationships and form realistic identities. The literature review in Chapter 2 (section 2.2.1-2.2.3) discusses the effects of marital disruption on single parent families in terms of their reactions, readjustments and relationships. Problems families encounter include spousal conflict, parental conflict, parental unavailability, role strain, role reversal and social stigmatisation. All these stressors affect the individual's ability to successfully cope with the transition.

Chapter two (section 2.3) highlights the adverse effects of marital disruption on the identities of family members on relationships, and the consequent negative impact on the process of identity formation. The nature of single-parent families' various interpersonal relationships after marital disruption Chapter 2, (section 2.5) suggest that a programme be designed according to relational theory.

#### 3.3.2 **Criteria for effective support groups**

Effective support groups function differently from conversational groups or social groups. Robinson (1980:184-185) maintains that the most effective support groups succeed in uniting in mutual support and providing aid based on a knowledge of a common problem by means of projects that enable members to form new relationships. The self-help project helps people choose one clear, understandable and manageable problem from all those that

confront them; to deal with it and build a new life for people who can control their everyday problems and therefore their destiny.

Meadows (as cited by Hanson et al. 1976:7) describes the functioning of a support group as a dynamic, interpersonal process, directed at conscious thinking and behaviour. Therapeutic functions are maintained in the group where members share their personal problems with one another and with the group leader.

Robinson (1980:181-182) divides the functioning of a support group into two phases. The first phase is known as sharing and the second as project work. Sharing involves mutual sharing of information, experiences and feelings, and can be informal or formal. Formal sharing occurs in a formal group session where members relate experiences and feelings which they have experienced, for instance conflict with a parent, rejection by friends because of the stigma associated with being a single-parent child and labelling by teachers. Informal sharing entails informal contact between group members where support is given informally through such contacts as telephone calls, an exchange of letters, the exchange of a book on a relevant topic, and so on. Sharing involves more than just words, but is operationalised in terms of deconstruction and reconstruction. Deconstruction focuses the group's attention on specific features of their common problem or problems and how they can be solved, processed and personalised. Reconstruction emphasises the activity directed at "producing a new way of life". In the deconstruction phase destigmatisation is stressed. This involves eliminating the social discrediting of group members and their common problems. One way in which this can occur is to change the self-perceptions of group members. This new realisation may make

them feel less conspicuous. The second operation in the functioning of a support group, project work, entails cooperation in performing shared activities. Such activities are planned and organised by the group itself with specific objectives in mind. It is essential for a planned activity to be important to all the group members and for it to arouse their interest, which emphasises the necessity of a common problem as a basis for the structure of the group.

According to Rodalfo and Hungerford (1982:345-346), the aim of a support group is "... to change society to assist personal change, and to aid family members through another's crisis". The nature of the relations in such a group is based on the assumption that the interaction between the members is therapeutic although it is not as specialised therapy group.

The most striking characteristic of support groups is the camaraderie or fellowship between group members because they find themselves in the same circumstances as a result of their communal problem or situation (Freeman 1979:273).

It is only when group members find themselves in the same situation that there can be genuine signs of mutual understanding. Then one could speak of an active, continuous interaction between group members aimed at building up and changing one another in order to enhance their growth as people. This change takes place when group members encourage one another to examine themselves and engage in self-dialogue (Verreynne 1991: 5.10).

Jeger and Slotnick (1982:262) highlight five criteria that defines a support group:

- a) The aim of a support group is to help and support the members.
- b) The origin of the group and its right to exist rests on the members rather than on any external organisation.
- c) Members are dependent on each other's knowledge, technique, care and participation.
- d) Any person with a common problem or problems may form a support group.
- e) The control, structure and organisation of the group is dependent on the members themselves.

Rogers (1973:7-8) points out characteristics of support groups which he regards as therapeutically valuable:

- \* In a group that gathers regularly, members are likely to have a feeling of security, so that they feel free to express themselves and need not be defensive.
- \* Within a climate of mutual trust, a sense of reciprocal freedom follows, where real feelings, positive and negative, are verbalised. Each member accepts himself more and more as a total person emotionally, intellectually and physically.

- \* Members are better able to overcome their psychological defences. The possibility of change in attitudes and behaviour is therefore greater.
- \* There is feedback between members of group. This teaches individuals how they appear to others, how they communicate and what influence they have on interpersonal relationships.

Brown et al. (1989) believe that a support group programme should:

- \* help children resolve divorce-related anxieties, confusion and blame;
- \* help children to express anger in divorce-related situations;
- \* help parents agree on visitation and custody arrangements;
- \* help parents to respond appropriately to children's divorce-related concerns;
- \* help ex-spouses develop a good post-divorce parental relationship and parent-child relationship;
- \* help parents resolve their anger and disappointment;
- \* facilitate the transition to single-parent status.

Kemp (1970:63-66) maintains that objectives in the support group need not be verbalised but that it should be commonly accepted that they concern the satisfaction of emotional needs. There is enormous involvement with the group which is based on trust and honesty. Such a climate causes a willingness and readiness in individual to share their feelings with others. Members become aware of a profound common bond when they discover that there are others with the same problems as they have and that others are willing and prepared to listen to their problems and ideas and try to understand them. Mutual support and an emphasis on acceptance and understanding increases the possibility of discussion, which in turn fosters the ability and readiness to share oneself with others.

According to Hansen et al. (1976:7), the group has a far greater influence than a therapist in individual therapy. Since the group comprises of members with similar problems the members regard the feedback from one another as more cogent and more important than feedback from the therapist alone. The members also feel safer within a support group than in a one-to-one situation because of the feeling that the group can protect the individual. The support group therefore provides security for its members.

Rubin, Price and James (1979:553) stress that, in a support group programme, children must be assured that:

- \* they did not cause the breakup nor can they bring their parents back together;
- \* parents divorce each other not their children;

- \* feelings of emptiness, loss, disorientation and fear are normal and are not permanent;
- \* a one-parent family can still be an emotionally supportive and satisfying family unit;
- \* children have to form new self-concepts through realistic and positive self-evaluation.

Black (1979:25) found that the most important aim in therapy is to help children and their parents to function well. When parents learn to deal with their own emotions, feel worthy again, develop a workable relationship with the former spouse and develop understanding of their children's reactions, then the children benefit. Sometimes what single parents most need is training in child management and the effective running of what may have become a disorganised household, guidance in how to meet emotional needs and how to benefit from emotional support for themselves.

Many single-parents seemed so caught up in survival that they do not have or take the time and energy to recognise and meet their own personal needs as individuals. These parents (both custodial and non-custodial) need a form of support that assists them to form realistic new identities so that they are able to cope successfully as a single parent in a single-parent household.

Section 3.3.3 analyses relational theory as a basis for the design of the programme.

### 3.3.3 Relational theory as a basis for the design of the programme

Chapter 2 (section 2.2 and 2.3) indicates that marital disruption does adversely affect the relationships of single-parent families. Since it is clear that the quality of relationships significantly affect identity formation (section 2.3), relational theory may be valuable as a basis for the design of a support group programme. On the grounds of the findings in chapter two it now becomes necessary to consider how relational theory can be used to develop a programme for a single-parent families.

In order for individuals to orient themselves in their world, they must understand those aspects of reality that constitute this world. This is achieved through a cognitive process of becoming aware of them, exploring them and finally attributing meaning to them. This involvement with aspects of reality defines the term relationship (Kokot 1988:12). After marital disruption single-parent families have to face the reality of the situation and the need to form new, realistic identities. This can be achieved through their attribution of meaning to the situation (which results from awareness, exploration and assigning personal meaning to the new situation), their involvement with and experience of that situation.

Individuals form relationships through the processes of involvement, experience and attribution of meaning. When a particular type of a problem exists in a relationship, it is identified using individuals' involvement, experience and meaning attribution as criteria. Positive relationships promote self-actualisation and negative relationships result in underactualisation and problems as experienced by the individual.

A suitable climate for a support group programme could be based on the above-mentioned categories of relational theory. Participants need to be in an atmosphere that assists them to realise how they experience each relationship, how they are involved in each relationship and what meaning they attribute to each relationship after the divorce or separation.

### 3.3.3.1 *Theoretical foundation of the relationship theory*

Relational theory is based on the pedagogical categories of involvement, experience, attribution of meaning, self-concept and self-actualisation. Through these categories relationships are formed which may be sound or unsound. Sound relationships lead to self-actualisation, while unsound relationships result in problems.

Chapter 2 (section 2.2.3) indicates how interpersonal relationships affect adjustment and cause identity conflicts in single-parent families. The nature and quality of relationships promote either well-adjusted, self-actualising behaviour or maladjusted non-achieving behaviour, including indifference, withdrawal, aggression, etcetera. Families predominantly experience negative emotions soon after marital disruption which are evident in feelings such as rejection, anxiety, shame, loneliness, failure, anger, sadness and insecurity. The negative emotions individuals experience in a particular relationship are frequently transferred to other relationships.

Through these concepts, relational theory can be evaluated in the light of the criteria for effective support groups discussed in section 3.3.2. In addition to the criteria mentioned in section 3.3.2, the following aims of a support group are particularly suited to an

application of relational theory:

- \* the formation of realistic identities;
- \* the perception of the nature of involvement and experience in the respective relationships;
- \* the attribution of realistic meanings to a relationship;
- \* the insight into the correlation between interpersonal relationships and identity formation;
- \* the awareness of unrealistic meaning given to identities which result in identity conflicts;
- \* the need to attain self-actualisation;
- \* the initiation of changes in interpersonal relationships.

Since individuals form relationships through involvement, experience and assigning meaning, the researcher decided to focus the support group programme developed in this study on these categories. Recognising the significance of relationships (after the separation) necessitates the inclusion of relational theory as a basis for the design of a support group programme. The support group programme aims to help individuals

improve their interpersonal relationships, form new identities realistically and initiate change in behaviour. The method used to promote these aims is a process of awareness, exploration and personalisation.

The support group programme will reflect the developmental stages of group work which includes the process of awareness, exploration and personalisation. The development of individuals in the group may begin with their identification of their respective roles or identities and various interpersonal relationships. This may be followed by evaluating the identities and respective relationships, exploring the self-concept and finally attaining self-actualisation.

Since relational theory will be applied in the programme, the programme may be regarded as relational therapy. Since the investigator intends to design a programme to enhance identity formation, the method of group work is reviewed and specific relational intervention programme outlined in section 3.3.4.

#### **3.3.4 The developmental stages of (support) group work according to relational theory.**

Group work (in support groups) as illustrated by Visser et al., (1989:142-143) is the technique the researcher chose to assist individuals to attain self-actualisation (the aim of group work) by means of identity formation (the focal point of group work). Identity formation is the development towards knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the self. The self includes people's system of ideas, their attitudes, values and commitments.

It is through association with other people that individuals derive a self-image through the process of involvement, meaningful attribution and experience.

Group work represents a nomothetic approach with an idiographic result. The nomothetic method refers to the involvement of groups or large number of people in research. The idiographic method refers to research done by involving separate individuals. Group work involves the acquisition of objective knowledge which is necessary for identity formation (nomothetic method) but each individual is given an opportunity to make deductions about him or herself. The investigator implemented the following stages in the programme: awareness, exploration, and personalisation which includes a change in reasoning and behaviour. The development achieved during the awareness and exploration stage ensures the knowledge of feelings for the self and others and the knowledge of specific identities. The personalisation stage gives individuals an opportunity to examine themselves and make the relevant evaluations. During this stage individuals know and understand the meaning of their status within the single-parent family in relationship to themselves. In the last stage individuals effect a change in their behaviour through the techniques of decision making, problem solving and appropriate behaviour strategies (Visser et al., 1989:141).

The origin, focal point, aim and result of group work (in support groups) is illustrated in Figure 5 (Visser et al., 1989:142).

Figure 5 is explained as follows. At the outset and throughout group work the relevance of the educational categories of involvement, meaning attribution and experience are

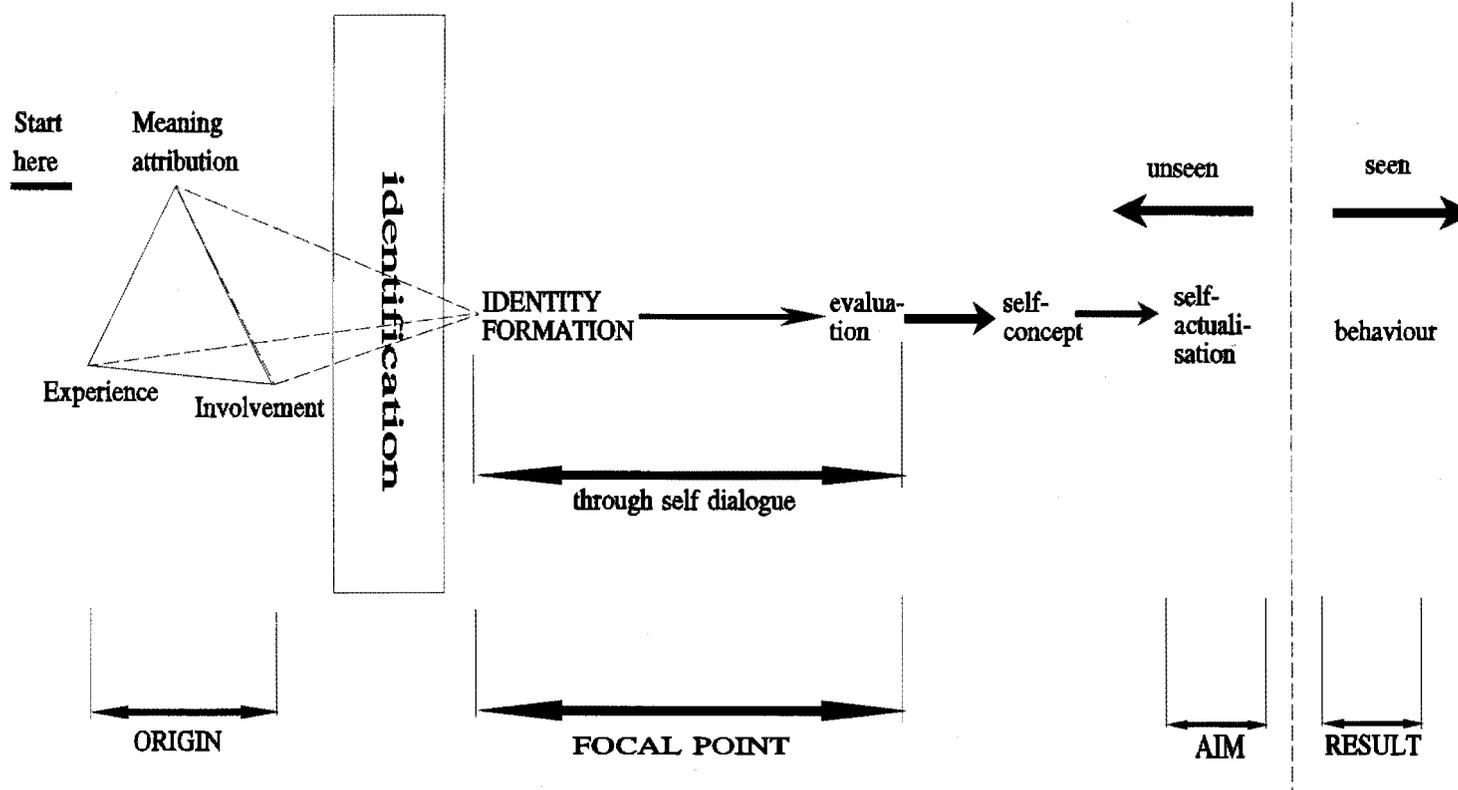
emphasised. Individuals are helped to become aware of the nature of the various relationships and identities involved in being a single parent or single-parent child, as usually they are unaware that they form particular identities and attribute meaning to certain situations according to a certain ideal. However they cannot attribute meaning to a situation unless they are involved; and they have to experience it in the same way either positively or negatively).

According to Vrey (1979:53), no attribution of meaning is possible without involvement and experience which determine the quality of the meaning. So individuals attribute meaning to their experience of the relationship between themselves and the other person. The relationship is thus determined by certain experiential events such as acceptance, rejection, success, failure, love or hate. Each group member's experience of a situation is unique and the relationships that he or she establish are completely distinct. Thus each individual may be involved in a particular situation in a different way because of his or her distinctive experience of such a situation.

Individuals must first become aware of their various identities as a single parent or single-parent child, and furthermore, they must explore these identities. To be able to explore a particular identity individuals must attribute meaning to aspects of themselves which concern the identity. This implies that they need to be involved in meaningful relationships (including relationship with themselves). From the involvement they experience a negative or positive relationship. Individuals then explore the reasons for the negative or positive aspects of various relationships that may influence their identity formation.

# FIGURE 5

*Schematic representation of the origin, focal point, aim and result of group work*

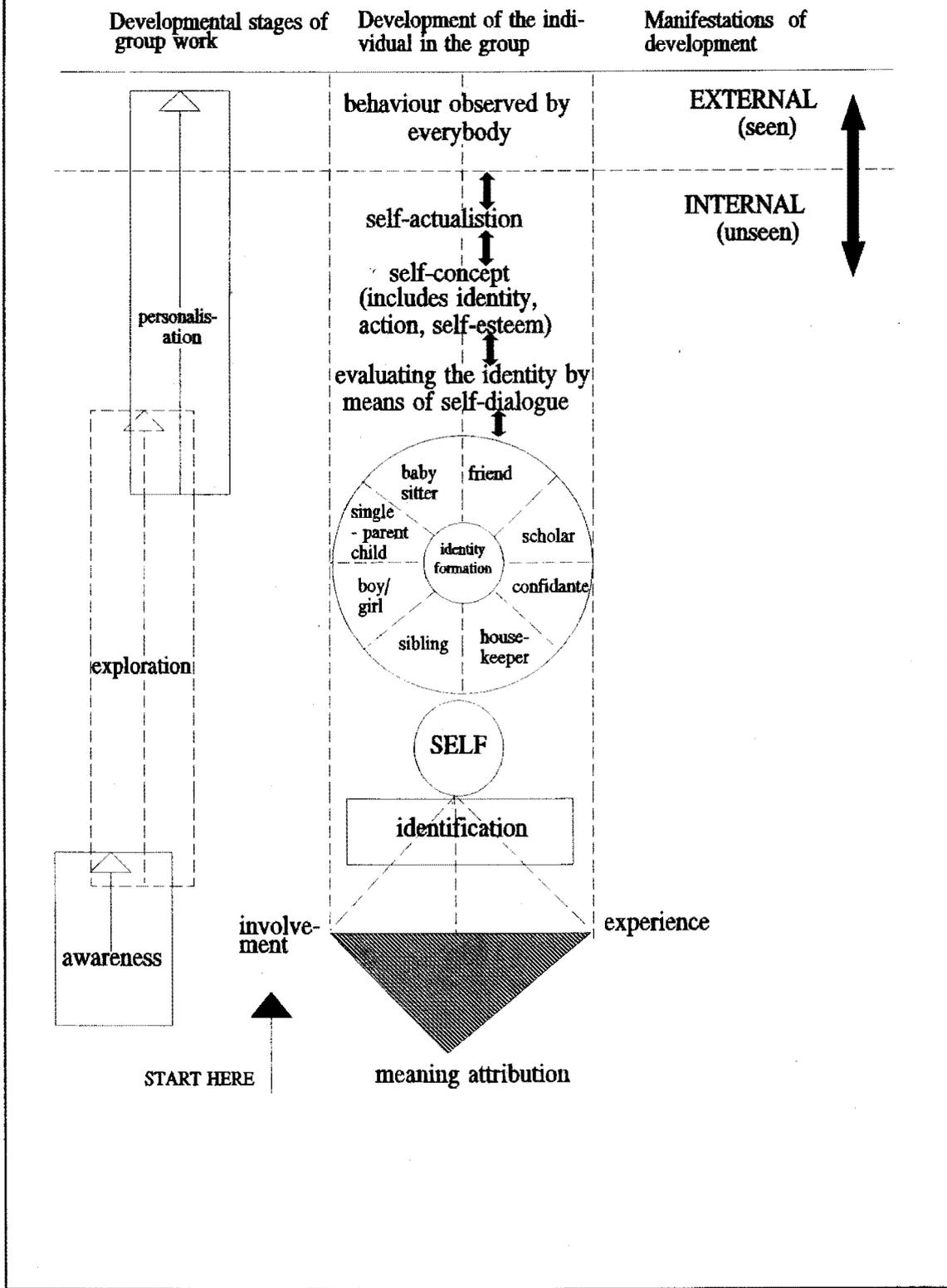


Before individuals can form various identities (as a single parent or single-parent child) personalisation must occur. Every individual interacts with other people in their life world who express certain opinions about them and who manifest certain attitudes towards them. Individuals' identities are evaluated on the basis of such opinions and attitudes and on their successes and failures. This is done by ascribing realistic or unrealistic meaning to the identity that has been formed on the basis of this evaluation. The evaluation can be deduced through self-dialogue (from what they say about themselves to themselves). It involves their answer to the question, "What am I like as a single parent or single-parent child?"

Through personalisation, individuals can evaluate a particular identity, resulting in a realistic or unrealistic high or low self-concept with regard to a particular identity, leading, in turn, to acceptable behaviour. During personalisation individuals accept or assimilate the outcome of their evaluation of the identity. The single parent or single-parent child who attributes meaning realistically will personalise the result of the evaluation accordingly and his or her positive or negative self-concept for a particular identity will be realistic. A realistic self-image will enable individuals to actualise according to their potential in the respective identity. An unrealistic self-concept causes individuals to underactualise. Throughout the stages of awareness, exploration and personalisation development within the group work is unseen or internalised; at the end of the group work, however, individuals' reactions are seen or externalised by their expression of opinions and by their behaviour.

In figure 6 (Visser et al. 1989:143) the procedure of group work is repeated with emphasis on the in-depth development of individuals in the group through the stages of awareness, exploration and personalisation. The identities single-parent children need to form are used as an example here. The figure also illustrates the therapeutic aim (self-actualisation) and the result (observe behaviour) of group work.

**FIGURE 6**  
*Group work in depth*



### **3.3.5 Essential aspects to be considered in the support group programme**

The investigator considers the following factors as stated by Yalom (1985:4) as essential for inclusion in the programme. These aspects are discussed with the group before the actual group work begins so that their involvement is voluntarily active and goal-oriented, and promotes a pleasant experience where individuals feel safe and appreciated and therefore able to significantly attribute meaning to the situation. Members are assured of absolute confidentiality and must also acknowledge and respect this aspect of group work.

In addition,

- a) inspiration of hope must be instilled so that individuals will want to attend the sessions regularly. Hope can be stimulated by sharing positive feedback from the members in the group;
- b) appreciation of the universality of the problem helps members realise that other individuals in the group also experience similar problems. Many single parents and single-parent children think that their problems are unique. This anxiety is often exacerbated by social alienation and negative interpersonal relationships;
- c) sharing information with group members from literature on the problems concerned and individuals' personal experience help group members to feel more comfortable and experience a camaraderie with the group;
- d) altruism and unselfishness are important aspects to consider in a support group. Individuals who join a group may often experience a feeling of helplessness and

uselessness. The feeling that they can help someone (in the group) with advice or suggestions raises their self-esteem. Members are encouraged to help each other a great deal during the group sessions. They support one another, make suggestions and understand one another's problems based on the experience of similar problems. This self-help occurs only when individuals transcend their own problems and become involved in someone else's problems (Yalom 1985:15);

- e) corrective treatment of family group experiences is also important. Family conflict can be relived in the group in a corrective way. Experiences that may have inhibited development in family relations are played out and corrected with other members of the group. During discussions about the nature of a specific relationship and the acceptance or rejection of specific identities, members receive feedback from the group about their feelings, attitudes and problems, and so learn ways in which they may promote positive or negative relationships. Thus individuals are given the opportunity to receive accurate feedback about their interpersonal relations;
  
- f) insight is a desirable outcome of group work. "Insight occur when one discovers something important about oneself" (Yalom 1985:46). Individuals learn how other people see them, for instance, as warm, withdrawn, tense, relaxed, etcetera. They also gain insight into complex patterns of behaviour they may exhibit amongst other people, why they do so, and what they may do to improve their relationships.

### 3.3.6 Creating a climate

Kokot and Wiechers (1991:137-138) believe that the creation of a suitable climate in a support group based on relational theory depends on leaders' warmth, genuineness and empathy. Such a climate is made possible by their ability to listen properly and to feel for group members, being sensitive to their feelings and aware of their messages and non-verbal communication. A climate of warmth and acceptance is created by group leaders who are in touch with the problems and emotions of members, and who can provide the necessary support. In this way members are made to feel that the group leader really understands them. The leaders' behaviour makes group members feel that they accept them as they are, and that they can also accept one another and their problems. Members are accepted on the basis of their human dignity, and not on any other condition. Individuals learn from the therapist how to see, hear and feel with discernment. They begin to feel safe and to support one another in the secure environment of the group. The group leader in an empirical educational support group provides guidance by making the group's common problem the central issue. When group members digress, group leaders bring them back to the issue at hand. Group leaders set objectives, because their role is to provide direction and promote group interests. They provide guidance but never act in an authoritarian way, because they believe in the group members' capacities and willingness to take care of themselves. Leaders' intentions in the support group are group-centred, with the interests of the group as a whole at heart as well as those of each member. They are generally non-directive, but provide direction sometimes in helping the group to concentrate on the central problem. Their prime interests are the group and each member's ability to give support to the others. Their aim is to guide the group towards mutual support, so that when they withdraw at the end of a series of sessions, group

members will still be able to give mutual support, and the group will continue to have a therapeutic value for its members.

#### 3.4 CONCLUSION

The literature review examines the availability and relevance of support groups (section 3.2), the need for a support group programme and the criteria for effective support groups (section 3.3.1) based on relational theory (section 3.3.2). The developmental stages of (support) group work (section 3.3.4) and aspects that are essential for a successful programme (section 3.3.5) are also examined, and it may be concluded that a programme, aimed at improving interpersonal relationships and the formation of realistic identities through the methods of awareness, exploration and personalisation, may be an effective medium of support.

Chapter four outlines the aims of the research, hypotheses, research design and methods used in this study, including the interviews and the support group programme.

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## CHAPTER 4

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **A REVIEW OF THE AIMS, THE HYPOTHESES, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD (DETAILING THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME)**

##### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter reviews the aims of the study, summarises the findings of the literature study (Chapters 2 and 3) and formulates the hypotheses based on the assumptions derived from the literature study. The research design and method are discussed in detail.

##### **4.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

###### **4.2.1 General Aim**

The general aim of this investigation is to explore whether the interpersonal problems of single-parent families are related to identity formation in order to understand the significance of each for facilitating the formation of new realistic identities for the achievement of self-actualisation following marital disruption.

###### **4.2.2 Specific Aim**

The specific aim is to investigate the dynamics of identity formation and to evaluate relational theory as a basis for the design of a support group programme for single-parent families which will assist them to form new identities realistically so that they can make the necessary adjustment to a post-divorce lifestyle with confidence. The possible value

of the categories of involvement, experience and meaning and the process of awareness, exploration and personalisation for a support group programme for single-parent families is also investigated.

The programme aims to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships and help families to achieve self-actualisation.

#### 4.3 SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review shows that single-parent families are traumatised by marital disruption to such an extent that it affects their self-concepts. This results in "shaken" or diffused identities (Chapter 2, section 2.3). Many of the problems that single-parent families experience are considered identity problems. Role overload, role reversal, spousal conflict, the inadequate fulfilment roles of parental alignment and unavailability and social alienation are problems that single parents experience which affect their self-esteem and result in an identity crisis. Similarly single-parent children experience parental conflict and alignment, parental unavailability, peer group alienation, sibling and role reversal, which influence their identity formation.

Most of these problems seem to be related to the quality of interpersonal relationships, affecting individuals' evaluation of themselves. The self-concept that people form as a result of this evaluation affects their ability to self-actualise.

A programme needs to be devised to assist families to form new realistic identities and to improve their ability to self-actualise. The quality of interpersonal relationships would be examined in the programme which includes the stages of awareness, exploration and personalisation in order to determine whether the nature of interpersonal relationships influences the formation of realistic identities, and so assist families to self-actualise

#### **4.3.1 Assumptions based on the literature review**

With reference to the aims (section 4.2), certain assumptions concerning interpersonal relationships and identity problems may be made based on the literature study.

Many single-parent families experience a negative self-concept after marital disruption which affects their evaluation of their identities (Parish and Dostal 1980; Pardek and Pardek 1987; Pasley and Healow 1986; Openshaw and Thomas 1986; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Schorr and Moen 1979; Harper and Ryder 1986; Rashke and Rashke 1979; Bishop and Ingersoll 1989; Du Plessis 1989; Conley 1981; Soehner et al. 1988; and Beane and Lipka 1980 Wijnberg and Holmes 1992 and Goldberg et al. 1992)

Many single parents experience role strain or role overload due to added responsibilities and the acceptance of new roles which contribute to identity conflicts (Morino & McGowan 1976; Factor and Stensank 1988(a); Hetherington 1979; Riseman and Park 1988; Stuart & Edwin 1981; and Mahler 1989 Johnston 1990; Wijnberg and Holmes 1992 and Alessandri 1992).

Single-parent children also experience role strain and role reversal which affects their identity formation and subsequent adjustment processes (Riseman and Park, 1988; Johnston and Campbell 1988; Semchuk and Eakin 1989 McKane 1991; Barber and Eccles 1992; Bayrakal and Kope 1990 and Fewelling and Bauman 1990).

The quality of the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families affects their new roles or identities as single parents or single-parent children. The following aspects of interpersonal relationships have been identified as problematic: parent conflict (Riseman and Park 1988; Johnston 1990; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein, 1989; Barber and Eccles 1992) parent alignment (Conley 1981; Wallerstein and Kelly 1976); parent-child relationship (Gardiner 1979; Tessman 1978; Franke 1989; Smith and Smith 1981; Rubin, Price and James 1979; Hetherington 1979; Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein 1989; Houser et al. 1993); sibling rivalry (Kelly and Main 1979; Shapiro and Wallace 1987; Rosenberg 1980; Striller 1986; Hetherington 1989 and Gehring et al. 1990); and peer-group relationships (Kalter 1990; Burns 1987; Hargreaves 1991; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989 and Richards and Schmiede 1993).

There is a connection between role strain and the quality of interpersonal relationships of single-parent families which may result in identity conflicts (Breger 1974; Johnston 1990; Breakwell 1982; Ritty 1984; McDermott 1968; Tschann et al. 1989; Bonkowski et al. 1984; Glenwick and Mowrey 1986; Wijnberg and Holmes 1992 and Jackson 1994).

The quality of interpersonal relationship may also influence single-parent families' adjustment to the new lifestyle (Tschann et al. 1989; Keshet 1978; Schiff 1985; Shapiro and Wallace 1987; Morawwetz and Walker 1984; Kalter 1990; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989; Rubin et al. 1979; Berg and Kelly 1979; Farmer and Galaris 1993 and Houser et al. 1993).

Due to the above-mentioned problems, single parents (in the the work situation) and their children (at school) are not able to self-actualise (Semchuk and Eakin 1989; and Hargreaves 1991; Wanat 1993; Houser et al. 1993; Richards and Schmiede (1993); Hetherington et al. 1989 and Wallerstein and Blakeslee1989).

The literature review explores the lack of support group programmes designed to help single-parent families to form new identities realistically. Such a programme should be designed to include the educational categories of involvement, meaningful attribution and experience as well as the stages of awareness, exploration and personalisation, so that family members are able to become more aware of their feelings regarding their relationships and the identities or roles, may explore and evaluate each accordingly, and so eventually achieve self-actualisation.

The following research statements are assumptions based on an examination of the literature:

- i) Some of the problems experienced by single-parent families are related to identity problems.

- ii) Single-parent families need to form new identities after marital disruption.
- iii) A support group programme aimed at enhancing identity formation may assist single-parent families towards self-actualisation.
- iv) The quality of interpersonal relationships may affect the process of identity formation in single-parent families.
- v) Parental conflict may adversely affect single-parent children's adjustment to the new lifestyle.
- vi) The added responsibilities involved in being a single parent or single-parent child may influence single-parent families' transition to a single-parent household.
- vii) Single-parent children may experience identity conflicts when subjected to parental unavailability and role reversals.
- viii) There is a relationship between parental alignment and identity problems in single-parent families.
- ix) An intervention programme may assist single-parent families to improve the quality of their interpersonal relationships.
- x) Single parents and their children may evaluate certain identities unrealistically..
- xi) An intervention programme may assist single-parent families to make their adjustment with more confidence and success.

On the basis of these assumptions it is possible to formulate the following hypotheses.

#### 4.4 HYPOTHESES

##### 4.4.1 **General Hypothesis**

A support group programme based on relational theory will assist single-parent families to form new identities realistically

##### 4.4.2 **Specific Hypotheses**

The general hypothesis implies the following :

###### 4.4.2.1 *Members of single-parent families will gain insight into the nature and quality of their involvement in their interpersonal relationships*

As stated in chapter two (section 2.3), after divorce or separation single-parent families tend to become enmeshed in spousal and parental conflicts (including parental alignment) which result in diffused identities. The families' involvement in their relationships and the feelings experienced as a result of this interaction, will determine how positively or negatively the relationships are evaluated.

Interviews and the support group programme will be aimed at helping families towards an awareness and exploration of emotions in relationships so that they gain insight into their own experiences. Through the verbalisation of feelings in interviews and in the support group, individuals will be able to perceive or gain an insight into the nature of their involvement and experience in the relationships.

*4.4.2.2 Members of single-parent families will attribute more realistic meaning to their experience of interpersonal relationships*

Relationships are formed when meanings are attributed by the referent to their interactions. The process of meaning attribution begins with the awareness of the other referent and is followed by exploration which entails an assignment of meaning. When individuals attribute unrealistic meaning to a relationship, feelings of failure, frustration and rejection may result (chapter two, section 2.2). The expression of negative feelings experienced in conflict relationships may in itself be cathartic; and the awareness of all the feelings experienced presents an opportunity to explore the nature of the relationship (chapter two, section 2.2). Such exploration makes it possible to re-analyse the source of these feelings. By attributing more meaning to their relationships individuals further understand themselves by identifying and verbalising negative feelings which are common in several relationships. This in turn helps to promote an awareness of unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to relationships not related to the problematic relationships. For example, if children are angry with the custodial parent for being unavailable most of the time (due to his or her employment situation), they may also become angry with the non-custodial parent and blame him or her for causing such a situation. Likewise, after marital disruption the custodial parent is angry with the non-custodial parent and this anger and frustration may at times also be aimed at the children, negatively affecting parent-child interaction.

*4.4.2.3 Members of single-parent families will gain insight into the cohesion between their interpersonal relationships and their identity formation*

The literature review (chapter two, section 6) indicates a correlation between the quality and nature of individuals' interpersonal relationships and their identity formation. The quality of their relationships affects the the evaluation of their new roles or identities as single-parents or single-parent children. Significant characteristics of interpersonal relationships after marital disruption explored during the support group programme include parental and spousal conflict, parental alignment, parent-child interaction, sibling rivalry and peer group relationships. Negative self-dialogue and irrational, emotional attribution of meaning to a relationship is maintained by the expectation of further negative experiences in that relationship. Inappropriate behaviour motivated by these negative expectations stimulates the type of processes which maintain unsound relationships. In a support group, individuals may be helped to realise how behaviour affects personal interactions and the formation of new realistic identities. They form an identity through their involvement with other people, objects, ideas and themselves and their meaning attribution to the experience of their own potential. They develop a concept of themselves, (that is, their identity) as a person in various spheres of life, for example, me as a single parent/single-parent child, me as a friend, confidant, housekeeper, head of household, etcetera (chapter two, section 2.3). Individuals may be helped to understand the reason for meaning they give to their identities within certain significant relationships.

*4.4.2.4 Members of single-parent families will become aware of the unrealistic meaning given to identities which results in identity conflicts*

The role strain or role overload experienced by many single parents due to added responsibilities may result in identity conflicts (chapter 2, section 2.3). Role reversals as experienced by both single parents and single-parent children can lead to shaken or diffused identities (section 2.3). Children identify with parents and other significant adults and this plays an important role in their development. During the process of identification children develop a closeness to their role (chapter two, section 2.3). Any disruptions in the relationships with identification figures can interfere in the development of an acceptable, individual sense of identity. After divorce or separation, single-parent children have to form various identities associated with this role. After marital disruption both parents and children tend to experience a negative self-concept which affects their evaluation of their respective identities (chapter two, section 2.3), and also experience role strain and role reversal which affects their sense of identity. The relationship between role strain and the quality of family members' interpersonal relationships may also contribute to identity conflicts (chapter two, section 2.3). All the above factors cause family members to attribute unrealistic meaning to their different identities and to negatively evaluate each identity.

*4.4.2.5 Members of single-parent families will use their acquired insight to initiate change in their relationships*

Single-parent family members will be helped to gain insight in order to initiate change in their relationships through the attribution of realistic meaning developed through the

processes of awareness, exploration and personalisation. By re-evaluating a particular relationship, new insight is gained into possibly irrational feelings and thinking concerning it. Once individuals have attributed new rational meaning to relationships, they can explore new and more appropriate ways to interact within these relationships. This will improve the quality of the relationships.

*4.4.2.6 Members of single-parent families will form new identities realistically through involvement, experience and meaningful attribution in relationships*

Single-parent family members are faced with more responsibilities, new roles and identities in their transition and adjustment to the new lifestyle. In order to accept the new roles, families need to attribute realistic meaning to each identity through the processes of awareness, exploration and assigning realistic personal meaning. They first need to be aware of the respective identities, then explore each identity and finally discover the personal meaning they attribute to each identity. Their involvement and experience of the identities will be revealed through their verbalisation of feelings in the support groups.

*4.4.2.7 Members of single-parent families will become aware of the need for self-actualisation*

Many single parents need to work either full-time or part-time after marital disruption and this causes role conflict, particularly regarding the caregiver and provider role. Such conflict results in underactualisation in these roles (chapter two, section 2.7). Single-parent children who have to come to terms with their new identities must face the social reality of being a single-parent child before being able to actualise at school (chapter two,

section 2.7). Through the intervention stages of awareness, exploration and personalisation, the individuals in the group will be able to achieve self-actualisation form sound relationships and so become self-actualising.

#### 4.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Literature referred to in chapter two suggests a link between the interpersonal relationships of single-parent families and identity formation after the divorce. Chapter three investigates the need for a suitable support group programme based on relational theory together with dynamics of identity formation and the relevance and possible value of categories such as involvement, experience, meaning and the process of awareness exploration and personalisation were examined.

It is now essential to consider what type of research design to implement. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a support group programme for the research subject may be mediums suited to the aims and hypotheses stated. According to Morgan and Spanish (1984:260), the strengths of each technique are fully realised in a combination of the different strengths of several mediums.

The research procedure adopted in this research study was one of triangulation. According to Cohen and Manion (1985:254), this may be defined "as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour". In the social sciences, triangulation techniques attempt to map out, or explain more fully the

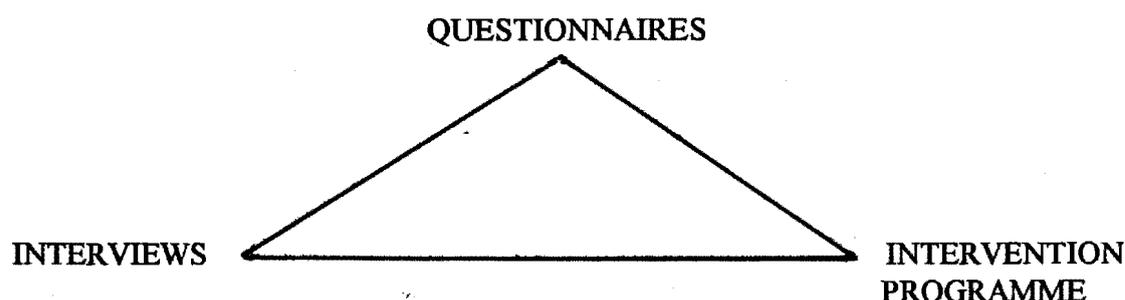
richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, making use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Denzin (1978:271) believes that "no single research method is superior but rather that each has its own strength and weaknesses. It is time for (individuals) to approach their problems with all relevant and appropriate methods, to the strategy of methodological triangulation".

Between-method triangulation is defined as "the combination of two or more different research strategies in the study of the same empirical units" (Denzin 1978:302). It was chosen, because "the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another, and by combining methods, observers can achieve the best of each while overcoming their unique deficiencies" (Denzin 1978:302). Triangulation enables the researcher to support, confirm and extend evidence from different sources.

The research methods chosen by the investigator were the use of questionnaires, an intervention programme and interviews. The research methods chosen are illustrated in Figures 7.

FIGURE 7

BETWEEN-METHOD TRIANGULATION RESEARCH STRATEGY

#### 4.6 RESEARCH METHODS

##### 4.6.1 Questionnaires

###### 4.6.1.1 *Purpose of the questionnaires*

Tuckman (1972:196) states that a questionnaire helps researchers to ascertain what is going on in the respondent's mind. They can make inferences about what respondents know (knowledge and information), about what they like (values, preferences and interests), and about what they think (attitudes). The researcher constructed three types of questionnaires for parents and children respectively. Information questionnaires for parents and children were designed to confirm the findings of the literature review, and to assist the investigator to plan the intervention programme accordingly by presenting it first to a sample population selected for a pilot study. The information questionnaires

incorporated the aspects of interpersonal relationships, adjustment problems, self-actualisation, self-evaluation and the necessity of an intervention programme. The pre and posttest questionnaires are identical for parents and children because they measure the same aspects before and after the intervention programme. The pretest questionnaire will be administered first to gauge the families' initial attitudes, reactions, and perceptions regarding interpersonal relationships (parental conflicts, availability and alignment, sibling rivalry, peer group alienation and parent-child relationships), role reversals, new added responsibilities, identity conflicts, evaluation of different identities, self-evaluation and self-actualisation and the need for an intervention programme. The same questionnaire (posttest) will be given again after the implementation of the intervention programme to identify possible differences in attitudes, perceptions and reactions as initially recorded in the pretest questionnaire.

#### 4.6.1.2 *Construction of the questionnaire*

The questionnaires were compiled after the following conditions were fulfilled:

- i) The items in the questionnaires were formulated after the aims, problems and hypotheses were clearly defined.
- ii) A thorough study of the relevant literature was done.
- iii) An experienced and qualified member of the Research Institute at the University of Durban-Westville examined the contents to assess the questionnaire's face validity.

The selection of sample groups for the pilot study was made as follows:

- i) The sample parents' group was structured to include mothers and fathers but not former couples;
- ii) The sample children's group included children in the early and later latent stage;
- iii) Only divorced and separated parents and their children aged between six and twelve years would be included.
- iv) Groups would consist of custodial and non-custodial parents (but no former couples would be put together).
- v) Anonymity and confidentiality would be assured.

The findings from the literature review and pilot study confirmed which aspects needed to be measured in the respective questionnaires for single parents and children. Although the questions in the children's questionnaires covered the same areas and measured the same aspects, it was necessary to eliminate questions not appropriate for children and to rephrase other questions on a simpler level so that children would understand what was being asked. The questionnaires contained open-ended, more structured and close-ended questions. The investigator hoped that this would result in an abundance of qualitative information that could also yield more structured responses.

It was not possible to obtain a standardised questionnaire which measures all the aspects relevant to this study together, namely, interpersonal relationships, role reversals, perceptions regarding adjustment, identity conflicts, self-evaluation and self-actualisation.

For this reason, the investigator implemented standardised questionnaires from various studies which measure some of the above-mentioned factors.

The following researchers' standardised questionnaires were used :-

- i) Interpersonal Relationships by Stangeland, Pellegrino and Lundholm (1989).
- ii) Perceptions regarding adjustment by Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carrol and Cowen (1989).
- iii) Role reversals by Riseman and Park (1988) and Semchuk and Eakin (1989).
- iv) Identity conflicts and evaluation by Pedro-Carrol and Cowen (1985).
- v) Self-evaluation by Rosenberg (1980).
- vi) School Performance and Self-Actualisation by Hightower, Work, Cowen, Lotyewski, Spinell, Gaure and Rohrbeck (1986) and Wanat (1993).

The items in the pretest and posttest questionnaires are identical because the researcher intends to ascertain what changes in attitude and behaviour are evident after the implementation of a support group programme. The responses will be analysed qualitatively and the respective responses from each questionnaire will be examined. It must be noted that some items which appear in the information questionnaires are repeated in the pretest and posttest questionnaires because the contents of the latter will not be analysed qualitatively, and since these items are considered essential, aspects to be included for analysis, they were incorporated into the pretest and posttest questionnaires. Each item (or question) examines certain aspects; the number of each

item (question) is indicated next to each aspect for the respective questionnaires, as indicated below:

**A. PARENTS' PRE AND POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRE :**

- 1) Reaction to divorce/separation
- 2) Blame
- 3) Spousal Conflict
- 4) Social Alienation
- 5) Parental Availability (non-custodial)
- 6 & 17) Perceptions regarding adjustment
- 7) Parental availability (custodial)
- 8-9) Parental alignment
- 10 & 15) Coping skills
- 11) Actualisation in respective roles
- 12 & 13) Role overload
- 14 & 16) Role reversal
- 19) Acknowledgement of respective roles
- 19 & 20) Evaluation of roles.

**B. CHILDREN'S PRE AND POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRE :**

- 1) Reaction to divorce/separation
- 2 & 24) Self-evaluation

- 3) Blame
- 4 & 5) Parental conflicts
- 6) Peer & group alienation
- 7 & 9) Parental availability
- 8 & 21) Parent-child relationship
- 10) School performance
- 11) Self-actualisation
- 12) Reactions to parental availability
- 13) Perceptions regarding (custodial) parents' capabilities
- 14) Perceptions regarding families' adjustment
- 15) Role reversal
- 16 & 17) Role overload
- 18) Interpersonal relationships
- 19) Acknowledgement of identities
- 20) Evaluation of each identity
- 22) Perceptions regarding (non-custodial) parents' attitude
- 23) Perception about own adjustment
- 25) Suggestions regarding support group programme

The full questionnaires are presented in appendices 1 to 4.

#### 4.6.1.3 *Implementation of the questionnaires*

The information questionnaires for both parents and children were submitted to the families in the pilot study. Each question was read orally with explanations given when

requested. The respondents were also invited to add additional information or questions.

The purpose and contents of this questionnaire are noted in section 4.6.1.

### THE PRE AND POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRES

These were submitted to the families in the pilot study (pretest) a month before the interviews and the implementation of the programme. Two months later, questionnaires were administered on completion of the intervention programme as a posttest measure.

#### *4.6.1.4 Processing and interpreting the results*

Since the sample in the pilot study was small (20), each item in the questionnaires was recorded and analysed accordingly (See section 4.6.1.7). The researcher realised that the questions were only a tool by which she could acquire the relevant information in order to determine whether the results are linked to the aims, problems and hypotheses of the study.

#### *4.6.1.5 Reliability and validity of the questionnaires*

The questionnaires were examined for reliability during the pilot test. Each question should convey the same meaning to all the people in the group and the respondents should be able to interpret the same questions the same way each time the question is administered. The questions were also reviewed for validity, that is, whether the respondents experienced similar situations or problems. The selection and phrasing of questions both influences validity.

According to Berdie, Anderson and Niebuhr (1986:5), "a questionnaire is not merely to be filled out, it is essentially a scientific instrument for measurement and for collection of particular kinds of data. Like all such instruments, it has to be specially designed according to particular specification and within specific aims in mind".

Questionnaires in the pilot study were all administered by the investigator, obviating a bias caused by administration by different individuals (as done in a large survey) due to different voice inflections, pronunciations, mannerisms and gestures. With a small group where there is only the investigator this bias can be avoided. The contents and general semantic construction were also analysed by a qualified and experienced personnel member of the University of Durban-Westville.

To test the information questionnaire and pretest questionnaire to ensure that single-parent families do experience similar problems as reflected in the literature review and to assist the investigator to plan her programme accordingly, a group of ten single-parents and eight single-parent children were selected from the target group for a pilot study. Their responses to the questionnaire confirmed most of the findings from the literature studies. Additional information regarding social stigmatisation and the need for a support system were then included in the amended information questionnaire which was then submitted to the target group selected for study. The families selected for the pilot study were exposed to and participated in the support group programme and were excluded from the target group. They did, however, participate in the pretest questionnaire.

#### 4.6.1.6 *Pilot testing*

The findings from the pilot test are briefly discussed below:

**SUBJECTS** : The participants included two non-custodial parents (fathers), eight custodial parents (mothers), five children in the later latent stage (3 girls and 2 boys) and five children in the early latent stage (2 boys and 3 girls).

Findings from the respective questionnaires confirmed that single parents and their children experienced problems of parental and spousal conflicts, parental availability and alignment, sibling rivalry, role strain, role reversal and poor self-evaluation. The responses from the parents' and children's questionnaires are noted according to the aspects investigated.

#### **PARENTS' INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE** :

**PARENTAL ALIGNMENT** : Six mothers blamed the ex-spouse for parental alignment.

**PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP** : Five parents admitted that the parent-child relationship was adversely affected while three other parents maintained that they shared a closer bond with their children after the divorce.

**EMPLOYMENT** : All the parents worked either full-time or part-time.

**ROLE STRAIN** : Four (custodial) parents confirmed that the work situation caused

One (non-custodial) father admitted that he found it difficult to comply with all the expectations of the new lifestyle, especially when his children came to visit over weekends and holidays. Four parents admitted that they let their children help with certain chores which they felt may have been too much to cope with daily.

**REACTION TO DIVORCE/SEPARATION** : Eight parents (7 mothers and 1 father) blamed the ex-spouse for the separation and while three parents stated that they enjoyed their independence to an extent, four others acknowledged that they experienced a deep sense of loneliness, frustration and bitterness.

**PERCEPTION REGARDING CHILDREN'S SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**

Six parents (including one father) mentioned that their children's performance at school was adversely affected after the divorce.

**SOCIAL ALIENATION** : Two parents stated that they had time to socialise to an extent; four felt there was no time for social activities and four parents indicated that they felt alienated by their friends and relatives after the separation.

**MIXED SUPPORT GROUP** : Three parents stated that a mixed support group (fathers and mothers) would undoubtedly help overcome certain stigmas and prejudices regarding the other parent's opinion regarding marital disruption. More especially, subjects felt that single-parent fathers' views on parenting and coping skills would be enlightening to the mothers in the group and vice-versa.

VALUE OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM : All the parents acknowledged that they volunteered to join the support group to learn more about coping with the new lifestyle and to get assistance in improving their situation.

PARENTS' PRE AND POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRES :

REACTION TO DIVORCE/SEPARATION : Seven parents felt angry, frustrated and rejected, while three parents felt relieved.

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP : Six parents stated that it was important for the ex-spouse to maintain a regular and stable relationship with their children; however, three parents believed that it was not necessary for the children to see their fathers.

ADJUSTMENT AFTER DIVORCE : All the parents admitted that the adjustment and transition to the new lifestyle was difficult.

PARENTAL ALIGNMENT : Six parents acknowledged that at times they criticised the other parent when their children spoke about them.

PARENTAL CONFLICT : Four parents admitted that they still had problems interacting with the other parent, especially on matters pertaining to their children.

**ROLE STRAIN** : When questioned about the various roles they now had to assume, seven parents admitted that it was difficult to cope adequately with the different roles, although four parents stated that they tried their utmost to manage each role to the best of their ability.

**ROLE REVERSAL** : While four parents stated that they did not let their children share their adult responsibilities (like cooking, laundry and shopping), Six others mentioned that they allowed their children to share responsibilities because they could not cope by themselves. Two parents felt it was important for the children to perform these chores as it made them more responsible.

**EVALUATION OF ROLES** : When questioned about which role they managed the best, four mentioned the provider role, three, the caregiver role and one mother stated that she managed both these roles adequately. However, all the parents agreed that they could not fulfill each role well enough.

**SELF-EVALUATION** : While six parents felt that they were more capable as single-parents, four mentioned that at times they found themselves incapable of managing certain stress situations.

**SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN'S INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE** :

**PARENTAL AVAILABILITY** : Six children stated that they saw their (non-custodial)

fathers regularly and two children revealed that they did not. Four children admitted that they did not spend as much time with their (custodial) mothers as before and this caused them to feel angry, sad and depressed.

**PARENTAL ALIGNMENT AND CONFLICT** : While six children admitted that their parents still spoke to each other in a friendly manner, three stated that their parents still had arguments and this made them feel angry, sad and frustrated. Four children acknowledged that sometimes the one parent made unpleasant remarks about the other.

**REACTION TO DIVORCE/SEPARATION** : None of the children blamed the mother for the separation, while six children blamed the father and one child blamed the father's girlfriend.

**SIBLING RIVALRY** : Four children mentioned that they have a better relationship with their siblings, while three admitted that they now fight a lot.

**ROLE REVERSAL** : Five children acknowledged that their parents let them be "in charge" when they were away and this made them feel proud and happy, although, one child felt frustrated and another child stated that her mother always let her older brother (10 years old) be "in charge" which made her feel sad and angry.

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE** : While three children stated that their progress at school

was the same, one child regarded his progress as better and three others felt that their progress had worsened after the divorce.

SINGLE-PARENT CHILD STATUS : One child was proud to be a single-parent child, four were depressed and two were angry.

SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN'S PRE/POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRE :

PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP : While six children stated that parents cared a lot for them especially after the divorce, four children stated that their parents were not as close or as available. Three children admitted that when they needed help with schoolwork their mothers were not always available and this made them feel angry and depressed.

MORE RESPONSIBILITIES : Six children maintained that they had more responsibilities at home after the separation and this made them feel both proud and sad.

NEW IDENTITIES : The children were able to see themselves in the various roles or identities.

EVALUATION OF IDENTITIES : Two children stated that they were good scholars, one a good babysitter, one a good cook and one even a good housekeeper. While two

children like being a babysitter and a cook, two children disliked being "in charge" when the parent was away.

PARENTAL CONFLICT : Two children who saw their fathers regularly felt disloyal to their mothers because their parents still had arguments about certain matters. One child did not like visiting her father any more in his new home because his girlfriend lived there. Four children mentioned that they blamed the father for the separation and were angry with him.

PARENTAL ALIGNMENT : Two children mentioned that their parents did not make unpleasant remarks about each other, while four children admitted that their parents made unpleasant remarks (especially when they were angry). One child stated that she was rebuked when she spoke about her father (especially after a visit).

SINGLE-PARENT CHILD STATUS : One child admitted that she was happy, two felt depressed and one was confused about being a single-parent child.

ADJUSTMENT AFTER THE SEPARATION : Three children stated that they had adjusted well and four maintained that they still had problems adjusting to the new lifestyle.

SELF-EVALUATION : Three children maintained that they had a poor self-concept after the separation and one blamed herself for causing the marital disruption.

**SCHOOL PERFORMANCE** : Four children stated that their progress at school was not affected by the divorce and four stated that their performance was adversely affected.

**NEED FOR A SUPPORT SYSTEM** : Five children admitted that they needed a support group to discuss similar problems and to share ideas and one child admitted that she needed to improve her relationship with her brother.

The findings indicate that there is a need for an intervention programme to assist the single-parent families to evaluate their interpersonal relationships and to form new identities realistically. All the questionnaires were then modified and amended accordingly for use with the target group.

#### *4.6.1.7 Observations and recommendations based on the pilot study*

When the questionnaires were filled in separately by the parents and children it was noticed that most of the participants (especially the younger children) needed assistance and clarification before being able to respond. The children experienced difficulty in reading the questionnaires. When the researcher read the questions out, however, they understood and could fill in their responses. They also needed assistance with spelling certain words. Due to these difficulties, the researcher decided to convert all the questionnaires to semi-structured interview schedules. During the interviews with each subject, the researcher read out each question and ticked off the relevant responses. The interviews also included open-ended questions and were recorded with a tape recorder. The same questions that appeared on the questionnaires appear on the interview

schedules. The interview schedule seemed a more effective instrument than the questionnaires, as the researcher ensured that each question was clearly understood.

#### 4.6.1.8 *Selection of the sample*

During the pilot study the subjects in the parent group (4 fathers and 6 mothers) were questioned about their views on a mixed group. While two parents (both fathers) stated that it would be beneficial to the group as a whole, the remaining eight (2 fathers and 6 mothers) indicated that they preferred a homogenous group. This grouping would enable them to discuss matters freely and honestly. In response to this, the researcher decided to include only divorced or separated single-parent mothers in the sample group. All the mothers had custody of their children.

## 4.7 INTERVIEWS

### 4.7.1 Introduction

Ackroyd and Hughes (1981: 18) see interviewing as the most important data collection instrument in the social sciences and consider it more than a mere tool. In the social sciences, qualitative and quantitative approaches to interviewing are used.

According to Lofland (1971:3-4, 7), the qualitative method is implemented to obtain information that is relevant to various attitudinal, situational and environmental factors in the "world" of those being investigated. For an accurate interpretation the researcher needs inter-subjective and personal knowledge of each subject. Methods such as

informant interviewing, participant observation and in-depth interviewing allow the interviewer to "get close to the data" and to obtain firsthand knowledge.

Morgan and Spanish (1984:260) compare group interviewing with in-depth individual interviewing. In informant in-depth interviewing the respondents are given the opportunity to explore their own attitudes and experiences in greater detail while in group interviewing the respondents are able to observe participants interacting and to pursue their own topics of interest.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) as cited by Shurink (1989) found that informant in-depth interviewing offers the researcher a chance to develop an interview schedule that is grounded on participants' understanding of the topic. The main advantage of this type of interviewing (using an interview schedule) is that the data is obtained relatively systematically and that comparison of the data is facilitated. Also, the interviewer need not be particularly skilled in interviewing.

For the purpose of this study qualitative interviewing was chosen as more appropriate and relevant, for the following reasons :

- \* the size of the sample (20 subjects) allowed for individual treatment of the subjects;
- \* the nature of the research is very sensitive and emotionally charged;

- \* the opportunity to understand the exact meaning of the subjects' responses was greater;
- \* the opportunity to analyse both verbal and non-verbal responses was presented.

#### **4.7.2 Basic principals of interviewing**

The following basic principals as outlined by Shurink (1989:143) were adhered to during each of the interviews and are briefly defined :-

- \* *Respect and Courtesy*

An interviewer must treat his/her subjects with respect and courtesy.

- \* *Confidentiality*

A subject should have no doubt that his identity and any information he/she provides will be regarded as confidential.

- \* *Integrity*

It is essential for the maintenance of a sound relationship of trust and no false expectations be raised in the subjects and that they be treated with absolute honesty.

#### **4.7.3 Planning the interviews**

The researcher had initially intended to use questionnaires to obtain information from her subjects, however from the the observations noted during the pilot study it was decided to use an in-depth semi-structured interview schedule instead. Interviewing each subject individually would be more effective than using questionnaires in a group situation. The

same questions from the questionnaires were used as reflected in paragraph 4.6 where the researcher also indicated that she used various other standardised questionnaires to compile her own standardised questionnaires. The researcher used two different interview schedules for each group, namely an Information Interview Schedule and a Pre/Posttest Interview schedule. For both the children's group (E.L.C. & L.L.C.) the same interview schedules were used.

The purpose of the information interview schedules was to confirm the findings from the literature review and to assist the investigator in planning the pre/posttest interview schedules and the support group programme. The information interview addressed the aspects of awareness, exploration and evaluation of interpersonal relationships, role strain and role reversal, adjustment problems, identity conflicts, self-actualisation and self-evaluation and the necessity of a support group programme. This interview was conducted in July and August 1993.

The pre/posttest interview schedules are identical because they measure the same aspects before and after the implementation of the programme. The pretest interviews conducted with the sample group in October and November 1993 and the posttest interviews two months after the completion of the support group programme in March and April 1994. These interviews investigated aspects including awareness, exploration and evaluation of interpersonal relationships (including parental conflicts, parental alignment and parental availability, sibling rivalry, and parent-child interaction), awareness, exploration and evaluation of identities (including identity conflicts stemming from role strain and role

reversal and parental alignment), self- evaluation and self-actualisation. The responses from the information schedule confirmed most of the findings from the literature studies and so the questions from these interviews were incorporated into the pre/posttest interview schedules.

The posttest interview was designed to gauge the following aspects :

- \* effectiveness of the programme
- \* change in attitude and behaviour
- \* insight into interpersonal relationships

#### **4.7.4 Pretesting the interviews**

The same sample (ten parents and ten children) used in the pilot study was selected for the pretest interview schedules. This sample excluded the families who were to be included in the programme. The procedure and purpose of the interview were explained before the participants volunteered. After the pretest certain questions were rephrased and insight was obtained into a more suitable manner to handle certain questions. The responses to the pretest were more forthcoming and better understood in comparison with the responses to the questionnaire, and the subjects did not need as much assistance. The pilot study also confirmed that the resulting data could be quantified and analysed in the manner intended.

#### **4.7.5 Selection of the target group**

The target groups included parents who had been divorced or separated within the previous two years and who had children aged between eight and twelve years. All of the eight parents who responded to the request were included in the target group for interviewing and participation in the support group with their twelve children.

#### **4.7.6 Communication during the interview**

Since interviewing is essentially a communicative process between an interviewer and a subject, the principles of interviewing can be retraced to the principles of everyday communication; indeed, without communication there can be no interviewing (Shurink 1989:142).

The researcher had to be aware of her own verbal and non-verbal communication and the effect that it had on the subjects, as well as the subjects' own verbal and non-verbal communication and possible meanings it conveyed. For example, if a researcher's facial expression depicts interest, this encourages subjects to communicate; and intervals of silence could be used effectively (Demos and Grant 1976:77-78).

The subjects were informed that their responses would be noted in the schedule, and in the case of the open-ended questions, the responses would be recorded on a tape recorder. All the subjects agreed to this procedure.

#### **4.7.7 Analysis of the data**

Though the research sample was small, including twenty subjects in all, it was deemed necessary to clarify the comparisons between the responses in the pre/post interviews in an analysis and presentation of the results in table form, as this method was felt to facilitate a clearer representation and comprehension of the responses.

#### **4.7.8 Validity and reliability**

No research study can avoid the problem of bias; and perhaps the most persistent question raised in the study of sensitive family topics is how can one be sure that subjects told the truth. Although in this study the researcher cannot guarantee that all responses were truthful, she did however, stress the importance of truthful answers to enable the participants to get the maximum benefit from the support group programme. Furthermore, the families needed help and were willing to cooperate and hence the researcher assumes that their perceptions and attitudes were based on the truth as they saw it.

### **4.8 THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME**

The programme would be implemented after the pretest interviews. The subjects will be notified about the purpose and duration of the programme and will be reassured of confidentiality. They will be encouraged to participate spontaneously and honestly. The entire process will be recorded.

#### **4.8.1 Selection of the target group**

The single-parent mothers who had been divorced for less than two years and their children aged between seven to twelve years were selected for the study.

#### **4.8.2 Composition of the groups**

Three groups formed the research sample : a single-parent group (eight participants), a group of six children in the early latent stage, and a group of six children in the later latent stage.

The composition of the childrens' groups normally depends on the age of the children, as younger children (7 to 9 years) have a short attention span and experience difficulty in sitting still for some time and listening to others in the group. For this reason, the younger the children are, the smaller the size of the group needs to be. For this age group (7 to 9 years) four to ten members are considered ideal (Barnes 1977, Duncan 1980 and Webb 1983). A group of eight to fifteen members is regarded as a suitable size for a group of older children (10 to 12 years). Though single sex groups are preferred for younger children it is not absolutely necessary. In mixed groups it is considered helpful to have an equal male to female ratio (Mayer and Baker, 1979), although an uneven ratio would not really present a problem; the success at group discussions depends rather on the size of the group. Appropriate group size assures maximum participation (Duncan and Gumaer 1980).

Age should also be considered in the formation of groups. Lavery and Fawcett (1987) suggest that the age span should not exceed three years. A wider age range may inhibit younger members and allow older members to dominate discussions. The age of the participants also affects the level of communication. Appropriate meaningful interaction is best achieved with group members of similar age. Thus the investigator divided the children's group into two separate groups as already indicated, both consisting of 3 boys and 3 girls.

#### **4.8.3 Time allocation for group sessions**

The parents and children will meet bi-weekly for sessions lasting one hour each. However, if children in the younger group do not seem to be able to concentrate for the hourly sessions, their sessions will be shortened to half-an-hour. The following timetable has been planned.

**TUESDAY** : Early Latency Children (E.L.C.) - 17h00 - 18h00

Later Latency Children (L.L.C.) - 19h00 - 20h00

**WEDNESDAY**: Single-Parent Mother's Group (S.P.M.) 19h00 - 20h00

**THURSDAY** : Early Latency Children (E.L.C.) - 17h00 - 18h00

Later Latency Children (L.L.C.) - 19h00 - 20h00

**FRIDAY** : Single-Parent Mother's Group (S.P.M.) 19h00 - 20h00

#### 4.8.4 Information regarding the sessions

The researcher had already met the parents and children during the completion of the questionnaires and the interviews. The following aspects regarding the group sessions will be discussed before the implementation of the programme.

a) INTRODUCTION

Introduction of members to each other will be done as a general "ice-breaker" so that each member feels more comfortable within the group. The children's group will include a name game where each child calls out his or her name to the whole group.

b) RULES

Everything discussed in the group is confidential. Group members must try to attend each session and make a commitment to work and try to cooperate in the group sessions. Each member must be given an opportunity to express him or herself.

c) LENGTH AND NUMBER OF SESSIONS

Sessions will last approximately one hour for the parents and children.

d) Each session will end with a verbal summary of aspects covered/issues raised in the previous session. Members will be told what the aims of the next session are.

Subsequent sessions will begin with an invitation to deal with "unfinished business" from the previous session.

#### **4.8.5 The support group programme**

##### **4.8.5.1 *Stage 1 - Awareness***

Objectives are to help group members to

- (1) become aware of the multitude of feelings that are associated with divorce, including all conflicting and contrasting feelings;
- (2) be involved in an awareness of the self and an awareness of the personal experience of different feelings regarding the divorce;
- (3) express and share all feelings experienced during and after the divorce.

#### **SESSION 1**

**AIM** : To encourage individuals to become aware of their experience of different feelings towards themselves and others after marital disruption.

#### **ESTABLISHING RAPPORT**

**CHILDREN'S GROUP** : A name game will be played where each child will call out her/his name and show the name card to others. Children will then be given an opportunity to guess each other's names.

**PARENTS' GROUP** : The individuals will each introduce each other by standing up and

saying their names. The investigator will then explain that the aim of the session is cathartic where participants will be given an opportunity to express and share different types of experiences associated with divorce.

A chart with the key word "Divorce" will be used and various feelings relating to the word are identified in a brainstorming session.

To acknowledge particular feelings experienced by individual members, each member will be asked to list their feelings (on a worksheet provided) under the following headings:

- i) feelings about the self
- ii) feelings relating to significant others (mother, father, brother, sister, son, daughter, etc.)
- iii) feelings about work (at place of employment or at school).
- iv) feelings about specific roles.

## SESSION 2

AIM : (1) To help individuals become aware of the nature of their involvement in different relationships, the quality of their experience in their involvement and the meaning they give to the relationships.

- (2) To help members perceive that their involvement in a relationship and the feelings experienced as a result determine how positively or negatively the relationship is evaluated.

The members will be encouraged to discuss problems in relationships. They will be helped to see how problems can be defined or diagnosed in terms of involvement, experience and meaning, and will be encouraged to focus on the following problem areas :

- i) spousal relationship (parent group)
- ii) parental alignment/parental conflict (children's group)
- iii) parent-child relationship (both groups)
- iv) sibling rivalry (children's group)
- v) availability (involvement) of members after marital disruption (both groups).

In this way, they will begin to analyse their relationship problems.

#### SESSIONS 3 and 4

AIMS : To help members become aware of and discuss various identities that they feel are significant to them, and to encourage them to elaborate on feelings that they experience in those identities. They will try to examine the various roles or identities they now have and how these are affected through the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

The following areas will be mentioned to prompt discussion:

- i) awareness of different roles/identities
- ii) feelings about these roles/identities
- iii) coping skills with regard to identities
- iv) relationships which
  - a) influence the individual's respective roles/identities
  - b) cause identity conflicts (caregiver/provider role, father/mother substitute, brother/sister role, etc.
- v) role strain, reaction to role strain
- vi) feelings about the reversal of roles.

#### 4.8.5.2 *Stage 2 - Exploration*

- (1) This stage entails gaining more knowledge and understanding of the self through the expression of feelings, exploring the processes involved in various relationships which give rise to different feelings. Individuals are encouraged to visualize situations in order to identify and understand problems.
- (2) All aspects of meaningful relationships, including individuals' relationship with themselves are explored.
- (3) The following aspects will be discussed further : spousal conflict, parental conflict and alignment, sibling rivalry, peer conflict, role reversal, role strain, social and self-evaluation.

### SESSIONS 5 and 6

**AIMS** : To facilitate insight into the nature of various relationships and understanding of problems. The following aspects will be discussed :

- i) expectations in various relationships concerning improvements or deterioration after marital disruption;
- ii) expectations in certain relationships in respect of expecting too much or too little of others;
- iii) ways of improving problem relationships;
- iv) the influence of the added responsibilities of being a single parent or single-parent child on
  - a) role strain and role reversal
  - b) interpersonal relationships.

#### 4.8.5.3 *Stage 3 - Personalisation*

- (1) During this stage individuals will be given the opportunity to identify realistic identities and evaluate each identity accordingly.
- (2) Each individual would be helped to realise that they can accept a realistically poor evaluation of one identity and a realistically high evaluation of another identity. For example, a parent might acknowledge that he or she is a better provider than a housekeeper and a single-parent child might realise that he or she is a better scholar than a babysitter.

- (3) The meaning given to the identities will be clarified by individuals.

#### SESSIONS 7 and 8

**AIM :** To provide an opportunity to identify realistic and unrealistic identities and positive and negative relationships and assess each accordingly. This is done in order to facilitate awareness of unrealistic meaning given to certain relationships and identities causing problematic relationships and identity conflicts.

Members will be encouraged to:

- i) explore the meaning they give to their identities through involvement and experience;
- ii) determine whether the type of relationship influences a particular identity or role;
- iii) analyse the meaning given to certain relationship which cause problematic relationships;
- iv) meaning given to identities resulting in identity conflicts.

#### 4.8.5.4 *Stage 4 - Change in behaviour and reasoning*

- (1) This last stage of the intervention process will reveal a change in the reasoning and behaviour patterns of the participants regarding relationships and identity formation.
- (2) During this stage, individuals may decide against certain identities and exercise a choice not to develop them. For example, if the mother thinks that she cannot develop an identity as a father substitute she can abandon that identity.

- (3) At this stage the reasoning and behaviour patterns become evident or externalised through group discussion and self-disclosure. With purposeful intervention during the programme individuals would have been guided towards acceptable behaviour patterns and logical (or positive) reasoning processes.
- (4) Members will now be able to clearly see the reasons for the particular type of relationships they experienced with various people in their life world.
- (5) They will also understand the need to assume specific identities which they now have realistic evaluation of and they also comprehend why certain roles or identities were thrust upon them after the marital disruption.

### SESSIONS 9 and 10

#### AIMS :

- (1) To make decisions about improving the quality of certain relationships which would positively influence the process of identity formation.
- (2) To consider how to solve certain problems (spousal conflict, parental alignment and conflict, etc.) and will determine their role in the creation of a problem. In so doing, they may make positive changes.
  - i) Members will make decisions regarding problems in their interpersonal relationships (they may improve/accept/reject certain relationships with realistic expectations).

- ii) They will evaluate each identity and accept or reject it accordingly.
- iii) Members will discuss any changed reaction (behaviour) or reasoning regarding their interpersonal relationships.
- iv) They will analyse change-initiating strategies concerning any aspect of the individuals' relationships with the self and others.
- v) They will also discuss their self-actualisation at work or at school.

#### SESSIONS 11 and 12

**AIM :** To discover and acknowledge a change in members' reasoning and reaction towards relationships and the formation of identities.

These are feedback sessions which will focus on members'

- i) changed attitudes and behaviour acknowledged during the support group programme towards interpersonal relationships. In this way, members attribute more realistic meaning to interpersonal relationships;
- ii) formation and evaluation of these new or revised identities;
- iii) self-evaluation, self-actualisation and responses which will indicate a change in their reasoning and behaviour.

#### 4.9. CONCLUSION

A posttest interview will be conducted with each participant after the final session to evaluate the support group programme.

Chapter 5 includes the findings and analysis of information obtained from the interviews (pre/posttest) and the support group programme assessment measures.

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## CHAPTER 5

### **RESULTS OF PRE AND POSTTEST INTERVIEWS AND THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the results of the interviews and the support group programme. The pilot study, dealt with in Chapter 4, outlines the selection of the target group (section 4.7.5), the purpose and planning of the interviews (section 4.7.3), pre-testing of the interviews (section 4.7.4), communication during the interviews (section 4.7.7) , composition of the support groups (section 4.8.2) and the support group programme itself (section 4.8.5). This chapter presents the procedure and analysis of the interviews and support group programme, a profile of the participants and the relevance of the hypotheses.

#### **5.1.2 Procedure**

The information interview schedules were administered to the target group in July and August 1993. These interviews enabled the researcher to rephrase certain questions for the pre- and posttest interviews and also helped to determine the aspects to be included in the pre- and posttest interviews and support group programme. The pretest interviews were conducted between October and November 1993 and the posttest interviews two months after the support group programme, during March and April 1994. The interviews were administered in the participants' homes and the support groups were conducted at a central venue; transport was provided.

### 5.1.2.1 *Interviews*

The subjects were informed about the purpose of the interviews and confidentiality and anonymity was assured before the interviews commenced. During the individual interviews, the researcher read out each question with its various responses and allowed sufficient time for the respondent to reply. The researcher ensured that every question was clearly understood before each response was elicited and the responses were noted on the questionnaire, with open-ended questions being recorded on a tape recorder.

### 5.1.2.2 *Support group programme*

The programme was implemented during November and December 1993. Participants were informed about the purpose and duration of the programme. They were reassured once again of confidentiality and were requested to participate spontaneously and honestly, to listen attentively and to share their similar experiences as a form of support. The participants were aware that the entire process was recorded.

### 5.1.3 **A profile of the research subjects**

A population of single-parent mothers who had been divorced for less than two years and had children between the ages of seven and twelve years were informed about the programme. Those who participated with their children (in separate groups) volunteered from this population.

The three groups that participated in the programme were :

- \* The single-parent mothers' group (S.P.M.)

\* The early latency children's group (E.L.C.)

\* The later latency children's group (L.L.C.)

In the following biographical descriptions of the research subjects, all names have been changed for confidentiality.

\* THE SINGLE - PARENT MOTHERS' GROUP

- |             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| 1. Shamla   | 5. Mogie   |
| 2. Suneetha | 6. Saras   |
| 3. Zarina   | 7. Fathima |
| 4. Jane     | 8. Ragini  |

\* THE EARLY LATENCY GROUP (E.L.C.)

- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Kerusha (7 years) | 4. Fahima (7 years)  |
| 2. Medisha (8 years) | 5. Aftab (9 years)   |
| 3. Akash (9 years)   | 6. Vinolan (8 years) |

\* THE LATER LATENCY GROUP (L.L.C.)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Therusha (11 years) | 4. Arulan (10 years)  |
| 2. Kantha (11 years)   | 5. Dayalan (12 years) |
| 3. Yugesh (12 years)   | 6. Najina (11 years)  |

The following relevant details were obtained from each parent:

1. SHAMLA NAIDOO (divorced  $\pm$  12 months)

Age : 34

Reason for divorce : Alcoholic and physically abusive husband

Children : Two daughters - Therusha (11 years) and Kerusha (7 years)

Occupation : Machinist in a clothing factory

2. SUNEETHA RAMLALL (divorced  $\pm$  9 months)

Age : 37

Reason for divorce : Physically abusive husband

Children : One daughter - Medisha (8 years) and one son - Arulan (10 years)

Occupation : Receptionist for a building society

3. ZARINA AHMED (divorced  $\pm$  18 months)

Age : 30

Reason for divorce : husband unfaithful who is now remarried.

Children : Two daughters - Najina (11 years) and Fahima (7 years) and one son -  
Aftab (9 years)

Occupation : Dress designer in a textile factory

4. JANE MOONSAMY (divorced  $\pm$  2 years)

Age : 35

Reason for divorce : Incompatibility and frequent conflicts

Children : One son - Dayalan (12 years)

Occupation : Computer programmer

5. MOGIE PERUMAL (divorced  $\pm$  12 months)

Age : 36

Reason for divorce : Incompatibility and frequent conflicts

Children : Two sons - Yugesh (12 years) and Anban (14 years)

Occupation : Sales consultant

6. SARAS PILLAY (divorced  $\pm$  2 years)

Age : 39

Reason for divorce : Husband unfaithful. He is now living with a girlfriend

Children : One daughter - Kantha (11 years) and one son - Akash ( $\pm$  9 years)

Occupation : Sales assistant in a furniture store

7. FATHIMA ALLY (divorced  $\pm$  12 months)

Age : 26

Reason for divorce : Husband is a drug addict

Children : Two daughters - Naasiha (7 years) and Nosheen (3 years)

Occupation : Machinist in a clothing factory

8. RAGINI GOVENDER (divorced  $\pm$  18 months)

Age : 35

Reason for divorce : Alcoholic husband, frequently unfaithful and physically

abusive. He is now living with a girlfriend

Children : One son - Vinolan (8 years) and one daughter - Priya (14 years)

Occupation : Receptionist in a hotel

#### **5.1.4 Analysis of the responses**

##### **5.1.4.1 Interviews**

The responses obtained from the pre- and posttest interviews are juxtaposed in tabular form to reflect the differences, if any, in order to indicate any changed reaction in subjects after their participation in the support group programme. Tables are used as they are easily accessible and simpler to understand. Each table indicates the specific aspect under examination (for example, parental conflict), the source of the information (which interview it was obtained from) and the number of the question as it appears on the interview schedule. Certain responses from the information interview schedules were also analysed where they are significant to the study. Responses from the single-parent mothers' interviews (S.P.M.) which are reflected in the tables encompass parental conflict, parental alignment, parental availability, role strain, role reversal, coping skills and transition to single-parent status. Responses from the single-parent children's interviews include aspects such as parental conflict, parental alignment, parental availability, sibling rivalry, scholastic performance, role strain, role reversal and transition to single-parent child status.

##### **5.1.4.2 Support group programme**

The programme contains twelve sessions for each of the three groups. The entire proceeding of the support group programme was recorded on a tape recorder and the

content analysed thereafter. The extracts reflected in the sessions are taken verbatim from the tape recorder and no attempt was made to correct the language as spoken by each participant. It must be noted that only responses pertaining to the aims of the study are included in the report. A brief summary appears after each extract indicating the salient aspects discussed and its relevance to the study. A more comprehensive summary is reflected at the end of each session.

#### **5.1.5 The hypotheses of the study**

The hypotheses as indicated in chapter four were considered during the analysis of the interviews and the support group programmes and were evaluated individually for acceptance or rejection. The hypotheses are stated below.

1. Members of single-parent families will gain insight into the nature of their involvement in their interpersonal relationships.
2. Members of single-parent families will attribute more realistic meaning to their experience of interpersonal relationships.
3. Members of single-parent families will gain insight into the coherence between their interpersonal relationships and their identity formation.
4. Members of single-parent families will become aware of unrealistic meaning given to identities which result in identity conflicts.

5. Members of single-parent families will use their insight to initiate change in their relationships.
6. Members of single-parent families will form realistic new identities through involvement, experience and attribution of meaning in relationships.
7. Members of single-parent families will become aware of the need for self-actualisation.

## **5.2 RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

The hypotheses of the study were considered when analysing the responses obtained from the interviews. The results of the interviews therefore appear under specific subheadings which are the research hypotheses, which will later be examined for acceptance or rejection.

### **5.2.1 The nature of involvement in interpersonal relationships**

The families' involvement in their relationships and the feelings experienced by them as a result of their interaction determines how positively or negatively relationships are evaluated. Parental conflict and parental alignment were analysed in both groups, while the children's group also addressed the problem of sibling rivalry and the single-parent mothers' group discussed spousal conflict and parent-child interaction.

A COMPARISON OF SPOUSAL AND PARENTAL CONFLICTS IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIESTABLE 5.2.1

The S.P.M. interview

ARGUMENTS (Q.3)

RESPONSE ARGUMENTS	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	2	25	6	87,5	8
All the time	1	12,5			1
Often	5	62,5	2	12,5	7
Not at all					
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

Key : % - Percentage

N - Number of response

TABLE 5.2.2

The children's interview

NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.4)

RESPONSE ARGUMENTS	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Visitation	2	33,3	5	83,3	4	66,7	3	50	14
Maintenance	4	66,7	1	16,7	2	33,3	3	50	10
Other response									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The information presented in tables 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 indicate the frequency and nature of parental and spousal conflicts single parent mothers and children experienced after marital disruption. The responses in tables 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 reveal that both the parents and children were aware of and experience parental and spousal conflicts.

According to table 5.2.1, 62% of the mothers in the pretest interviews indicated that they often experienced spousal conflicts while in the posttest interview only two mothers (12% of the group) stated that they often argued with their ex-spouse. In the posttest interview 87% of the mothers admitted that they had conflicts only sometimes compared to the pretest interview where two mothers (25%) indicated that they sometimes experienced conflict. There is a significant difference in the responses obtained from the pre- and posttest interviews with regard to the frequency of spousal conflicts. This changed reaction and attitude could be attributed to the therapeutic effect of the support group programme.

During their participation in the programme, the mothers were able to analyse their feelings realistically and so re-assess their relationship with their ex-spouses from a new perspective.

Many parents were then able to attribute a more realistic meaning to their relationship with their ex-spouses.

In table 5.2.2 all the children admitted that their parents had conflicts about visitation or maintenance. The posttest interviews indicate that children felt that parents conflicted mostly about visitation as reflected in the E.L.C. group.

All the children acknowledged that they were aware of and experienced parental conflicts. While parents indicated the frequency of the conflicts (table 5.2.1), the children were aware of the nature of the conflicts (namely, that their parents had conflicts about visitation and maintenance) (table 5.2.2).

#### A COMPARISON OF PARENTAL ALIGNMENT IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.2.3

The single-parent interview

NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.8)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
REMARKS	N	%	N	%	
Often	7	87,5	4	50,0	11
Sometimes	1	12.5	4	50,0	5
Not at all					
Other Response					
TOTAL	8	100	8	100	16

**TABLE 5.2.4****The children's interview****NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.14a)**

RESPONSE REMARKS	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	3	50	2	33,3	2	33,3	3	50,0	10
All the time	1	16,7							1
Often	2	33,3	3	50,0	3	50,0	2	33,3	10
Not at all			1	16,7	1	16,7	1	16,7	3
Other Response									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The information obtained from tables 5.2.3 and 5.2.4 indicate parental alignment in single parent families (i.e. where one parent is slandered in order to gain children's support by the other parent). In the parents' pretest interviews (table 5.2.3), 87% of the mothers admitted that they often made negative remarks about the other parents; however, in the posttest interview, half of them stated that they were often guilty of encouraging parental alignment and the remaining half acknowledged that they made negative remarks sometimes.

The information in table 5.2.4 was obtained from the early and late latency children's pre- and posttest interview schedules. The children in both groups acknowledged that they

were subjected to parental alignment where the parents sometimes and even often made negative comments about the other parent to them.

It is evident that all the single parents were aware that they subjected their children to parental alignment. Only two children (out of a total of twelve) indicated that their parents did not make unpleasant comments about the other parent.

All the parents and children indicated the frequency of disparaging remarks in both the pre-and posttest interviews. Five children stated that their mothers did this often and five others indicated that this happened sometimes. Parental alignment can influence the nature and quality of both parents' and children's interpersonal relationships as is evident in section 5.2.2 where parents and children reveal the conflicting feelings experienced due to parental alignment.

#### A COMPARISON OF PARENTAL NEGLECT IN THE SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.2.5

The S.P.M. interview (information)

PARENTAL NEGLECT (Q.10a)

RESPONSE NEGLECT			
	N	%	TOTAL
Sometimes	2	25	2
All the time			
Often	5	62.5	5
Never	1	12.5	1
Other response			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>

**TABLE 5.2.6****The children's interview****PARENTAL NEGLECT (Q.9)**

RESPONSE NEGLECT	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	4	66,7	5	83,3	5	83,3	4	66,6	18
All the time	2	33,3							2
Often			1	16,7	1	16,7	1	16,7	3
Never							1	16,7	1
Other Response									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The information in tables 5.2.5 and 5.2.6 concerning parental neglect was taken from the single-parents' interview schedules and single-parent children's interview schedules respectively. Both groups believed that the children were neglected to a great extent after the separation. This is evident from the large percentage reflected in the tables. The responses in the posttest interviews do not reveal a significant difference, showing that even after the support group programme children still felt neglected.

While seven out of the eight mothers (88%) admitted that they neglected their children, only one parent (who represented 12% of the group) believed that she did not neglect her children. Eleven children (92% of the group in the pre- and posttest interviews)

indicated that their parents sometimes and even often neglected them. This confirms that parental neglect is undoubtedly prevalent in single-parent families.

**TABLE 5.2.7**

The S.P.M. interview

**PARENTAL CONTACT (Q.5a)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL	
	CONTACT	N	%	N		%
Yes		3	37,5	6	75	9
No		5	62,5	2	25	7
Other response						
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

**TABLE 5.2.8**

The children's interview

**PARENTAL CONTACT (Q.7)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Often	2	33,3	2	33,3	3	50			7
Sometimes	3	50,0	4	66,7	3	50	5	83,3	15
All the time	1	16,7					1	16,7	2
Often									
Never									
Other									
Response									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

In tables 5.2.7 and 5.2.8 parents and children were questioned about parent-child interaction with the absent father after marital disruption.

While three parents (38%) indicated in the pretest interview that it was important for the fathers to see their children regularly, the remaining five parents (62%) of the group indicated the contrary and explained their reasons for this response in their participation during the support group programme. They admitted that the fathers were irresponsible, unreliable and displayed erratic behaviour. (Three of these mothers' ex-spouses physically abused them due to their alcoholism or drug addiction.) There was a significant difference in the responses elicited in the posttest interviews, however, where six parents (75%) stated that it was necessary for the fathers to see their children regularly. This indicates the therapeutic effect of the support group programme in assisting the mothers to re-examine their feelings about their ex-spouses.

Ten children (83,8%) did see their fathers while two children never saw their fathers at all. Eight children saw their fathers sometimes and three of them saw their fathers often. The fact that the majority of these children do not see their fathers on a regular basis could be attributed to their mothers' reluctance to encourage or support this parent-child interaction.

### **5.2.2 The attribution of realistic meaning to the experience of interpersonal relationships**

Relationships are formed when meaning is attributed by the individuals to their interactions with the self, others' ideas and objects. When an individual attributes

unrealistic meaning to a relationship, feelings of failure, frustration and rejection may result. The expression of negative feelings experienced in conflicting relationships may be cathartic and an awareness of feelings experienced presents an opportunity to explore the nature of the relationship. Such exploration makes it possible to re-analyse the cause or source of the feelings. By attributing more meaning to the relationships individuals understand themselves further by identifying and verbalising the negative feelings which are prevalent in several relationships. This in turn helps to promote an awareness of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to relationships outside of the problematic relationship. The following tables reflect the responses obtained from the single-parent mothers' interviews and the children's interviews respectively. The negative feelings experienced as reflected in the tables indicate that the individuals did attribute unrealistic meaning to their experiences in various interpersonal relationships. The various feelings experienced in the interpersonal relationships are indicated accordingly.

A COMPARISON OF THE FEELING EXPERIENCED (ABOUT THE DIVORCE)

TABLE 5.3.1

The S.P.M. interview

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED(Q.1)

RESPONSE FEELINGS	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Angry and frustrated	2	25			2
Sad and relieved	1	12,5	2	25	3
Sad	2	25	3	37,5	5
Relieved	2	25	2	25	4
Rejected	1	12,5			1
Happy			1	12,5	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

**TABLE 5.3.2****The children's interviews****FEELINGS EXPERIENCED (Q.1)**

RESPONSE FEELINGS	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Angry & depressed	1	16,7	2	33,3	1	16,7			4
Rejected & depressesd	4	66,6	2	33,3	2	33,.			8
Angry & rejected	1	16,7	1	16,7			1	16,7	3
All of above			1	16,7			1	16,7	2
Relieved					3	50	4	66,6	7
Happy									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

From the responses obtained in tables 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 it is clear that both the parents and children experienced negative feelings after the separation. In the pretest interviews, six (75%) reported negative feelings associated with the divorce compared with two parents (25%) who indicated that they felt relieved after the divorce. The posttest interview responses reveal that the parents felt sad and relieved rather than angry and frustrated.

There is a significant difference in the children's responses before and after the support group programme. In the pretest interviews, all the children stated that they experienced negative feelings (anger, depression and rejection) associated with the divorce, however,

in the posttest interview, seven of them have indicated more positive feelings (happiness and relief) about the disruption.

This then leads to the attribution of unrealistic meaning to certain relationships.

ATTRIBUTION OF BLAME IN THE TWO FAMILY GROUPS

TABLE 5.3.3

The S.P.M. interview

BLAME (Q.2)

RESPONSE BLAME	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Self	1	12,5	3	37,5	4
Children					
Ex-spouse	7	87,5	5	62,5	12
Others					
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

**TABLE 5.3.4****The children's interview****BLAME (Q.3)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Self	1	16,7	1	16,7					2
Sibling									
Mother									
Father	3	50,0	5	83,3	4	67	2	33,3	14
Others	2	33,3			1	16,7	3	50,0	6
No -one					1	16,7	1	16,7	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The responses from both groups (parent's and children's) indicate that many blamed the father for the marital disruption in the pretest interviews (tables 5.3.3 and 5.3.4). However, by the end of the support group programme the parents had changed their attitudes as reflected in the posttest interview about the attribution of blame. A larger percentage of parents (87%) acknowledged that they blamed the fathers in the pretest interviews than in the posttest interviews.

REACTION TOWARDS PARENTAL ALIGNMENTTABLE 5.3.5

The S.P.M. interview

## NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.9)

RESPONSE REACTION	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Ignore	4	50	1	12.5	5
Reprimand	2	25	4	50	6
Praise					
Explain	2	25	3	37.5	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

The information obtained in the single parent mother's interview is reflected in table 5.3.5. The parents indicated their reaction to their children's negative remarks about their fathers. While in the pretest interview 50% reported ignoring such comments and 25% reprimanded their children, in the posttest interview 50% claimed to reprimand their children and 37% explained to the children why they should not make such negative comments.

The mothers' responses in the pretest interviews indicate that they did not make a concerted effort to discourage their children from making negative remarks about their fathers. Since the posttest responses reflect a significant difference, it is possible that the

parents' participation in the support group programme influenced the change in their reaction.

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED ABOUT PARENTAL NEGLECT

TABLE 5.3.6

The S.P.M. interview (information)

PARENTAL NEGLECT (Q.10b)

RESPONSE FEELING	SINGLE-PARENT GROUP		
	N	%	TOTAL
Guilty & depressed	1	12.5	1
Depressed & worried	2	25	2
All of above	4	50	4
Frustrated	1	12.5	1
Confused	-	-	-
Happy	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>

**TABLE 5.3.7****The children's interview****PARENTAL NEGLECT (Q.12)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				
FEELINGS	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Angry	3	50	2	33,3	1	16,7	1	16,7	7
Sad	2	33,3	2	33,3	2	33,3	1	16,7	7
Confused	1	16,7	1	16,7					2
Sorry			1	16,7	3	50	4	66,6	8
Happy									
<b>TOTAL</b>	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

The responses reflected in tables 5.3.6 and 5.3.7 indicate feelings experienced concerning parental neglect in both family groups. All the parents experienced negative feelings as shown in table 5.3.6. 50% of them experienced guilt, depression and concern over the neglect of their children. The information obtained from the children's interviews demonstrate that the children did experience parental neglect. The significant difference in the pre-/posttest children's responses indicates that the children felt sympathetic towards their mothers, possibly due to the effect of the support group programme.

In the pretest interviews of both children's groups, five children experienced anger about parental neglect, four felt sad and two experienced confusion. Their responses differ significantly in the posttest interviews where only two children experienced anger and seven felt sympathetic about their mothers. It is possible that their participation in the

support group programme helped them to be more tolerant and sympathetic of their mothers' unavailability. Their responses in the pretest interview suggest that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to their experience in their relationship with their mothers.

### FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS PARENTAL CONFLICT

TABLE 5.3.8

The children's interview

PARENTAL CONFLICT (Q.5)

RESPONSE FEELINGS	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Depressed					1	16,7			1
Worried	3	50	2	33,3			2	33,3	7
Depressed/angry	3	50	2	33,3	2	33,3	4	66,7	11
Depressed/worried					3	50			3
Responsible			2	33,4					2
Happy									
Other response									
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

The responses shown in table 5.3.8 indicate the negative feelings experienced by children towards parental conflict. All the children in the early latency group indicated anger, anxiety and

depression, while the later latency children experienced more depression than anger and two of them (33%) admitted that they felt responsible for the conflict. There was no significant difference between the pre- and posttest responses, indicating how strongly the children felt about parental conflict even after participation in the support group programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PARENTAL UNAVAILABILITY

TABLE 5.3.9

The children's interview (information)

PARENTAL UNAVAILABILITY (Q.7)

RESPONSE	ELC		LLC		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Less time	4	66,7	5	83,3	9
More time	2	33,3	1	16,7	3
No time					
Other response					
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	12

**FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS PARENTAL UNAVAILABILITY****TABLE 5.3.10**

The children's interviews (information)  
**PARENTAL UNAVAILABILITY (Q.8)**

RESPONSE FEELINGS	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Happy					
Angry	4	66,6	3	50	7
Sad	1	16,7	2	33,3	3
Worried	1	16,7			1
Frustrated					
Disappointed			1	16,7	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12</b>

The information in tables 5.3.9 and 5.3.10 obtained from the children's interviews reflects parental unavailability and the feelings the children experienced about this. Nine children (75%) from both groups admitted that they spent less time with their mothers after the divorce; and the remaining three stated that they spent more time with their mothers. It is evident that strong negative feelings were experienced by the children with regard to parental unavailability. All of them indicated that they either experienced anger, sadness or concern (worry) about their parents'

unavailability. Seven children (58%) experienced anger, three felt sad and one child was worried. These negative feelings appear to have influenced their relationship with their mothers to some extent.

**TABLE 5.3.11**

The children's interview (information)

**SIBLING RIVALRY (Q.9)**

RESPONSE	ELC		LLC		TOTAL
	BROTHER	SISTER	BROTHER	SISTER	
FIGHTING	N	N	N	N	
More		1	2		6
Less		1	1	2	5
Not at all			1		1
Other response					
TOTAL	4	2	4	2	12

The information in table 5.3.11 was obtained from the children's information interview schedules and examines sibling rivalry in the two groups (E.L.C. and L.L.C.). While 50% of the children in the E.L.C. group believed that there was more fighting after the divorce, 33% of the children in the L.L.C. group felt otherwise. There was found to be rivalry between brothers and sisters

than between same-sex siblings. According to the findings of the support group programme, the rivalry stemmed mainly from resentment towards the elder brother or sister who was appointed to babysit and be "in charge" when the mother was away.

### **5.2.3 Unrealistic meaning given to identities resulting in identity conflicts**

The literature review (chapter 2, section 2) suggests that the role strain or role overload experienced by many single parents due to the added responsibilities of divorce may result in identity conflicts. This could in turn lead to role reversal which affects family members' sense of identity. The relationship between role strain and the quality of the interpersonal relationship of the single-parent family members may also result in identity conflicts. Due to role strain and role reversal, families attribute unrealistic meaning to respective identities and so negatively influence their evaluation of each identity. The information obtained in from the interviews of both parents and children show that family members do experience role strain and role reversal and so do attribute unrealistic meaning to their identities.

The findings regarding aspects relating to identity conflicts, namely, role strain, role reversal and the feelings experienced because of these and coping skills, are presented in tables 5.4.1 to 5.4.5.

The number and percentages of responses are calculated in each table.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ROLE REVERSAL  
IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.4.1

The S.P.M. interview  
ROLE REVERSAL (Q.16)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N.	%	N	%	
Sometimes	1	12,5	1	12,5	2
All the time	2	25,0	5	62,5	7
Often	5	62,5	2	25,0	7
Not at all					
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

TABLE 5.4.2

The children's interview  
ROLE REVERSAL (Q.15a)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	3	50			4	66,6			7
All the time	1	16,7	3	50	1	16,7	4	66,7	9
Often	2	33,3	3	50	1	16,7	2	33,3	8
Never									
Other response									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The responses indicated in tables 5.4.1 and 5.4.2 in the parents' and children's interviews indicate that both groups acknowledged that there is a reversal of roles after marital disruption. The fact that 62% of the parents and 50% of children report a reversal of roles after marital disruption confirms that this is indeed a significant problem.

There is a significant difference between the responses obtained in the pretest and posttest parents' interviews. While only two parents (25%) admitted that their children took on adult roles all the time in the pretest interviews, five parents (62%) acknowledged a reversal of roles all the time in the posttest interviews. It is clear that these parents realistically accepted this fact only after their participation in the support group programme.

A COMPARISON OF THE ROLE STRAIN AND THE FEELINGS  
EXPERIENCED IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.4.3

The S.P.M. interview  
ROLE STRAIN (Q.12a)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Too much	6	75			6
Not too much	1	12,5	4	50	5
Coping	1	12,5	4	50	5
Other response					
TOTAL	8	100	8	100	16

**FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS ROLE STRAIN****TABLE 5.4.4**

The S.P.M. interview

**ROLE STRAIN (Q.15)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Depressed	3	37,5	1	12,5	4
Frustrated/bitter	2	25	1	12,5	3
Manageable/confident			4	50	4
Confident	2	25	2	25	4
Overwhelming	1	12,5			1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

The information in tables 5.4.3 and 5.4.4 was obtained from the pre- and posttest single-parent mothers' interviews. The responses reflect role strain and the mother's feelings about role strain. From the results obtained, it is clear that single-parent mothers certainly experience role strain to a large extent. A large percentage (75%) of the parents admitted that they found the demands of being a single parent too much to cope with and experienced negative feelings because of role strain.

In the pretest interview, six mothers (75%) indicated that the demands of being a single parent too much to cope with (table 5.4.3). The posttest interview reveals a marked difference in their attitude: four mothers (50%) found the demands of single parenthood manageable and the remaining four (50%) admitted that they could cope with the role

strain. This changed reaction regarding their coping skills could be attributed to their meaningful participation in the support group programme. As seen in table 5.4.4, five mothers (62%) admitted that they felt either depressed, frustrated or bitter with the role strain during the pretest interview while two (25%) stated that they felt confident about coping with the various roles. The responses in the pretest interviews (tables 5.4.3 and 5.4.4) reveal that the mothers attributed unrealistic meaning to the various roles as is evident in the negative feelings experienced (table 5.4.4).

The results obtained in the posttest interviews indicate a change in attitude with 75% of the mothers acknowledging more positive feelings towards role strain.

#### FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS ROLE REVERSAL

TABLE 5.4.5

The children's interview

ROLE REVERSAL (Q.17)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Happy			1	16,7	4	66,6			5
Angry	5	83,3	4	66,6			2	33,4	11
Proud					1	16,7	4	66,6	5
Sad/Worried	1	16,7	1	16,7	1	16,7			3
Confused									
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

The information in table 5.4.5 reveals the feelings experienced by the children about role reversal. Eleven out of the twelve children (92%) indicated negative feelings (anger, sadness and worry) in the pretest interviews. These negative feelings caused them to attribute unrealistic meaning to their identities resulting in identity conflicts. Eleven children (92%) in the posttest interview responded that they experienced happiness and pride about taking on adult roles (role reversal). This positive reaction could be as a result of their purposeful involvement in the support group programme.

#### **5.2.4 Sharing added responsibilities and the feelings experienced in single-parent families (Role Strain)**

The responses reflected in tables 5.5.1 and 5.5.2 indicate the awareness of added responsibilities and the feelings associated with this. These results were derived from the single parents mothers' interviews. The parents admitted that they had added responsibilities and had to share some of these with their children. A large percentage (87%) indicated that they always shared duties with their children and when questioned about their feelings regarding this, confirmed that they experienced mostly negative feelings (table 5.5.2) The posttest results indicate only a slight difference in their feelings about sharing responsibilities with their children, indicating that although mothers had accepted the sharing of duties as a way of life in a single-parent family, they were frustrated, worried and sad about this reality. Seven mothers (87%) felt in the pre- and posttest interviews negative feelings about allowing their children to assist them with the added responsibilities.

TABLE 5.5.1

The S.P.M. interview

## SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES (Q.13)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
SHARING					
Sometimes	1	12,5			1
All the time	7	87,5	8	100	15
Often					
Not at all					
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

TABLE 5.5.2

The S.P.M. interview

## FEELINGS EXPERIENCED ABOUT SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES (Q.14)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
FEELINGS					
Frustrated	2	25	2	25	4
Worried	4	50	3	37,5	7
Worried/sad	1	12,5	2	25	3
Proud/happy	1	12,5	1	12,5	2
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

TABLE 5.5.3

## The children's interview

## ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES (Q.16)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				
RESPONSIBILITIES	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	TOTAL
Sometimes	2	33,3			3	50			5
All the time	1	16,7	4	66,7	1	16,7	6	100	12
Often	3	50	2	33,3	2	33,3			7
Never									
Other response									
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

TABLE 5.5.4

## The children's interview

## FEELINGS EXPERIENCED (Q.17)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				
FEELINGS	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	TOTAL
Happy			1	16,7	4	66,6			5
Angry	5	83,3	4	66,6			2	33,3	11
Proud					1	16,7	4	66,7	5
Sad/worried	1	16,7	1	16,7	1	16,7			3
Confused									
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

The results derived from the children's interviews (tables 5.5.3 and 5.5.4) reveal that they also acknowledge greater responsibilities after marital disruption and 83% of them displayed intense negative feelings (anger) about this. The response obtained from the posttest interview indicate a very significant change in their perception regarding their added responsibilities. 66% of the children have admitted that they were happy and proud to share their parents' responsibilities.

#### **5.2.5 Indication of changed and improved interpersonal relationships**

From the findings derived from tables 5.3.1 to 5.3.11, it seems that single-parent families do experience problematic relationships and that they attribute unrealistic meaning to certain relationships due to their negative experiences. However, the posttest results obtained from the interviews of both parents and children indicate that the family members used insight gained from the support group programme to initiate change in their interpersonal relationships. The following aspects of interpersonal relationships are examined and the findings reflected: parent-child interaction, parental availability and support and sibling rivalry.

TABLE 5.6.1

The S.P.M. interview

## NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTAL CONTACT (Q.5a)

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
CONTACT					
Yes	3	37,5	6	75	9
No	5	62.5	2	25	7
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

TABLE 5.6.2

The children's interview

## FEELINGS EXPERIENCED AFTER PARENTAL CONTACT (Q.21a)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Satisfied			1	16,7	1	16,7	2	33,3	4
Happy/relieved					4	66,6	2	33,3	6
Dissatisfied	1	16,7					1	16,7	2
Sad	5	83,3	4	66,6	1	16,7	1	16,7	11
Confused			1	16,7					1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The results in tables 5.6.1 and 5.6.2 were derived from pre- and posttest interviews of the single-parent mothers and the children. The responses in table 5.6.1 reflect the mothers' attitudes about the need for the father to spend time with their children.

In the pretest, a larger percentage (62%) of mothers indicated that it was not important for the children to spend time with their fathers, while in the posttest 75% of the mothers admitted that it was important for the father to spend time with the children. The responses in table 5.6.2 reflect the feelings experienced by children about spending time with their fathers. They felt sad after the visits, indicating an unwillingness to part with their fathers. The posttest responses reveal a more positive feeling after visiting their fathers (happy and relieved).

TABLE 5.6.3

The children's interview

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED ABOUT PARENTAL UNAVAILABILITY (Q.12)

RESPONSE	PRETEST				POSTTEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Angry	5	83,3	3	50	4	66,6	1	16,7	13
Sad	1	16,7	2	33,3	1	16,7	2	33,3	6
Confused					1	16,7			1
Sympathetic			1	16,7			3	50	4
Happy									
Other response									
TOTAL	6	100	6	100	6	100	6	100	24

The information in table 5.6.3 reveals the feelings experienced by single-parent children about their mothers' unavailability. In their terms parental unavailability applied especially to assistance with their schoolwork. All the children experienced negative feelings, mostly anger (83% and 50%) and sadness (16% and 33%). However, in the posttest interviews, they admitted to being sympathetic towards their mothers' unavailability. It is evident that they experienced a changed reaction after the support group programme.

**TABLE 5.6.4**

The children's interview

RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY MEMBERS (Q.18)

	RESPONSE	MOTHER		FATHER		BROTHER		SISTER		TOTAL
	RELATIONSHIP	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	
E.	Better	4	5	3	5	2	3	2	4	28
L.	Worse	1		2		4	3	3		13
C.	Same	1	1	1	1			1	2	7
	Other response									
	TOTAL	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48
	Better	5	6	1	5	2	4	3	1	27
L.	Worse			5		3	2	2	2	14
L.	Same	1			1	1		1	3	7
C.	Other response									
	TOTAL	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	48

The responses obtained (table 5.6.4) reveal the relationships of the single-parent children with different members in their families (mother, father and siblings) after the marital disruption. They all admitted that they enjoyed a better relationship with their mothers

compared to relationships with siblings and fathers. The posttest results indicate a change in their attitude about the quality of their relationships with siblings and fathers.

It is significant to note that all the children realised that they experienced a better relationship with their mothers than their fathers and their siblings. Their responses in the posttest interviews reveal that the support group programme helped them to attribute a more realistic meaning to their relationships with their fathers or siblings; and ten children (83%) indicated that their relationship with their father was better after the marital disruption.

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLE STRAIN**

**TABLE 5.6.5**

The children's interview (Q.15 & Q.16)

	RESPONSE	RESPONSIBILITIES								
	ROLE STRAIN	SOMETIMES		ALL THE TIME		OFTEN		NEVER		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
PRE-TEST	Sometimes	2	33,3							2
	All the time			3	50					3
	Often					1	16,7			1
	Never									
	TOTAL	2		3		1				6
POST-TEST	Sometimes	3	50							3
	All the time			1	16,7					1
	Often					2	33,3			2
	Never									
	TOTAL	3		1		2				6

The information presented in table 5.6.5 was obtained from the (L.L.C.) children's pre- and posttest interviews. The responses indicate the relationship between added responsibilities and the role strain of the single-parent children. While 33% of the children in the pretest interview believed that sometimes the added responsibilities were too much to cope with even occasionally; others (50%) admitted that the added responsibilities were too much to cope with all the time. Very little difference can be noted in the responses to the pre- and posttest interviews, suggesting that even after support group participation children still believed that they had too many responsibilities to cope with.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROLE STRAIN AND THE FEELING EXPERIENCED

TABLE 5.6.6

The children's interview

ROLE STRAIN AND FEELINGS (Q.16 x Q.17)

	RESPONSE	FEELINGS									
	ROLE STRAIN	HAPPY		ANGRY		WORRIED		SAD		CONFUSED	TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
PRE- TEST	Sometimes							1	16,7		1
	All the time										
	Often			5	83,3						5
	Never										
	TOTAL			5	83,3			1	16,7		6
POST- TEST	Sometimes	1	16,7	2	33,3	1	16,7				4
	All the time										
	Often							2	33,3		2
	Never										
	TOTAL	1	16,7	2	33,3	1	16,7	2	33,3		6

The responses reflected in table 5.6.6 were obtained from the pre- and posttest interviews of the older group of (L.L.C.) children. This table examines the relationship between role strain and its associated feelings.

83% of the children acknowledged that they often experienced role strain and felt angry about this. However, in the posttest interviews, there is significant difference in the feelings that they report about role strain. Fewer children (33%) felt anger, some (33%) experienced sadness often and one felt worried sometimes.

The information reflected in table 5.6.7 highlights the relationship between added responsibilities and role strain. These responses were obtained from the mothers' interviews and compare the pretest and posttest interviews. In the pretest interviews, 75% of the mothers acknowledged that they experienced role strain due to the added responsibilities. There is a significant difference in the results obtained from the posttest interviews with regard to their coping skills. An analysis of both interviews confirms that single parents seem to experience role strain, but in the posttest interviews the same mothers did not report the same strain they seemed to experience during the pretest interviews, indicating a changed reaction and attitude after their participation in the support group programme.

TABLE 5.6.7

The S.P.M. interview

## ROLE STRAIN AND RESPONSIBILITIES (Q.12 X Q.13)

	RESPONSE	SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES										
	ROLE STRAIN	SOME-TIMES		ALL THE TIME		OFTEN		NOT AT ALL		OTHER		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
PRE-TEST	Too much			4	50							4
	Not too much	2	25									2
	Coping					2	25					2
	TOTAL	2		4		2						8
POST-TEST	Too much			2	25							2
	Not too much	1	12,5									1
	Coping					5	62,5					5
	TOTAL	1		2		5						8

The responses in table 5.6.7 were obtained from the single-parent mothers' interviews and the role strain and responsibilities were cross-tabulated and examined. All the parents acknowledged that they experienced role strain and for this reason had to share responsibilities with their children. A large percentage (50%) admitted that they let the children share their duties all the time and 62% indicated that they coped well because their children assisted with the added responsibilities. The responses in the pretest interviews reflect that 25% of the mothers did not cope very well compared to their responses in the posttest interviews where 50% mentioned that they coped well enough.

The responses tabulated in tables 5.6.8 and 5.6.9 were obtained from the single-parent mothers' interviews. The issue of delegating duties and the associated feelings were

examined. The information reflected in these tables shows how often parents delegated duties to their children and the feelings experienced with regard to this. All the parents let their children help them with the duties and 50% indicated that they expected their children to assist them all the time. The responses in table 5.6.9 indicate that all the parents experienced negative feelings about letting their children help. In the posttest interview, three parents (37%) indicated positive feelings (happiness), about delegating duties to their children. There is no significant difference between the pre- and posttest interviews, indicating that parents need to share their duties to alleviate role strain.

TABLE 5.6.8

The S.P.M. interview

DELEGATING DUTIES (Q.14)

RESPONSE DUTIES	DELEGATING DUTIES - CHILDREN				
	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	2	25	2	25	4
All the time	4	50	1	12,5	5
Often	2	25	5	62,5	7
Not at all					
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

TABLE 5.6.9

The S.P.M. interview

**FEELINGS ABOUT DELEGATING DUTIES (Q.14b)**

RESPONSES	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Guilty/frustrated	2	25	1	12,5	3
Guilty/sad	2	25	2	25	4
Three of above	4	50	2	25	6
Happy			3	37,5	3
Other response					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

**5.2.6 The relationship between interpersonal relationships and identity formation**

The analysis of the responses dealing with interpersonal relationships and identity formation indicates a significant relationship between these aspects. Certain questions were cross-tabulated to reveal that individuals form an identity through their involvement with people and their self and the manner in which they attribute meaning to their experiences of interpersonal relationships affects their identity formation.

The aspects of role strain, role reversal, responsibilities, parental neglect, parental conflict, parental availability and parental alignment were analysed in each of the three groups.

A COMPARISON OF THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL CONFLICT ON PARENTAL  
ALIGNMENT IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.7.1

The S.P.M. interview (pretest)

ARGUMENTS AND NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.3 x Q.8)

RESPONSE	NEGATIVE REMARKS						TOTAL	
	OFTEN		SOMETIMES		NOT AT ALL			OTHER
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Sometimes					1	12,5	1	
All the time			3	37,5			3	
Often	3	37,5	1	12,5			4	
Not at all								
Other								
TOTAL	3		4		1		8	

TABLE 5.7.2

The children's interview (information)

ARGUMENTS AND NEGATIVE REMARKS (Q.3 x Q.11)

ARGUMENTS	NEGATIVE REMARKS					TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NEVER	OTHER	
Sometimes	2					2
All the time		2				2
Often	2		6			8
Never						
Other						
TOTAL	4	2	6			12

The information in tables 5.7.1 and 5.7.2 was obtained from the single-parents' interviews and children's interviews respectively. The responses indicate a relationship between parental conflict and parental alignment in the two family groups. While some mothers (37%) admitted that they often experienced spousal conflicts and also often subjected their children to parental alignment, others (37%) believed that they had conflicts with their ex-spouse all the time and sometimes aligned themselves with the children (table 5.7.1).

90% of the parents acknowledged that they experienced spousal conflicts and their children were subjected to negative remarks about the father. All the children admitted that their parents still had conflicts and that their parents made negative comments about the other parent regularly (table 5.7.2). Thus it seems that spousal conflicts instigate regular negative comments.

Table 5.7.3 shows how parents admitted that due to their demanding duties (role strain), they neglected their children regularly (often and sometimes). Parental neglect could influence children to attribute unrealistic meaning to their demanding new identities. Because the single-parent children need the support and encouragement from their mothers in order to accept their new roles positively, this may then result in the formation of negative identities influenced by parental neglect.

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL NEGLECT ON ROLE STRAIN IN SINGLE-PARENTFAMILIESTABLE 5.7.3

The S.P.M. interview (information)

NEGLECT AND DEMANDING (Q.10a x 6a)

RESPONSE	DEMANDING					TOTAL
NEGLECT	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NEVER	OTHER	TOTAL
Sometimes	3		2			5
All the time						
Often			3			3
Never						
Other						
TOTAL	3		5			8

TABLE 5.7.4

The children's interview (information)

NEGLECT AND DEMANDING (Q9 x Q15)

RESPONSE	DEMANDING					TOTAL
NEGLECT	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NEVER	OTHER	TOTAL
	PRETEST					
Sometimes	2		2			4
All the time						
Often			8			8
Never						
Other						
TOTAL	2		10			12
	POSTTEST					
Sometimes	3					3
All the time		2				2
Often	1		6			7
Never						
Other						
TOTAL	4	2	6			12

The responses shown in tables 5.7.3 and 5.7.4 reveal the effect of parental neglect on role strain in single-parent families. The analysis of information obtained from the parents' and children's interviews indicates a relationship between parental neglect and role strain on both parents and children. All the parents experienced role strain which thus affected their parent-child interaction resulting in parental neglect. In table 5.7.3, the responses indicate that some parents (37%) sometimes found the various roles demanding and neglected their children due to this, while the remainder (37%) often experienced their roles as being demanding, and therefore, often neglected their children.

In both the pretest and posttest interviews all the children admitted that their parents neglected them and found their new responsibilities very demanding. In the pretest interviews eight children (67%) stated that they often found the roles too taxing and thought that their mothers neglected them often. The posttest results indicate only a slight difference, suggesting that the children still found the roles too demanding and experienced parental neglect even.

THE FEELINGS EXPERIENCED ABOUT ROLE STRAIN AND PARENTAL NEGLECT

TABLE 5.7.5

The S.P.M. interview (information)

ROLE STRAIN AND PARENTAL NEGLECT (6b x 10b)

RESPONSE	PARENTAL NEGLECT					
	GUILTY	DEP/WORRIED	FRUSTRATED	HAPPY	OTHER	TOTAL
1. Happy/proud						
2. Frustrated	1		2			3
3. Sad/worried		3				3
2 & 3	2					2
Other response						
TOTAL	3	3	2			8

Key: DEP - DEPRESSED

The findings in table 5.7.5 were obtained from the single-parent interviews and reveal a significant relationship between the feelings experienced about role strain and parent neglect. All the parents mentioned that they experienced negative feelings about their demanding new roles and their neglect of their children. These negative feelings resulted in unrealistic attribution of meaning to the different roles which the single parent (mother) has to assume after the divorce.

THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL ALIGNMENT ON ROLE REVERSAL  
IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.7.6

The S.P.M. interview (posttest)

PARENTAL ALIGNMENT AND ROLE REVERSAL (8 X 13)

RESPONSE	ROLE REVERSAL					
NEG. REMARKS	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NOT AT ALL	OTHER	TOTAL
Often	1	3	2			6
Sometimes		2				2
Not at all						
Other						
TOTAL	1	5	2			8

**TABLE 5.7.7**

The children's interview (information)

**PARENTAL ALIGNMENT AND ROLE REVERSAL (11 X 15a)**

RESPONSE	ROLE REVERSAL					TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NOT AT ALL	OTHER	
NEG. REMARKS						
Sometimes	3					3
All the time		3				3
Often			5			5
Never	1					1
Other						
TOTAL	4	3	5			12

In tables 5.7.6 and 5.7.7 the effect of parental alignment on role reversal in single-parent families is displayed. The responses were derived from the single-parent mothers' posttest interviews and single-parent children's information interviews respectively. These tables indicate a relationship between parental alignment and role reversal in the two family groups. In table 5.7.6 all the parents admitted that they had very often made negative remarks about the father and expected their children to take on adult roles (babysitter, housekeeper, being in charge and cook), especially when they were away.

The responses in table 5.7.7 indicate that the children in both groups were subjected to parental alignment and at the same time had to take on the roles of their parents as indicated above.

THE EFFECT OF ROLE STRAIN ON ROLE REVERSALIN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIESTABLE 5.7.8

The S.P.M. interview (posttest)

SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES AND IN CHARGE (14 x 16)

RESPONSE	IN CHARGE					TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NOT AT ALL	OTHER	
Sometimes		1				1
All the time		3				3
Often	1		3			4
Not at all						
Other						
TOTAL	1	4	3			8

TABLE 5.7.9

The children's interview (information)

EXPECTATIONS AND IN CHARGE (17 x 15a)

RESPONSES	IN CHARGE					TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NEVER	OTHER	
Sometimes	2		4			6
All the time		5				5
Often	1					1
Never						
Other						
TOTAL	3	5	4			12

The information in tables 5.7.8 and 5.7.9 was obtained from the single-parent interviews and children's interviews respectively. These tables examine the effect of role strain and role reversal in the two family groups. The parents (tables 5.7.8) acknowledged that due to the role strain (of being a parent, provider, caregiver, etc.) they had to share their responsibilities (roles) with their children to a large extent and in so doing subjected them to role reversals. The relationship between role strain and role reversal is therefore significant, as indicated in the table.

All the children (table 5.7.9) admitted that their mothers expected them to share their responsibilities and take on adult roles (babysitter, cook, housekeeper, etc.) on a regular basis. The relationship between role strain and role reversal is significant as it indicates that parent-child interaction (an important interpersonal relationship) can affect the identity formation (through role reversal).

THE EFFECT OF FAMILY CONFLICTS ON ROLE STRAIN IN  
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES

TABLE 5.7.10

The S.P.M. interview (information)  
ARGUMENTS AND DEMANDING (5 x 6a)

RESPONSE	DEMANDING					TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NOT AT ALL	OTHER	
Sometimes	1	3				4
All the time		1				1
Often	1		2			3
Not at all						
Other						
TOTAL	2	4	2			8

TABLE 5.7.11

The L.L.C. interview (information)

**SIBLING RIVALRY AND RESPONSIBILITIES (9b x 10b)**

RESPONSES	RESPONSIBILITIES					
RIVALRY	SELF	BROTHER	SISTER	ALL	OTHER	TOTAL
More	3		1			4
Less	2					2
Not at all						
Other						
TOTAL	5		1			6

The effect of parental and spousal conflicts and sibling rivalry on role strain in single-parent families is tabulated in tables 5.7.10 and 5.7.11. The data from table 5.7.10 was obtained from the single-parent mothers' interviews and indicates a significant relationship between conflicts and role strain. All the parents indicated that they had experienced spousal conflicts and at the same time found the demands of being a single parent very stressful.

The information presented in table 5.7.11 was obtained from the later latency children's interviews. The responses in table 5.7.11 reflect the relationship between sibling rivalry and taking on added responsibilities (babysitting, housekeeping, etc). 50% of the children indicated that they had taken on added responsibilities and had more sibling conflicts while 33% admitted that they had more responsibilities but had experienced little sibling rivalry.

It is evident that the children who took on more responsibilities were confronted with more conflicts with their siblings.

Thus there seems to be a relationship between the interpersonal relationships and identity formation in single-parent families. Due to the new demanding roles parents and children experience negative feelings about role strain, resulting in parental neglect and unavailability. This in turn causes unrealistic attribution of meaning in the parent-child relationship and identity conflicts. The effect of parental alignment on role reversals, role strain on role reversal, parental conflicts on role strain and sibling rivalry on added responsibilities also indicates a significant relationship between interpersonal relationship and identity formation in single-parent families.

#### **5.2.7 An awareness of specific identities in single-parent families**

It was evident during the interviews that the parents and children were aware of the new and numerous identities they had to deal with after the marital disruption. They were given the opportunity to examine all the identities and evaluate each one during the interviews and support group programme. It must be noted that neither parents nor children could relate positively to each identity, resulting in unrealistic meaning given to certain identities, thereby causing identity conflicts. The responses in tables 5.8.1 to 5.8.6 indicate single-parent families' awareness of specific identities and their coping skills.

**TABLE 5.8.1**  
**The S.P.M. interview**  
**IDENTITIES (Q.18)**

RESPONSE IDENTITIES	PREEST		POSTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Provider/caregiver	1	12,5			1
Head/finance man.					
Cook/housekeeper					
All of the above	7	87,5	8	100	15
Confidante/friend					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

Key : finance man. - finance manager

**TABLE 5.8.2**  
**The children's interviews**  
**AWARENESS OF IDENTITIES (Q.19a)**

RESPONSE IDENTITIES	PRETEST		POSTTEST	
	N	%	N	%
Babysitter	2	33,3	4	66,7
Parent substitute	1	16,7	2	33,3
Cook	1	16,7	3	50
Housekeeper			2	33,3
Scholar	6	100	6	100
Sibling	6	100	6	100
Friend	6	100	6	100

The information reflected in tables 5.8.1 and 5.8.2 was obtained from the single-parent mothers' interviews and the single-parent children's interviews respectively. The responses in both tables reflect an awareness of specific identities after marital disruption. It is evident that both family groups acknowledged that they had to assume numerous identities simultaneously after the separation. The parents admitted that they had to be a provider, caregiver, head of family, cook, financial manager and single parent while the children indicated that they were babysitters, parent substitutes, cooks, housekeepers, scholars, siblings and friends.

COPING WITH SPECIFIC IDENTITIES

TABLE 5.8.3

The S.P.M. interview

NOT MANAGEABLE (Q.19b)

RESPONSES IDENTITIES	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Provider/caregiver			1	12,5	1
Caregiver	4	50	1	12,5	5
Head of household	2	25	3	37,5	5
House/cook			2	25	2
Confidante/friend	2	25	1	12,5	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

**TABLE 5.8.4**

The S.P.M. interview

MANAGEABLE (Q.19a)

RESPONSE IDENTITIES	PRETEST		POSTTEST		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
Provider	5	62,5	2	25	7
Housekeeper	3		1	12,5	4
Caregiver		37,5	4	50	4
Confidante			1	12,5	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>

Tables 5.8.3 and 5.8.4 reflect the single-parent families' coping skills in dealing with their specific identities. The information was taken from the parents' pre and posttest interviews respectively. There is a significant difference in the results obtained from the pre and posttest interviews, as indicated in the tables. In the pretest interview, the majority of the parents (75%) acknowledged that they could not cope with being a caregiver and the head of the family, however, many parents (62%) admitted they found the role of the provider manageable (table 5.8.4) and some (37%) found that being a caregiver was not too demanding. The posttest interview shows that 50% of the parents felt that being a caregiver was more manageable than being a provider.

**TABLE 5.8.5**

The children's interviews (posttest)

MANAGEABLE (Q.20a)

RESPONSE	ELC	LLC
IDENTITIES	N	N
Babysitter	1	3
Parent	-	2
Substitute	-	2
Cook	3	4
Sibling	3	3
Scholar	3	3
Friend		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>

**TABLE 5.8.6**

The children's interview (posttest)

NOT MANAGEABLE (Q.20b)

RESPONSE	ELC	LLC
IDENTITIES	N	N
Babysitter	3	2
Parent substitute	4	2
Cook	3	3
Sibling	2	2
Scholar	2	3
Friend	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

The children in the early latency group indicated that they found the following roles manageable: sibling, scholar and friend; however, they could not cope efficiently with the roles of babysitter, parent substitute and cook. There is a significant difference in the responses of the later latency children, 50% of whom could cope with being a babysitter, parent substitute and cook. Table 5.8.5 shows that 33% found most of the roles fairly manageable while 33% found some not manageable.

### **5.2.8 Self-actualisation in single-parent families**

The literature review (chapter 2 and 3) indicates that the self-concept of single-parent families is negatively influenced after marital disruption to the extent that their ability to self-actualise is adversely affected. This was also evident during the support group programme. The pre and posttest interviews reveal that the families did not try to utilise their potential to the maximum. This is evident from the responses obtained from the parents' and children's interviews. The information in tables 5.9.1 - 5.9.3, derived from the pre and posttest children's interviews, examines the subjects' self-actualisation at school.

TABLE 5.9.1

## The children's interviews

## TRYING THEIR BEST (Q.11a)

RESPONSE TRYING THEIR BEST	PRE - TEST				POST TEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Sometimes	4	66,6	3	50	2	33,3	2	33,3	11
All the time	1	16,7	1	16,7	1	16,7	2	33,3	5
Often	1	16,7	1	16,7	3	50	2	33,4	7
Never			1	16,7					1
Other									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>24</b>

The table shows that the majority of the children in the pretest interview acknowledged that they only tried sometimes to improve their progress while in the posttest interview a large percentage (60%) indicated that they tried often to improve their progress.

TABLE 5.9.2

## The children's interview

## INDICATION OF PROGRESS (Q.10)

RESPONSE PROGRESS	PRE - TEST				POST - TEST				TOTAL
	ELC		LLC		ELC		LLC		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Better			1	16,7	3	50	4	66,6	8
Worse	5	83,3	3	50	1	16,7	1	16,7	10
No difference	1	16,7	2	33,3	2	33,3	1	16,7	6
Other									
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>24</b>

The responses in table 5.9.2 show that in the pretest interview nearly all the children admitted that their progress was worse after the divorce, while in the posttest interview these children acknowledged that their progress had improved in the interim (between the pre and posttest interviews).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AWARENESS OF ONE'S PROGRESS AND THE  
ATTEMPT TO IMPROVE THE PROGRESS

TABLE 5.9.3

The children's interview

PROGRESS X ATTEMPTS (Q.10 x Q.11)

PROGRESS	ATTEMPTS - TO IMPROVE				TOTAL
	SOMETIMES	ALL THE TIME	OFTEN	NEVER	
	PRETEST				
Better			1		1
Worse	8				8
No difference	3				3
Other					
TOTAL	11		1		12
	POSTTEST				
Better	1				2
Worse	2		8		10
No difference					
Other					
TOTAL	3		8		12

The information in table 5.9.3 has been cross-tabulated to indicate a significant relationship between the two aspects under examination (progress and attempt) and

highlights the fact that while the children were aware of their specific progress they were also trying to improve their ability to some degree.

**SELF-ACTUALISATION OF IDENTITIES IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES**

**TABLE 5.9.4**

The S.P.M. Interview

**UTILIZATION OF SPECIFIC ROLES (Q.11)**

RESPONSE	PRETEST		POSTTEST	
	N	%	N	%
Provider	5	62.5	8	100
Housekeeper	4	50	8	100
Caretaker	6	87.5	8	100
Confidante	2	12.5	8	100
Friend	3	37.5	6	87.5

**TABLE 5.9.5**

The children's interview

**UTILISATION OF ROLES (Q.20a)**

RESPONSE ROLES	PRETEST		POSTTEST	
	ELC	LLC	ELC	LLC
Babysitter	1	3	1	4
Sibling	3	3	5	4
Housekeeper	2	3	4	5
Scholar	4	3	5	6
Friend	3	3	6	6
Parental substitute	1	2	1	3
Cook	1	2	3	4

The information in tables 5.9.4 and 5.9.5 were obtained from the mothers' and children's interviews respectively. The subjects asked whether they had been trying their best in their numerous new roles. The information reveals that in the posttest interviews more parents and children acknowledged that they tried their best in specific roles compared to the pretest interviews, indicating that the support group programme helped subjects to initiate a more positive and decisive attitude towards their new roles. The tables indicate the number of responses to specific items. (For example, in table 5.9.5, four early latency children out of six admitted that they tried their best to be a good scholar, and so on.)

#### 5.2.9 Summary

These results indicate a significant relationship between interpersonal relationships and identity formation in single-parent families. The findings suggest that the quality of the interpersonal relationships affects individuals' identity formation. Problematic relationships within the family have an especially adverse effect on the parents' and children's skills in coping with their respective identities. The responses indicate that problematic relationships cause single-parent families to attribute unrealistic meaning to their experience of their interpersonal relationships; and the subjects themselves also acknowledged that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to specific identities resulting in identity conflicts. The posttest responses indicate significant differences from the pretest responses, confirming that the individuals had made an attempt to initiate a change in their relationships after their involvement and participation in the support group programme.

The self-actualisation of single-parent families was also adversely affected by divorce.

The quality of interpersonal relationships and the effect of problematic relationships on identity formation also negatively influenced the process of self-actualisation in the single-parent families. This is evident in the responses obtained in the pre and posttest interviews concerning the self-actualisation of the family members.

### 5.3 REPORT ON THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME

#### 5.3.1 **Development of the Programme**

The report focuses on incidents during the support group programme where

- \* awareness
- \* exploration
- \* meaning attribution and
- \* change-initiating strategies

resulted in clarification of and/or changes to individuals' interpersonal relationships and identity formation. Each session is summarised, highlighting significant aspects relating to the aims of each session. Extracts from the sessions are given to justify the researcher's findings.

The members were frequently reminded both during and outside the group sessions of the importance of group interaction, support and participation during the sessions to enable the programme to be properly implemented.

##### 5.3.1.1 *Introduction and conclusion of sessions*

A time for brief silent prayer opened each session. Members were encouraged to discuss

any matter that they thought had not been resolved in the previous session and a brief summary of the previous session was given before the session began.

At the end of each session the members were thanked for their participation and briefly informed of the contents of the next session so that they could give the matter some thought and be prepared to participate actively.

#### 5.3.1.2 *Use of certain terms*

The members were informed about the meaning and use of the following terms which were used synonymously during the sessions and may be seen as synonymous in the course of this report:

- \* identities/roles/chores/responsibilities
- \* ex-spouse/ex-husband
- \* breadwinner/provider.

#### 5.3.2 **The Single Parent Group (S.P.M.)**

##### STAGE 1 - AWARENESS

##### SESSION 1

##### AIM

The aim was to encourage individuals to become aware of their experience of different feelings towards themselves and others and their feelings towards their identities during and after the marital disruption. The session was intended to be cathartic where the members were given an opportunity to express and share different experiences associated with divorce.

### ESTABLISHMENT OF RAPPORT

The members were already familiar with the researcher who they had met during the information and pretest interviews. They had already been assured anonymity, confidentiality, trust, respect, understanding and empathy during the interview, but these aspects were again briefly outlined to reassure the mothers. The aim of the session was also stated.

### CONTENTS

A chart with the key word "divorce" was used and various feelings were identified by a brainstorming exercise. The members participated actively and the different types of feelings experienced were grouped under specific sub-headings, namely, feelings about self, feelings in relationships with significant others (daughter, son, ex-spouse and friends) feelings about work and feelings about specific roles.

After this activity the members were given a handout (Appendix 5) depicting various feelings associated with divorce and were requested to fill in the particular feeling they experienced with each family member in certain situations.

Thereafter a discussion followed in which members verbalised the multitude of feelings they experienced with the different people and situations. An awareness of the many feelings concerning relationships with themselves and others was promoted, as was the awareness that the feelings they experienced with certain people were not always negative.

The following extracts illustrate some of the feelings expressed during this session.

Ragini (divorced  $\pm$  18 months)

I felt very bad when I left my husband but I knew I had to because my children and I couldn't live with him anymore. I felt sorry for the children because they were in the middle of the fight and violence. He blamed me for the divorce but I did what was right for the children. I was very frustrated and didn't want to have anything to do with him for what he put us through.

Jane (divorced  $\pm$  2 years)

I felt very bitter and disappointed with my ex-husband. I really think I tried to make the marriage work, more for my son's sake but he didn't try. He felt he did nothing wrong and complained that I always nagged him. I couldn't live with him and he accused me of breaking up the marriage. This made me feel guilty after the divorce.

Zarina (divorced  $\pm$  18 months)

I felt angry with myself because I blamed myself for the divorce. I thought I did something wrong for my husband to leave me after 12 years of marriage.

Mogie (divorced  $\pm$  12 months)

I also felt angry and sad because I couldn't live happily with my ex-husband. We always quarrelled over something. I told him many times that I wanted a divorce and when he really left I blamed myself.

Suneetha (divorced  $\pm$  9 months)

When my ex-husband used to hit me I became determined to leave him but I always hesitated because of the children. When I finally left him I had mixed feelings of self-blame, guilt and bitterness.

The other members also acknowledged negative feelings towards themselves. When questioned about their feelings concerning others, all the subjects indicated that they experienced strong negative feelings towards their ex-spouses.

Shamla (divorced  $\pm$  12 months)

I am divorced now for about a year. Now I feel relieved that the children are not exposed to the physical and emotional abuse. I still feel a lot of anger and frustration towards my ex-husband because of his heavy drinking and violence. The children felt confused after the divorce, especially my younger daughter Kerusha. They both feel sorry for him now.

Suneetha

I feel guilty about the children because they had to be part of the problem caused between my ex-husband and I. They used to feel very bad after their father was drunk and hit me. I feel anger towards him for letting the children experience this misery.

Saras (divorced  $\pm$  2 years)

I feel sorry for my two children because they took the divorce badly. They were angry with their father. I felt so miserable that for a while I even shut myself off from them because I couldn't handle their pain as well.

The responses indicated in the worksheet (Appendix 5) regarding the awareness of experienced feelings confirmed most of the parents' expression of their experiences of the divorce illustrated in the discussion above.

The feelings experienced by the eight mothers are reflected below.

**ANGER** : Seven mothers (87%) experienced anger towards their ex-spouses.

**CONFUSION** : Six mothers (75%) felt confused about the divorce and its aftermath, five (62%) about their new identities and four (50%) about their children's behaviour.

**GUILTY**: Six mothers (75%) felt guilty about the divorce and five (62%) experienced guilt about working.

**SADNESS**: Six mothers (75%) felt sad for their children, five (62%) felt sad about the divorce and four (50%) felt sad about having to work.

**UNLOVED** : Three (37%) felt unloved by their children and four (50%) felt generally unloved after the divorce.

**PRIDE** : Two (25%) mothers experienced pride in being divorced, three (37%) felt proud of themselves for coping and six (75%) felt proud of their children (after the divorce).

**SHAME** : Four (50%) mothers felt ashamed of their ex-spouses and two (25%) felt ashamed about having to work.

**HAPPINESS**: Three (37%) mothers felt happy about the divorce, four (50%) about their children and two (25%) about going to work.

After the discussion of feelings, the researcher briefly explained the concept of identities again. (This had been discussed during the preliminary interviews.) The researcher then initiated a discussion about the different identities an individual has and enquired whether the parents had more responsibilities (and identities) after the divorce (i.e. due to the roles of a provider, caregiver, housekeeper, head of household, etcetera). The parents agreed that there was undoubtedly an added number of identities to contend with and when questioned about their feelings towards their respective role functions or identities the following responses were elicited:

Jane : I have mixed feelings about my different roles. I used to work before my divorce but after the divorce I began to look at my job in a new light because now I am a supporter and realise that my job has to be done well and I needed to improve my skills so that I don't lose my job and even hope for an increase.

Researcher : You regard your work as a challenge and enjoy it.

Jane : Yes, but at times I get frustrated because there is more for me to do after work like shopping, cooking and cleaning. Now I don't have a maid and I have to do everything myself. My son tries to help me a lot.

Shamla : I am also the breadwinner, mother and father to the children, head of the family, housekeeper and cook. This sometimes becomes too much for me. I don't know what I would do if my eldest daughter didn't help me so much. I am really proud of her.

I enjoy working because I feel useful but I also feel guilty because I cannot see to my children's needs at home.

Mogie : (divorced ± 12 months). There are now a lot of changes at home. I am now both mother and father to my two children (Yugesh and Anban). At times I don't know how to deal with certain problems regarding them. After the divorce I wanted to stay at home and spend more time with them but now I have to work and it makes me feel guilty. Now I rely on them to help me with the housework, everything is so rushed.

Fathima : I feel the same way too. I feel very guilty about leaving my two small children [7 years and 3 years] and going to work. I have too many things to do, I have to get up very early to cook, clean house, see to the children, leave one in school and one with the neighbour before going to work. I am forced to work because I don't get any money from my ex-husband who is not working. I love to be at home for my children but I can't. I feel very confused about my different identities, like working, being a mother and seeing to the things at home. Everything is one big rush.

Ragini : Before the divorce, because my husband used to drink I had to be the breadwinner, see to my children's needs, clean the house, and cook. It was not a big change for me but when I moved away I had to adjust to the new place and home. I had a problem with finance and my children were too upset and confused to really help me at home.

Saras : When my ex-husband suddenly left, it was too much for me. He used to be the breadwinner, do the shopping and discipline the children. Now I had to do all these and clean the house, cook and see to the children. I did not know what to do. I felt that I couldn't manage because it was a big change and I was frustrated that I had to do so much.

Suneetha : I enjoy certain roles like being the provider for my children and a caregiver. I am also a father to them. There are times when I am quite tired and cannot manage but my children help me a lot. But they also have their moods too.

The researcher thus established that the parents were aware of their different identities and their involvement with and experience of each varied.

They were given a handout (Appendix 6) to fill in regarding their identities and their feelings experienced towards each identity.

The following analysis illustrates the feelings experienced by the eight mothers towards the various identities. Percentages are reflected to indicate the significant number of mothers who experience the specific feelings towards the respective identities.

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS AND FEELINGS

TOWARDS EACH RELATIONSHIP

The following analysis was made based on the worksheet on important relationships (Appendix 6):

<b>FEELINGS</b>	<b>ROLES / IDENTITIES</b>
Pride	Five mothers (62%) felt proud being providers and housekeepers. Six (75%) were proud to be single parents, caregivers and head of the household.
Happiness	Three (37%) were happy to be single parents and providers, and four (50%) felt happy being caregivers.
Confusion	Four (50%) of the mothers felt confused about being a provider and caregiver.
Guilt	Three mothers felt guilty being the provider and two (25%) were guilty about being the head of the household.
Sadness	Two mothers (25%) were sad to be a single parent.
Anger	Four (50%) mothers felt angry about being providers and three (37%) felt angry about being the head of the household.

All the parents acknowledged that their children were very important to them and felt love, pride, concern and sympathy towards them. Seven mothers indicated that their relationships with their ex-spouses were not regarded as being important. Four mothers felt anger, bitterness and shame towards them. Five mentioned that their friends were also important to them and all admitted that their relationship at work was important and four mothers felt pride and two felt anger about working.

### SUMMARY

The parents were aware of the different feelings experienced during and after the divorce. They all experienced negative feelings towards their ex-spouses. Shamla and Zarina blamed themselves for the divorce. They all acknowledged that they had new identities and in the discussion indicated that they were aware of their different feelings concerning the respective identities. This was also apparent in the responses elicited in the worksheets (Appendix 6). Ragini and Shamla admitted that they had already assumed or taken on many of their new identities (such as breadwinner and head of household) before the divorce because of their ex-husbands' drinking problems and their inability to perform their role functions properly.

## SESSION 2

### AIM

This session was aimed at helping the individuals become aware of the nature of their involvement in different relationships, the quality of their involvement, and the meaning given to the different relationships. The researcher intended to help members perceive that their involvement in a relationship and the feelings experienced would determine how positively or negatively the relationship was evaluated.

### CONTENT

A brief summary was done of the previous session. The parents were then encouraged to discuss problems in relationships. The researcher told a story of a divorced couple who continued to experience a conflictual relationship even after the divorce, especially on matters regarding their children. This reference evoked a strong response from the members, extracts of which follow.

Researcher : Do any of you also experience problems in your relationships?

Zarina : When my ex-husband calls to see the children I used to get irritated and hope that the children refuse to go. When he comes to pick them up I ignore him or tell him that he has to bring them back at a certain time. When he is late I get angry and shout at him and sometimes he shouts back and we have a fight.

Shamla : Soon after the divorce my ex-husband used to try to talk to me and I should feel so mad about what he used to do (drinking and getting violent) that I used to talk roughly to him. I wanted to make him pay for what he did to me and the children. When he brought my daughter back late I used to get all worked up because I used to worry that he got drunk and wonder how he will bring Kerusha back. We then have a fight about that. But now I feel sorry.

Researcher : It was more out of concern for your daughter that you got angry with him. (Shamla nods her head in agreement).

Mogie : I used to feel very confused and bitter with my ex-husband after the divorce. I wondered whether he could have tried harder to make our marriage work. He was too set in his ways to change and always wanted things his way. He didn't bother to improve our relationship. When he calls to speak to my son sometimes I used to make an excuse so that Yugesh (son) doesn't talk to him.

Fathima : My ex-husband didn't bother us too much. But sometimes he will come to see my daughters and I told him not to come if he drank or took drugs. Once he took my daughter and left her in his mother's house and went away.

Suneetha : I used to get very annoyed with my ex-husband when he didn't keep to his word. He is very unreliable at times, especially about keeping to time and not keeping his promise to my younger daughter (Medisha).

The mothers experienced anger, anxiety and resentment towards their ex-spouses for causing the divorce and for their irrational and irresponsible behaviour when visiting their children. The researcher referred the parents to a handout given to the children's group entitled "Games parents play" (Appendix 7). After a brief explanation of this handout, the researcher enquired whether the members experienced similar situations.

Mogie : I am guilty of saying nasty things about my ex-husband to my son especially when I was upset about something he said or did. One such time was when he promised to buy my son a set of television games and I wanted to buy something more useful. (He knew I was against the television games).

Shamla : During and after the divorce I used to belittle my husband even in front of my children about his drinking and not working daily. That used to get him very mad and then he used to break things and even push me aside roughly when I should stop him. When he promises to pick up my daughter and doesn't I used to say unpleasant things.

Suneetha : I had not much respect for my ex-husband because he physically abused me during the years and I got into the habit of insulting him and making nasty remarks about him to my children. My daughter didn't like it when I did that but my son sometimes encouraged me and told me that I should leave his father because of the hiding.

In the above extracts the mothers acknowledged that they subjected their children to parental alignment. The researcher then prompted discussion on parent-child interaction after the divorce.

Mogie : I feel sad that I don't spend more time with my son but I can't help it. After work I still have to come home and see to the housework. Sometimes when I get late my son makes his own supper, he likes that.

Jane : I spend more time with my son [Dayalan] now than before because I feel that I shouldn't neglect him now that he has only one parent to live with. During the weekends I always take him out and make sure he has fun.

Saras : I don't get the time to spend with my children. There is so much to do working full-time, shopping, cleaning the house, being the breadwinner and both mother and father to the children. I feel bad that I can't spend more time with the children.

Suneetha : I used to try my best to be there for my children but it is hard. I have to do more now. I also have to do the work my ex-husband used to do. The children help but I still have lot to do.

Ragini : My children understand that I have to work, come home, cook, clean and see to them. They help me a lot and I don't spend a lot of time but while we are all cleaning the house and while they are doing their schoolwork we talk a little. I wish that I could really spend more time with them, especially my smaller son. He gets difficult at times and wants more attention and always complains that his sister bullies him.

The mothers admitted that after the divorce they had more responsibilities and thus could

not spend much time with their children. They expressed sadness and regret about this situation and hoped that they could spend more time with their children.

Here the session ended; the members were thanked for their participation and were informed of what would be discussed at the next session.

### SUMMARY

The parents became aware of negative thought patterns experienced in their relationships with their ex-spouses. Two members (Mogie and Shamla) were able to attribute new meaning to their relationships which resulted in changes to the emotions experienced in the relationship. Initially they experienced anger and bitterness but after verbalisation of their feelings they acknowledged that they felt guilty and sympathetic towards their ex-spouses. All the parents admitted that they still experienced conflictual relationships with their ex-spouses and subjected their children to parental alignment where they made disparaging comments about their fathers. With regard to parent-child interaction, the parents expressed sadness and guilt about not spending enough time with their children and two mothers experienced pride in their children's supportive behaviour towards them. The mothers wanted desperately to spend more time with their children but could not. This caused them to make the most of the situation and encourage their children to cope with the new lifestyle. The parents stated their children were very supportive in assisting with the many chores.

## SESSIONS 3 AND 4

### AIM

These sessions aimed to promote discussion of the various identities that are significant to members and to help them elaborate on the feelings that they experience in each identity. In this way, they were able to determine whether their identities were influenced by the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

### CONTENT

The parents were reminded of their awareness of their identities in session one when they were then given a handout (Appendix 6) indicating their feelings about different identities and the effect of these identities on the respective relationships. (Members' responses are indicated at the end of session one).

In the following discussion, all the mothers acknowledged that they felt the burden of too many responsibilities and roles after the divorce and this caused them to experience negative feelings towards certain identities. The following extracts serve as examples of their ambivalent feelings :

Jane : I am beginning to enjoy my work. I find it a challenge and a change from being a housewife. I get pleasure from knowing that I can provide for my son and myself. I also know that I can take good care of my son and not neglect him. But I do get tired when it comes to doing the cleaning and cooking. My son helps me and he also makes his own supper at times.

Researcher : You get more pleasure from working than cleaning the house because you find your work more challenging.

Jane : Yes, I hope that I could get some help at home but I can't and I have to manage to do it myself.

Mogie : I also enjoy my work and I hold a good job. At times I have to work long hours which is tiring but rewarding. My husband and I always quarrelled about my working. He wanted me to stay at home or hold a part-time job so that I could be at home to see to my son. Before being married I had training in a computer course and worked for a while till my son was born. I prefer working to being a full-time housekeeper. After the divorce I couldn't keep a part-time maid and now have a problem with the housework. I try my best though.

Shamla : I found it hard to adjust after the divorce. Even at work I couldn't work properly, and kept thinking about the children who needed me more now (after the divorce). But I had to work to provide for them. I don't enjoy working that much; I prefer to be at home.

Zarina : I don't enjoy working that much but I have to. I love being at home, cleaning, cooking, baking and seeing to the children after their school. After my mother died I found it even harder to work, worry about the children and am now responsible for everything at home. My eldest daughter helps me a lot.

Saras : I also work full-time and find my work very tiring. I hope that I can stay at home and be a better mother to my children. I do neglect them because now they have to come from school and help me with the work. I don't get the chance to check their school work, most of the time I feel bad about that.

Suneetha : Over the years I have been working on and off. When my ex-husband lost his job once, I had to work; I don't enjoy working : once my ex-husband hit me on my face, I had to go to work and my friends saw my face and knew that I had problems. I used to dislike going back to work. Now I need to work but I don't get the chance to clean the house properly and cook a good meal and see to the children.

While Mogie and Jane found the prospect of having to work challenging and enjoyable, they found the household chores demanding. The other four parents admitted that they had to work after the divorce and experienced conflicting feelings about their provider and caregiver roles.

When questioned about whether the nature of their relationships affected their identities, the members confirmed that it did. They were encouraged to examine their roles and see how these were influenced by the quality of their relationships.

Shamla : I needed to work because my ex-husband is an alcoholic and couldn't have a stable job. I don't really enjoy working; especially after the divorce, I neglect the children. I love cooking, cleaning and baking, taking good care of them, but now I know

I can't do all this properly because I have to work. I do blame my ex-husband for this because I feel guilty that I cannot be there for my children, seeing to their needs.

Jane : After the divorce I found comfort in my job: it gave me some satisfaction. I think that if I was happily married I wouldn't have enjoyed working so much because I was a person who loved being a housewife, housekeeper and mother, but because of my problems with my ex-husband I didn't like staying at home because he always had something to complain. At work I enjoy a good relationship with the people and my boss. They appreciate my work. I try not to neglect my son and make sure that I spend a lot of time with him during weekends.

Suneetha : I do not enjoy working but have to now because of the divorce. I blame my husband for having to work. I love being at home and find such pleasure being there for the children. Now that I am working, my younger daughter, especially, gets very angry when I cannot help her with her schoolwork and I do feel guilty when she behaves this way. I begin to wonder whether I am a good mother and blamed my ex-husband for this situation.

Zarina : I also blame my husband for having to go to work because I know I do neglect the children in a way. I think that I am not a good mother, when they need me most. I am not there to help them (like their schoolwork). I don't enjoy being in charge of everything at home. After the divorce I depended a lot on my mother. After she died I found it very hard to manage but my daughter helps me a lot.

Saras : I feel happy that I have a very understanding relationship with my children. After the divorce we got closer. I felt so bad that I tried my best to make up for them. Even though I work I try to be a good cook - get up early in the morning and cook, housekeeper and mother. I can't manage with all the work but my children help too. I blame my ex-husband for causing the children to help with my chores and not do so well at school now.

All the mothers besides Jane admitted that their having to work adversely affected their relationship with their children and they preferred staying at home because they enjoyed the nurturing caregiver and efficient housekeeper roles. However, their duty as a provider caused a conflict with these roles and they blamed their ex-spouses for their predicament.

The following extract reflects a spontaneous and supportive response by the members with regard to their adjustment after their traumatic divorce. The verbalisation of feelings had a cathartic effect on some members and their supportive intervention was therapeutic.

Suneetha : We are lucky that we can now meet and talk about our problems. It helps because it is not good to keep all our problems in. It is good to know that we have similar problems and went through the same pain, anger, frustration and depression.

Shamla : Yes, we are now stronger because we have proven to ourselves that we can manage without our ex-husbands. We must now be proud and not feel bad for our children. They will understand.

Ragini : I had a very bad time with my ex-husband when he used to drink and hit me. Then he moved away to live with his mistress. That was too much for me. At that time I was working part-time. Then we did not have enough money. I had to find another job. It was very difficult. I had to take two part-time jobs. Now I have a better job. I blamed my husband for putting me and my children through all this [she began crying softly.]

Fathima (getting up and comforting her) : I know how you feel because my husband also gave me a lot of trouble. I began to work as a machinist as soon as he lost his job for almost a year. I used to feel very angry, and frustrated because I had to leave my two daughters, the younger one was not yet two years old, with my neighbours. She used to cry most of the time and it took her a whole year to settle down next door. She made me feel very guilty. I had to go to work and I knew I was neglecting my children because they were still small and needed me. [She also was in tears.]

At this point all the members offered comforting and encouraging words to the two women.

Shamla : I used to cry very easily before even in front of the children when my ex-husband used to hit me but now I have hardened a bit because I went through a lot. I feel for all of you here because we have all went through similar pain and anger. We all have to do so much more : being the breadwinner, mother, cleaning the house, etcetera, and we do not enjoy doing all these everyday but we have to manage some how.

The researcher enquired whether they experienced stress due to the added responsibilities of being a mother, employee, provider, housekeeper, etcetera. The following responses were evoked :

Mogie : Soon after the divorce I found it very difficult to adjust but now I think that I manage quite well being a single parent, and providing for my son and handling all the other responsibilities as well. But at times it does get tough and even frustrating. But I regard my work as a challenge.

Saras : I feel things are too much for me to handle at times. Sometimes I get frustrated because I can't expect my children to do all the work at home. My children too get mad because I come late sometimes and I am not there for something, mainly to help them with their schoolwork. Before their father used to help them now they have to battle on their own.

Jane : I manage quite well after the divorce. I think that this is so because I was always very independent and a career person. After the divorce, I concentrated more on my work. The conflicts we had in our marriage helped me to be stronger and more independent. After the divorce I could manage to do most of the things myself but I do find it very tiring at times.

Shamla : I find it too much to do everything myself now. Although I did have a lot of problems with my ex-husband, at times when he was not drinking he used to be very

helpful at home, especially with the children's schoolwork and doing the shopping. If my daughter didn't help me so much I don't know how I could manage.

Suneetha : After the divorce I couldn't manage with all my new responsibilities. I felt frustrated and angry but now I am coping okay, but it is hard. Now you have to be mother and father to the children. Sometimes they don't listen and even tell you that they wished that their father was at home when I shout at them. I can't handle it when they are stubborn and moody.

Ragini : We must give them time to adjust to this change. My children also get stubborn and difficult and I get fed up with them when they don't listen. I also find it hard to cope sometimes, especially when my son doesn't help as agreed. Sometimes he gets very moody and it doesn't help when I get mad with him too. I leave him alone and when he feels better he comes around to help. I do get very depressed and frustrated at times when it gets too much.

Fathima : Now I got used to working full-time, seeing to my two daughters, cleaning the house, cooking and shopping. I do make a lot of sacrifices. I hardly meet my friends or relatives now. Everyday I have to be organised, I get up very early to cook the food (I send my daughter's lunch next door) and clean the house. In the evening I give both the children a bath and supper. At the beginning, last year, I used to find it very difficult and felt like crying all the time. Now I try my best.

All the mothers acknowledged that they experienced role strain due to the numerous demands made upon them, however, they also admitted that they made an effort to cope in spite of the difficulties experienced. Their children reacted negatively by being unsupportive and unresponsive and this further adversely affected the mother's coping skills.

The members were thanked for their participation and informed briefly of what would be discussed at the next session. The session was terminated.

#### SUMMARY

The parents were aware of the different identities that were significant to them and they elaborated on the feelings they experienced about those identities. They all agreed that the type of relationship they had with certain family members (ex-spouse, children) affected their identities (i.e. being a provider, caregiver, housekeeper, etc). In addition, conflicting feelings about the ex-spouse caused conflicts with their respective identities.

They felt that they had to work (the provider role) and at the same time neglected their children (the caregiver role). When the (older) children were rebellious and uncooperative, the parents had to take on more identities (involved in cleaning the house and supervising the younger children's schoolwork).

Through awareness and exploration the parents were able to verbalise their feelings regarding interpersonal relationship and specific identities. They found that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to certain identities because of the negative thought patterns

experienced in the spousal relationship. Five of the parents acknowledged that they had to work full-time because of their divorce and blamed their ex-spouses. This resulted in a conflict of identities and resulted in the attributing unrealistic attribution of meaning to the provider role.

All the parents admitted that they experienced stress due to the many new identities they had to take on.

It is pertinent that verbalisation of intense feelings had a cathartic effect when three of the members broke down and cried and the researcher encouraged comforting comments soon after the outbursts to allow for group bonding and for members to provide valuable support and interaction.

## STAGE 2 - EXPLORATION

### SESSIONS 5 AND 6

#### AIM :

The parents were informed that these sessions were aimed at helping them explore their respective relationships and understand certain related problems. Such as role strain, role reversal and unrealistic expectations.

#### CONTENT

A brief summary of the previous session was made. The parents were then given a worksheet (Appendix 8) and the researcher briefly discussed expectations that people have in relationships, and whether added responsibilities could affect interpersonal relationships and the formation of identities. Thereafter the members were asked to fill in the worksheets. The responses are reflected at the end of the session.

When the worksheets were completed, the mothers were invited to voice their opinions on the issues addressed in them. The following extracts illustrate the content of the discussion:

Jane : I tried to improve my relationship with my son after the divorce by spending more time with him, especially during the weekends. I think that I expected too much of him because I wanted him to spend most of his time with me but now I realise that he also needed some time alone for himself and his friends. I was afraid of losing him after the divorce and I sort of clung to him.

Suneetha : I got closer to my children too and I expected them to cut off all ties with their father because of what he put us through. My younger daughter was badly affected by the divorce and still wanted to live with her father. That used to anger me. I also expected my older daughter to do too much for me and she hardly complains.

Saras : I know I expected too much from my two children. I wanted them to forget their dad and start all over again. I was wrong because no matter how upset they were with their father they still loved him and missed him. They were always excited to see him or hear from him, especially my younger son. I also depend a lot on my elder son to help with the housework and take care of his brother when I was at work.

Ragini : I have a son [Vinolan] who is eight years. I cannot expect much from him and I don't expect anything from my ex-husband, but I expected a lot from myself. I had to be provider, caregiver, cook, housekeeper, head of household, parent and friend (neighbour). At times I find it hard to cope but I know I have to cope because I have no choice. Most important of all I want to be a good mother to my children. I intend to start my own business soon, dressmaking. This will give me great joy because I can be there for my children.

Fathima : I also cannot expect anything from my ex-husband, being an addict. He doesn't even visit my daughters. My older daughter (6 years) is affected because she misses him but she was afraid when he used to be violent with me. At times I think she blames me and asks me why her father doesn't stay with us anymore.

This extract reveals the feelings experienced by the mothers in their relationships with their children and their ex-spouses. The mothers made every attempt to be more available to their children so that this relationship could improve. Resentment and bitterness towards the ex-spouses was evident and the mothers indicated that they didn't encourage the children to see their fathers although they missed them and yearned for them.

Researcher : Does your added responsibilities affect your relationship with your children?

Suneetha : I tried to be more attentive with my younger daughter because she was affected by the separation. She used to cry easily and told me one day her father went away because I used to be angry with him. After I started working and having more to do, she resented me more then but I am glad now she has settled down and understands better now.

Jane : My son [Dayalan] also at the beginning was moody, aggressive and did not want to listen to me. When I expected him to do certain things for me he used to complain and I used to lose my temper. I think he found the adjustment difficult and since I had more to do he felt neglected and when I tried to spend a lot of time during the weekends he did not seem to enjoy it also.

Shamla : I didn't expect that much of support from my daughters, but I got a lot of help especially from my older daughter. She has coped very well with the divorce and helps me a lot and tries her best. She is like a mother to my younger daughter.

Mogie : I expected my ex-husband to resent me for divorcing him and not be friendly but suprisingly after a few months after the divorce he began to show more interest in my welfare which was so unlike him. At first I thought he was trying to win me back and because of the years [10 years] of conflict and fighting I didn't want to encourage a reconciliation.

Zarina : I also expected my husband to ignore me after the divorce but he always asks the children if I am okay. When they tell me about that I have mixed feelings about him because I was married to him for about 12 years. I also depend a lot on my elder daughter to help me. I won't be able to cope without her help.

The responses illustrate that the mothers' added responsibilities affected their relationship with their children. They also had unrealistic expectations from their children, wanting them to be more supportive. Two mothers mistakenly expected their ex-spouses to react negatively towards them after the divorce, but instead they showed consideration and interest towards them.

The researcher enquired whether the added responsibilities affected their identities (role functioning) and the following responses were elicited:

Jane : I had more responsibilities after the divorce and this made me take on more duties [identities] like being the head of the family, provider, caregiver, housekeeper and grocery shopper. At times I didn't know which role I should be good at and which one is not that

important. Definitely the added responsibilities affected my relationship with my son because I couldn't spend much time with him.

Shamla : After living with an alcoholic for many years [12 years] you take on many responsibilities yourself. That's how I started working, being in charge of the family, and providing for them. But after the divorce I realised that I couldn't depend on my husband at all. During his sober stages he used to be helpful. Now I don't know which duty is more important. I think that they are all important in a way and cannot neglect them.

Zarina : After my husband left me and after my mother passed away, I had so much to do and so many changes took place. This affected my relationship with my children. At first my eldest daughter couldn't understand why I depended on her to help me so much. Now she helps me a lot.

Zarina : At times I feel I neglect them because I am working , but if I don't work then I cannot provide for them. I have many roles now, like a mother, breadwinner, housecleaner, cook and friend. Sometimes I don't know if I can cope with all properly but I think that my children must have healthy food, clean place to live and my love. My eldest daughter is very good: she takes over for me when I am not at home.

Fathima : You are right, that is what children need. I also find it difficult to manage. My children are too small to help me and I try my best. I have to be very well-organised. I get up quite early in the morning to cook and even do some house cleaning so that after

work I can be there for my children. When they are sleeping I complete my other jobs. I do get very tired.

Suneetha : We all have more to do after our divorce and we have to see which role is more necessary or important. As Zarina said, our children come first. We must make time to help them with their schoolwork too. We still have to be the provider, caring mother, head of the family, housekeeper and cook because each one is necessary. We can only be good at each through our children's help as well. We cannot do all very well because we do get tired.

Ragini : Yes, we must remember that we also need to slow down and be organised so that we can cope. If we want to do all every day we will go to pieces and begin to hate our different roles. Like cooking, on certain days we have something that doesn't take long to cook, but still healthy, and cleaning the house, we do only what has to be done like sweeping and doing the dishes and during the weekend we do a good job of cleaning and I cook special dishes.

Jane : Yes, I think we all do that as well. Being a single parent makes us more sensitive to our children's needs and we want to make up for the children for not having a dad. If we plan well and make our children understand then we can manage okay, I think.

All the members confirmed that the role strain of added responsibilities was quite stressful and demanding and this caused identity conflicts. However, during their interaction the group members were supportive in attempting to be more positive and assertive with

regard to trying to cope with each role as best they could. They indicated that being a caregiver was definitely more important than all the other roles.

The responses from the worksheet (Appendix 8) are reflected below:

### Coping skills

A majority (75%) felt stress with the pressure to cope with role functions and children's expectations. They found the children's behaviour and attitude negative, which affected them negatively. They all found the transitional adjustment process difficult.

### Reaction to Stress - feelings experienced in relationships

While the two parents (25%) stated that they handled stress satisfactorily, the others (75%) responded that they reacted by being demanding and unreasonable, experiencing moments of frustration, depression and hopelessness. 83% of them experienced guilt for depending on the children to help alleviate their role strain.

### Expectation from certain relationships

While 50% of the subjects maintained that their relationship with their children improved, others (25%) indicated that this relationship fluctuated. With regard to their relationship with the ex-spouse, they all indicated that they still resented him and still experienced spousal conflict to some degree; however, two parents admitted that after a while their relationship with their ex-husband improved. When questioned about their relationships with friends, 75% mentioned that a good relationship was maintained and that their friends were supportive while two members indicated that their old friends avoided them.

In general, the mothers expected their children to: do more chores, be more supportive, be more considerate, allow them to spend some time alone and most importantly, listen to them.

#### Attempts to improve certain relationships

All of the parents acknowledged that they could improve certain aspects of their relationships with their children and ex-spouse. Regarding their children, they felt that they could be more sympathetic and appreciative of them spending more quality time with them and demonstrating that they care.

#### Effect of added responsibilities on relationships

The parents indicated that the added stress associated with increased responsibilities had adversely affected their relationships with their children, friends and ex-spouses.

#### SUMMARY

The findings from the worksheets support the group discussion with regard to role strain, role reversal and the evaluation of certain interpersonal relationships. The parents gained an insight into the nature of the respective relationships and the related problems (such as role strain, role reversal and unrealistic expectations from certain relationships). They indicated that they had unrealistic expectations from their relationships and this had negatively influenced their interaction within these relationships.

Through group interaction and exploration, the parents were able to verbalise feelings experienced towards the new identities they were faced with and could attempt to evaluate the importance and relevance of certain identities.

### STAGE 3 : PERSONALISATION

#### SESSIONS 7 AND 8

##### AIM

These sessions were aimed at identifying realistic and unrealistic identities and positive and negative relationships, assessing each accordingly. The members would also ascertain whether the meaning given to certain relationships and identities may cause problematic relationships and identifying conflicts.

##### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session, the researcher initiated a discussion (pertaining to the meaning given to their identities through their involvement and experience of their identities) with the following question :

Researcher : How do you feel about your different roles now?

Mogie : I felt that I had to take on all my new roles and make each one manageable, mainly because I wanted to prove to myself that I can do it on my own and to show my ex-husband that I am strong enough to cope with everything. But I find a few roles difficult to cope with and don't know which role I should try to be better in.

Saras : Yes, I also feel the same way too. I want to be the best mother, housekeeper, provider and head of family. But when I think that my husband caused me to be in this situation (like being a provider or head of the family) I have mixed feelings about these

certain roles and resent the idea that I have to take on a role that was supposed to have been my ex-husband's.

Shamla : I also found it hard to take on the roles that was my ex-husband's before. I was angry with him for making me being responsible now. I do enjoy the challenge and being a provider and in charge of the family sometimes but at times I wonder which role should be more important for me to improve on and which one I am doing well in.

Zarina : I do neglect the children sometimes and think about which role I should play more attention to: being a mother or being a breadwinner. I know that if I don't work I cannot provide them with the things they need. Sometimes when I am at work, I think about them and blame my husband for causing this problem, that is, going to work and leaving the children alone at home after school. One day my small daughter [Fahima] got burnt and I felt very bad after that. [She began to cry; Suneetha got up and went to her and comforted her].

Suneetha : Don't feel so bad, these things happen. It can happen to anyone even if we are with them at home. We just feel guilty and blame ourselves because these things happen when we are not at home. My two children fight a lot and I worry about them at work. One day my son took out a cricket bat for my daughter and she ran out. These things happen, we have to be strong and explain to them that we depend on them a lot to help us. Now my son is more understanding and responsible. I sometimes make him feel that he is the man in the house and it makes him feel good.

Ragini: Yes, we need to sit down and explain to our children that we rely on them to help us and not to fight but look out for each other and that will make us a better and stronger family. It is sad that we have to work harder to make our children comfortable and safe but we must accept that.

The mothers acknowledged that they had more identities to deal with after the divorce and they resented their ex-spouses for their role strain and for their conflicting feelings about the various identities. A conflict between the provider and caregiver role is evident from their responses.

Researcher: Thank you all for really expressing yourselves so well and it is good to see you supporting each other so well too. Let's discuss your different identities. Which identities do you think are more important to you and why?

Suneetha : I don't really enjoy working. I love to be at home, clean house, cook, bake and spend a lot of time with my children but sadly I cannot do the things I love to do. I have to work and I feel angry about that because it was my ex-husband's duty to be the breadwinner and in charge of the family and now I have to take his place.

Researcher : So, which identity is more important to you?

Suneetha : I think all are important but some roles have to be performed properly every day, like caring and cooking for the children. The others can be done properly during the weekends.

Ragini : I agree with Suneetha. We are forced to take on an identity because we are single parents and we are not giving of our best in these identities. I don't enjoy working full-time because I am away from the children and I think that it was my ex-husband's duty to provide for us. Being in charge means I have to be very careful how I talk to the children so they understand me clearly. Before they used to listen to their father out of fear and when he was away they used to be naughty with me. I find it hard to discipline them at times.

Fathima : I also don't like being the head of the family, sometimes I like to just relax and not worry about the worrying things in my life. But I have to because there is no one else to do it. I think it is important to be a good parent and give them good food and lots of love.

The mothers admitted that they had to take on certain identities after the divorce and they resented their ex-spouses for this. These feelings of resentment negatively influenced their different identities and as such they did not enjoy performing certain roles. They all indicated that the caregiver role was more important than the provider role.

The members were given a worksheet which indicated that the type of relationship they had with others may affect their identity formation. A short discussion followed and the members filled in their responses. The following feelings were reflected (Appendix 9):

All the parents indicated that their relationship with their ex-spouses affected their roles as a provider, head of the household and housekeeper, and their relationship with their

children also affected their role functioning as a provider, housekeeper, cook, confidante and caregiver. Six of the parents acknowledged that they found the new identities unmanageable while two admitted that they could cope.

All the parents stated that they tried their best in all the roles but also that they did only as much as they could (for the day).

The researcher attempted to ascertain whether the meaning given to certain relationships could cause problematic relationships.

Researcher : Do you think that at times you were too hard with your child or children or ex-spouse and this affected your relationships?

Mogie : After the divorce I expected to maintain the same problematic relationship with my ex-spouse but surprisingly he changed and was very considerate when he phoned or called to talk to my son. Because of my previous relationship with him I didn't trust this change in him and used to be abrupt when he spoke to me. I used to make sure that he kept to his word about picking my son up and when he had to buy something for Yugesh.

Jane : I expected my son to spend a lot of time with me after the divorce because I thought that was what he also wanted. Once he told me that he doesn't get the chance to play with his friends and he also missed his father who used to supervise his school-work.

I resented that because I wanted to prove to myself that he didn't need his father because I could help him with his needs.

Shamla : I was very frustrated with my husband for drinking and causing problems. I sometimes feel guilty for divorcing him but I can't put my children through the misery of living with an alcoholic. Once I was separated and went back but it didn't improve anything. I cannot trust him and respect him.

Suneetha : After the divorce I expected my children to be closer to me and feel relieved; but soon after the divorce they used to feel confused and even resented me because I didn't know how to please them. They missed their father, especially my younger daughter, and she blamed me too for the divorce. I also used to get angry with her and I couldn't deal with that.

These parents confirmed that they had unrealistic expectations of their ex-spouses or children and this adversely affected these relationships. This indicates that they had attributed unrealistic meaning which caused problematic relationships.

Ragini : You know Shamla, I now attend the Al-Anon meetings and there we learn that alcoholism is an addiction and that the addict cannot be responsible for his actions when drunk. We make matters worse by rejecting them and insulting them. They need assurance that they are worthwhile people and they need love most of all. I didn't accept that then but now after listening to others in the group I realised that it was true. My ex-husband is now living with another woman. Now I think that maybe she has shown him

some love and respect. I know that I cannot live with my ex-husband again because I went through a lot of pain and misery. Now I understand his behaviour better and don't mind if he spends time with the children at home. This makes the children feel good too.

Shamla : I agree with you, when they are not drunk, they are different but I also forget the years of violence and misery I had with my ex-husband and don't want my children to be part of that too. My daughters attend the Allateen group, a programme for children and they have asked me many times to go to the Al-Anon group meetings but I told them that I needed more time. The programme has helped them to deal with their father's behaviour when he is drunk.

Fathima : I had the same problem with my husband. He has a drug problem and at first I tried to be supportive. He gave up drugs and went to the rehabilitation centre two times and then went back to it. Now I cannot live with him because he is not responsible and gets very violent. I also do know that he cannot be blamed at times but I cannot face the pain again. My two daughters are still small to understand why I had to leave him and they miss him. My older daughter asks me many times why her father does not live with us and gets angry with me when I sometimes ignore her. Sometimes I don't know what to do or say. [She starts crying and all the members go around and comfort her. Shamla, Suneetha and Ragini break down too].

Researcher [after giving them a few minutes] : I think that it is very good to cry openly like this, it helps to let out all our suppressed feelings and it is a big help to see that the

others also experience similar feelings. This makes us closer to each other and allows us to be more honest and express ourselves openly.

The members were thanked for their participation and support and were briefly informed of the contents of the next session and the session ended.

### SUMMARY

Through awareness and exploration the members were able to attribute personal meaning to the respective identities and identify realistic and unrealistic identities. Mogie felt that she had to prove to herself and ex-spouse that she could take on all the identities successfully, but then admitted that certain identities were hard to cope with. She felt confused about which identity to focus on. Zarina realised that being a breadwinner was important but attributed unrealistic meaning to it because she blamed her ex-husband for her having to work and neglecting the children. Suneetha was able to identify which identity was necessary and realistic to her although she would have enjoyed other identities more (being a cook and housekeeper). The parents became aware of all the feelings that they experienced in their relationships and of the unrealistic meaning they attributed to these relationships as a result. Through exploration of their feelings, they identified negative thought patterns and became aware of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to relationships. Shamla blamed her husband for his drunken behaviour and violent outbursts, and because of the separation blamed him for her having to work and neglect the children. She transferred her anger for her ex-spouse to her feelings towards certain identities. Zarina found the expression of feelings (such as anxiety) about her children's welfare and her caregiver role very cathartic. The exploration of feelings

allowed the subjects to identify realistic and unrealistic identities and attribute new meaning to certain problematic relationships. Shamla was able to give new meaning to her problematic relationship with her ex-husband through Ragini's intervention about attributing unrealistic meaning to a relationship (her discussion about the benefit of the Al Anon programme). This encouraged all members to explore their own feelings in their various relationships.

The members gained insight into the coherence between their interpersonal relationships and identity formation and also became aware of unrealistic meaning given to identities which results in identity conflicts.

## STAGE 4 - CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR AND REASONING

### SESSIONS 9 AND 10

#### AIM

These sessions were aimed at helping the members make decisions about improving the quality of certain relationships in order to positively influence the process of identity formation. Members were also encouraged to consider how to solve certain problems (such as spousal conflict, parental alignment/conflict etcetera) and to determine their role in creating problems, with the aim of stimulating the parent to make an attempt to initiate change.

#### CONTENT

A brief summary of the previous session was made. The researcher encouraged the members to make decisions regarding problems in interpersonal relationships; and to either improve, accept or reject certain relationships.

Researcher : Do you think that you can improve certain relationships?

Mogie : I think I need to improve my relationship with my ex-husband because he has been very considerate towards me and then I was suspicious of his motives. But I will now try to be polite too; this will make my son happy. This will reduce some of the stress I experience because when he used to call I had to think of his reaction and his behaviour and try to be on guard. I think that if I change my attitude towards him I might enjoy certain roles which caused stress, like being a provider and head of family.

Shamla : I also think that I should be more tolerant towards my ex-husband because I now understand he is an alcoholic and he needs more support than criticism. After the divorce he tried to be more reliable and tried to stop drinking by joining the A.A. for a while but went back to drinking. Then I was quite angry with him. My older daughter suggested that I join Al Anon. I refused because I felt that I would not benefit from such a programme. My children now go to a similar programme for children called Allateen and I can see that the programme has helped them to deal with the problem of their father's drinking.

Jane : I thought that after the divorce my son and I will get closer but I became too over protective and too attentive and I don't think he liked that. Once he asked me quite politely if he could spend some time with his friends and his father. I now let him to spend some time with his friends and even agree to let him talk and see his father more often than before. I am not too rigid about him completing all his chores for me too.

Zarina : I still find it hard to forgive my ex-husband for leaving me for another woman, but for the children's sake I will be polite to him. I will try to improve my relationship with my children especially the younger ones. They sometimes get angry when I let my older daughter be in charge and tell them that they have to listen to her when I am at work. They complain that she bullies them and that I treat her differently from them. I tried to convince them that she is only trying to help me and I am grateful for that. I will try to show them that I care a lot for them.

Suneetha : I thought that I would not be able to forgive my husband for beating me. I do feel sorry for him now, because he does seem lost without my children. I will try to be more considerate towards him when he calls to see the children. I will try to be a better mother to the children as well by spending more time especially during weekends. I need to take stock of myself and note how often I lose my temper.

Ragini : I think that being together as a group helped us to really be aware of our feelings and come to terms with certain unresolved issues. Now I also can be more tolerant towards my ex-husband who abused me and even cheated on me. At one time I thought that I was a failure because he left us, but now I know I didn't cause that. I think that I can be polite to him when he calls to pick the children up. That would surprise him because I used to be very angry and even insulting when he called.

Fathima : Maybe he might want to come back to you [smiling and teasing].

Ragini : I will not allow that!

Saras : I used to feel the same way, Ragini. When my husband left I felt empty and useless and frustrated but now I am more positive about the future. I can now face him and not let him see the hurt and misery he put me through. I also can try to be more pleasant when he comes to see the children.

Fathima : I really had a tough time with my two children, when my ex-husband gave me problems. Once I even thought of suicide, but now I am stronger. I do feel sorry for him but will not allow him to take my children away from home. He can come to see them.

Zarina : I used to really hate my ex-husband and also his wife. She is very mean and selfish. She feels very insecure about him because she doesn't like him taking the children out or spending time with them. She makes use of them and gives them chores to do at her house. My younger daughter [Fahima] was excited about their baby and wanted to visit often, I used to get mad; My son [Aftab] complained that she used to shout at them and tell my daughter to watch the child when she was in the bathroom or on the telephone. My daughter used to be frightened to complain because she thought I won't let her go again. I spoke to my ex-husband about this and now even my daughter is not afraid of her anymore because her father told her that she doesn't have to do things she doesn't like to do. Now I can talk to him without much anger and hurt. But his wife is a real witch and I really don't like my children going there.

Saras : You can maybe tell your ex-husband to take them out, like to the park or see a movie; that's what my children tell their father because they don't like to spend time with him at his new house.

The parents' responses reveal that they examined their respective interpersonal relationships and acknowledged that they could improve certain relationships. They indicated that they were now more tolerant about certain aspects of their relationships which they found unacceptable before (especially with regard to the erratic and

irresponsible behaviour of the ex-spouse and the time spent by the father with the children). They also evaluated their own role as a single parent and realised that they needed to be more assertive and positive to be able to cope with the various situations. They admitted that they were responsible for creating a problematic relationship with their ex-spouses or children.

The members then evaluated each identity and indicated which identities they enjoyed and which they couldn't relate to positively.

Mogie : I know that I am a good provider, caregiver and head of the family but I am not such a good housekeeper and cook. I don't let that bother me because I think that I am doing my best in the more important roles, that is, to provide for my son and be there for him.

Saras : Although I think that I am a good cook, housekeeper and mother and not so good at being an employee or provider but that doesn't mean that I don't provide well enough for my children. I make sure they are provided with all the things they need. But I feel guilty that I cannot be there for them because I work and that is why I don't enjoy my provider role.

Shamla : I like housekeeping, cooking, and being a caregiver but I don't really like working and being in charge of the family. Working keeps me away from my children. I now have to make all the decisions and know how to discipline the children myself. Sometimes I wonder if I am doing a good job. It is hard.

Zarina : I used to be a housewife and love cooking, housekeeping, baking and being a proper mother to my children, but after the divorce I had to go to work and therefore I don't really like working but I have to, and sometimes wish that I don't have to be the head of the family because the children always look to me when there is a problem and sometimes I can't give them a good enough answer or make a correct decision. So Shamla, don't worry, we all have problems, we just have to try our best.

The parents found the various roles demanding but challenging and all of them admitted that they try their best to be available to their children (highlighting their caregiver role).

The researcher questioned the members about their self -evaluation and self-actualisation.

Suneetha : I have been physically abused for nearly ten years and that has made me into a quiet submissive person. I used to think that I was useless and deserved that kind of treatment. My father used to do the same to my mother. Therefore I more or less accepted it but after a while, when I saw what effect it had on my children, I decided to put a stop to this abuse and know that I made the right decision. Now that I am divorced and picking up the pieces I have a good job and stopped feeling guilty about things I used to feel guilty about. I am now proud of myself and glad I made the right move. I get praised at work quite often from my supervisor and even at home I try to improve my relationship with my children.

Mogie : My husband used to resent my working and I used to feel bad when I used to work because of his attitude. He resented my working and felt that I needed to stay at

home to be a good housekeeper and good mother. Soon after the divorce I began to have doubts about my working because I knew my son was upset about the separation and I wanted to stay at home and explain to him that I needed to work but I still loved him a lot. Now I know that I am quite good at my job; I am working on improving my relationship with my son. I try to question my behaviour and decision whether it is in the best interest of my son.

Saras : After the divorce when I had to work full-time, I felt bad about neglecting my children and didn't try my best at work but now that I realise that I have to work and my children understand that I enjoy working. I feel good when I get more sales and new customers. I know that I am useful and therefore try my best.

Zarina : When my husband left me after 13 years of marriage I felt hopeless. I was convinced that I was useless and I used to depend on him a lot. I couldn't deal with the divorce and blamed myself. But looking back I know that I was not responsible and I am a useful person. I am a dress designer and intend to open a boutique soon. This makes me feel good. My children are very helpful especially my eldest daughter. She used to listen to me when I used to feel very depressed. I am proud of her and grateful.

Jane : Yes, I think that we should all feel very proud of ourselves, we have done well. We must thank [the researcher] for letting us get together and give us an opportunity to talk about our unresolved feelings in the different relationships. I am quite proud of being a single parent; my son also has shown some improvement in his behaviour. I enjoy my work and find my different roles quite challenging.

Fathima : I think that we all learned something from this programme and we are thankful. I am also satisfied with myself the way I can manage, I know that I can take good care of my two children and they won't be neglected. I also feel more understanding about my husband. This group programme has helped me to see things much clearer now. I will always try my best in whatever I do. If it doesn't work out then I won't let it worry me too much. (All the members cheered her by clapping).

Ragini : We have all benefited by meeting like this and discussing our problems. I feel quite close to you all. By listening to you I was able to see what specific problems I had and was glad to give some advice too without being criticised. This made me feel good. Thank you all. I have learnt to be a better person and will deal with my feelings with more strength and most important of all I can look at my ex-husband in the eye and know that he can't hurt me anymore and still be polite to him. I know that I am a capable single parent and I too have noticed a change in the children. It is for the better (Ragini got a little emotional and then all the members clapped together and got up and hugged each other).

Saras : This feels good, all of us feeling for each other. I enjoyed listening to you all and also talking about my feelings openly. I am definitely going to change my attitude towards things that used to get me down. Even my children used to worry me and I used to react negatively. Now I know that I got to be more understanding and give them time too and not want them to do things my way only.

By evaluating their role as a single parent, the mothers realised that even though they regarded the caregiver role as being more important than the provider role, they were also beginning to enjoy the provider role because it proved challenging and rewarding and this boosted their self-esteem which had been negatively affected by marital disruption. They also acknowledged that their participation in the programme enabled them to change their attitude and behaviour and were grateful for the mutual support they received from the group members.

The members were thanked for their contribution and were informed briefly of what the next session would contain.

#### SUMMARY

The members used their acquired insight to initiate change in their relationships through the attribution of realistic meaning, resulting from the processes of awareness, exploration and personalisation. After they attributed new rational meaning to relationships (especially their relationships with their ex-spouse and children) they were able to explore new and more appropriate ways to interact within these relationships.

Through the verbalisation of their feelings in the group, they also attributed realistic meaning to identities through the processes already mentioned earlier. They had all come to terms with their new identities and faced the social reality of being a single parent. They all vowed to utilise their potential to the maximum, thus attaining self-actualisation.

## SESSIONS 11 AND 12

### AIM

The researcher's aim was to observe the members' perception of changes in their reasoning and reaction towards relationships and the formation of realistic identities.

### CONTENT

All members acknowledged that their reasoning and behaviour regarding their interpersonal relationships and the formation of identities had changed positively because they were able to see each relationship in a new way and understand why they experienced difficulties in forming certain identities with realistic expectations.

Much of this discussion was also covered in sessions 9 and 10, especially in concerning change-initiating strategies, changed attitudes and behaviour (or the intention to change) and the evaluation of the various identities. The members were reminded that they were welcome to discuss how the programme helped them with regard to their relationships and identity formation.

Researcher : Let's discuss our attitude towards the children and ex-spouses. Has it changed?

Mogie : Yes, it has. I am more relaxed and patient towards my son and I don't have the same expectations of him as before about him finishing all his chores. He has noticed

the change and understands me better. I have made up my mind to be more patient with my ex-husband. I would never think of being nice to him after the divorce, you know.

Shamla : That's because we have now let go of some of our frustration, bitterness and anger we experienced towards their behaviour. We are now over the worst part of the divorce and we can look at the future more positively. Now I understand my ex-spouse's behaviour better and know that I can be a good singleparent and also that he is still my children's father.

Ragini : You know, I used to be so mad with my ex-husband that I used to tell my children that they don't have a dad anymore because he was not worth it and he doesn't care because he was living with someone else. Now I can admit that they do have a father and that I cannot deprive them of that no matter how I feel towards him. I am much stronger now and won't let certain things to worry me now. I want to enjoy my new lifestyle with my children and make sure that they get the best care and try to help them with their schoolwork because they are not doing that well at school.

Suneetha : I am also glad to be part of this support group. I am more confident at work and at home. I can make decisions easily without having to worry too much about the outcome. It is a good feeling. My children went through a lot before and after the divorce. I want to make sure that they are exposed to a brighter and happier future.

There is no more time for brooding and worrying about the past. [All the members clapped in support of her comments].

Saras : I hope this new feelings of having achieved something doesn't die after we stop meeting. I think we should meet often and maybe form our own group to talk about things that bother us and when we need some advice. I think that being in a support group like this has helped me to be more forceful and positive about things. I don't get depressed so easily and feel I am tough enough to face my problem at work or at home.

Zarina : I also think that it is a very good idea to meet often together, say once a week. In this way we can keep our spirits up and continue to be positive and hopeful. I also feel more at ease now.

The researcher agreed that it would undoubtedly be a good idea for the members to meet regularly. They then indicated that they would discuss this in more detail after the session ended.

Fathima : The programme also helped me a lot and I would love to attend more meetings so that I don't go back to my depression and become negative about things like I used to. I feel good now but when things get too much for me I get easily depressed. I need people like you to remind me to be strong and hopeful.

Ragini : Don't you worry, we must meet and form a group and maybe other mothers can join in and we can help them too. We definitely want a better life and we don't want to start worrying again about the past.

Jane : I think that is true. We have all agreed that we can be good parents and try our best in our different identities. We can choose what is important in our lives and what is in our best interest and our children's. As long as we try to do our best and encourage our children to do the same.

The responses reflect the positive and enthusiastic feelings experienced by the mothers regarding their relationships, identities and the benefits of participation in the programme. They felt reassured that they would enjoy their new lifestyle with realistic expectations and would not feel daunted by their previous traumatic experiences (relating to the marital disruption).

The researcher thanked them for their tremendous support, participation and contribution and expressed the hope that they did meet and form a group.

The members were then handed worksheets (Appendices 9 and 10). Each item was discussed and time was given to fill in the worksheets. These were then collected and the researcher enquired whether she could read out aloud the responses without divulging the names of the respondents. The members agreed and some even mentioned that they did not mind reading out their own responses. The responses were read out and a general

discussion followed, confirming that the members had undoubtedly changed their attitude and behaviour in respect of their relationships and identities.

The members were informed that the sessions were over and were thanked again and reminded that they would be interviewed separately after two months. Light refreshments were then served. All members, parents and children, held a picnic at the park a week later which was an enormous success.

The responses in the worksheet are noted (Appendix 10 ) under the following subheadings:

Attitude : The parents indicated that their attitude towards the divorce, children and ex-spouses had improved.

Behaviour : The parents had vowed to behave in a more relaxed and tolerant manner.

Relationship with children : The parents indicated that they would make efforts to improve their relationship with their children.

Relationship with ex-spouse : The parents stated that they would be more understanding, polite and accommodating towards their ex-spouses.

Feelings about self : The parents indicated that they felt prouder, more satisfied and happier about themselves.

Feelings about identities : They stated that they enjoyed and could cope with their identities and felt proud and satisfied in them.

Self-actualisation : The parents admitted that they had improved their proficiency at work and would try their best to improve further.

#### SUMMARY

The members gained insight into their important relationships through awareness, exploration and the attribution of personal meaning. Changed attitudes and behaviour were evident in this session. The spontaneous group interaction and bonding were also apparent. Members were able to reflect a changed attitude and behaviour towards their relationships, evaluate their different identities realistically and expressed the desire to do their best in their relationships and role functioning, indicating attempts at self-actualisation.

### 5.3.3. The Early Latency Children's Group (E.L.C.)

#### STAGE 1 - AWARENESS

##### AIM

This session was aimed at encouraging the children to become aware of their experience of different feelings associated with divorce, to understand that these feelings were either good or bad, to identify specific feelings and to seek ways of dealing with these feelings.

##### ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

An atmosphere of trust and caring was establishing by assuring the children that they would be respected and all matters discussed would be treated absolutely confidentially. They were informed of about the importance of listening to one another, thus conveying their interest, consideration and respect for each other. The researcher had been a primary school teacher for 15 years and had the required experience and ability to relate to children and was able therefore to establish rapport easily. This was evident from the children's relaxed manner, interest, attention and spontaneous responses. The children were encouraged to comment on each other's responses and contribute actively to the discussion.

##### CONTENT

The name game as outlined in the programme (chapter 4) was played as part of the orientation. The researcher then enquired about the different feelings that children experienced regarding divorce. Thereafter the children were presented with a handout (Appendix 12) which described certain situations and possible associated feelings to

clarify the meaning of each feeling. It must be noted that children might experience greatly differing emotions in the same situations. For example, while some children might experience anger about not seeing their fathers often, others may feel sad or even guilty. The children were then asked if they had experienced similar situations.

After the discussion a worksheet (Appendix 13) was given which addressed different feelings experienced with different people. As the researcher read the items aloud, the children ticked off the feelings experienced towards different people including feelings about themselves. The worksheets were then collected and the researcher encouraged the children to talk about the feelings they experienced towards the different members in the family. The responses from the worksheets are reflected below :

#### ANALYSIS OF WORKSHEETS (APPENDIX 13)

##### Feelings experienced towards family members, friends, divorce and school

The following analysis reflects the different feelings experienced by the six children towards themselves and the other members of their families after the marital disruption. Percentages are reflected to illustrate the number of children who experienced each feeling.

FEELINGS	FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, DIVORCE AND SCHOOL
Anger	Three children (50%) felt angry with their mother after the divorce, four (67%) were angry with their father, two (33%) experienced anger towards their siblings and themselves.
Confusion	Four children (67%) felt confused about the divorce, three (50%) were confused about their fathers' behaviour and their school progress and two (33%) felt confused about their mothers' behaviour.
Guilt	Three (50%) children experienced guilt about the divorce and their father leaving and two (33%) felt guilty about their mother being divorced.
Sadness/worry	Three children (50%) were worried about themselves, their school progress and about their father, while four (67%) were worried about their mother.
Abandoned	Four children (67%) felt that they had been abandoned by their father, two (33%) by their mother, and three (50%) by their friends and teachers.
Pride	Four children (67%) were proud of their mothers, and two (33%) felt proud of their siblings and their school progress after the divorce.
Unloved	Three children (50%) felt unloved by their mothers, five (83%) by their fathers, and two (33%) by their siblings.
Shame	Four children (67%) felt ashamed about the divorce, three (50%) were ashamed about their fathers' behaviour.

The responses in the worksheets indicate that the children experienced many negative feelings after the marital disruption towards the different members in the family.

The researcher promoted an awareness of the many feelings concerning relationships with the self and significant others, and an awareness that the feelings experienced towards

certain people are not always the same. (For example, they could feel angry with their father for leaving but also feel sad about missing him.)

The researcher encouraged the children to talk about their experiences and this request evoked a strong response from Akash (9) and Kerusha (7).

Kerusha : Angry and sad, that's how I felt when my father drinks.

Researcher : Do you still feel that way about your dad?

Kerusha : No, I feel sad that he doesn't stay with us anymore. But he used to hit my mother when he got drunk and that makes me angry with him and sad for my mum.

Researcher : Your father's drinking caused you to have bad feelings towards him but now that he is not living with you, you have mixed feelings.

Kerusha : I feel happy when he visits us and I miss him a lot but my sister gets mad when he comes home to see us.

Researcher : Why is that?

Kerusha : She is still angry with him and blames him for the divorce.

Akash : I also feel sad now that my dad is gone. I love him but I don't think he loves us because he got married again and he has a new baby girl.

Researcher : How do you feel towards your dad's wife.

Akash : I don't like her but I like the baby. He laughs at me when I talk to him.

The opportunity to voice their feelings concerning the events resulting from the father's drinking and his leaving appeared to have a cathartic effect on the other members also. Medisha (8) expressed the need to talk about her feelings about her mum who became angry when questioned about why her dad could not live with them anymore.

Researcher : Did your mum tell you why your dad had to leave?

Medisha : Yes. She was not happy, he used to hit her, but my dad promised he would change.

Researcher : Do you believe this?

Medisha : I don't know. He used to hit my mother on her face and I used to get mad and hit him back.

Researcher : How do you feel about him now?

Medisha : I feel sorry for him now because he is sad and wants to come back but my mum says no.

Researcher : Are you angry with your mum for that?

Medisha : Yes, sometimes. Now she has to work and is always tired and fed up.

Researcher : What is she fed up about?

Medisha : She says she is tired and must do everything in the house and it is my father's fault and also we don't listen to her sometimes.

Researcher : Is that true?

Medisha : Sometimes, because she gives me hard work to do like sweeping and cleaning my room. I miss my programme on T.V.

This response prompted the researcher to explain the various identities each child had to be aware of in a single-parent child. With regard to the feelings experienced in each identity the researcher first had to clarify the concept of an identity or role to the children. This was done by narrating a story which centred around a single-parent family where the mother explains to her children that now that they are single-parent children, they have to assist her by performing duties such as, being a babysitter, housekeeper, cook, grocery shopper and father substitute. The children's reaction to their mother's request was noted. (This story was adapted by the researcher and is reflected in Appendix 14.)

The researcher then prompted a discussion with the following questions :-

Do you children also help your mother with chores?

Aftab : (9) My mom tells me to help look after my small sister after school but she doesn't listen to me and she hits me and I get into trouble for that.

Researcher : How do you feel about taking care of your sister?

Aftab : I don't like it. I like to do my schoolwork and play television games.

Fahima : (7) [Aftab's sister]. You are a big bully, you only shout at me and tell me to clean the house and you only play games.

Researcher : Don't you think that your mothers get upset when you fight and she needs your help so that she feels happy when she comes home and know that you listened to her?

Fahima : Yes, I do help my mum. I clean my room and listen to my big sister but Aftab fights with me.

Aftab : I help too, I then do my schoolwork.

Fahima : You are a liar, you only do your schoolwork when Najina [their elder sister] tells you, and when mummy tells you in the night.

Researcher : Is that true?

Aftab : I forget sometimes.

Researcher : Don't you like school?

Aftab : Sometimes, the teacher shouts at me and gives me hard work to do I don't understand it.

The researcher asked the other members whether they enjoyed school and its related activities. The children contributed to this discussion and two members stated that their teachers were not sympathetic with them when they did their work incorrectly or forgot to do it at all. However, when one member indicated that she told her teacher that her father used to help her and now she experiences difficulty with her mathematics, her teacher was more considerate towards her after that.

It may be noted that the group involvement assisted the members to be aware of their experiences of different feelings towards themselves and others after marital disruption.

The discussion about the children's experienced feelings and the analysis of the responses from the worksheets (Appendix 13) reveal that the children are aware of the different feelings that they experienced towards various members of their families. They also acknowledged that they had new identities and expressed their feelings about them. Some

children (like Aftab, Fahima and Medisha) indicated that some identities were thrust upon them and expressed their reluctance to perform some of these roles.

## SESSION 2

### AIM

This session was aimed at helping the individuals to become aware of the nature of their involvement in different relationships, the quality of their experience of their involvement and the meaning they gave to the relationships. The members were helped to perceive that their involvement in a relationship and the feelings experienced as a result determined how positively or negatively the relationship was evaluated.

### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session the children were helped to understand that a relationship is based on the feelings that are experienced in that relationship. This followed a discussion on all the significant relationships the children were involved in, and they were referred to the "feelings" worksheet they had filled in (in session 1).

Discussing the feelings listed for each of the relationships promoted an awareness of the diversity of feelings experienced in relationships and the reason for these particular feelings. All the children indicated different feelings towards the respective members of their families.

The topic of parental alignment (when the child is used as a "pawn" by parents) and parental conflict evoked a strong response. The researcher clarified and simplified these concepts to the children by giving them an handout entitled "Games parents play" (Appendix 7). After discussing the handout the researcher posed questions to which some responses are stated below.

Researcher : Did any of your parents say or do these things mentioned in this worksheet?

Vinolan : I get upset when Mummy says bad things about my dad. She tells me he does not love us anymore and we don't need him anymore. When he bought us presents for Christmas she told us that he only knows to spoil us and he doesn't take care of us everyday.

Researcher : Why do you think she said that?

Vinolan : I don't know. I think she is still angry with him and she wants me to forget him. He is still my father.

Fahima : One day my mother got so cross with my father she said he is a dog because he left us and married my stepmother.

Aftab : She is not your mother you silly, you only have one mother. I don't like her.

Fahima : Daddy says I can call her Mummy and she lets me carry the baby and look after him.

Researcher [to Aftab] : How do you feel towards your dad for marrying again?

Aftab : I am angry with him because he made us all sad, my mummy too, and I also miss him.

Kerusha : When Daddy comes to pick me up some days my mother sees if he is drunk and she tells him that he must not come to pick me up when he drinks and sends him away when he is drunk. I feel like crying but my mummy tells me that he will meet an accident. I miss my dad a lot too.

Researcher : How do you feel about your father coming to see you when he is drunk?

Kerusha : I feel sorry for him because he is alone and he must be missing us. He buys me a present sometimes. I sometimes get cross with my mum for being mean to him. [She relates another incident of conflict between her parents.] They used to fight a lot and when I tell my dad to stop drinking so much he sometimes sits and cries and I cry with him.

The group members related more incidents of parental alignment and conflict, which led to an expression of their feelings. Fahima, Medisha and Kerusha felt ambivalent towards both their parents. The children tried to evaluate the relationships according to how many times they experienced good and bad feelings in these relationships.

The researcher then initiated a discussion by stating that the frequency and intensity of each feeling were also significant in the evaluation of each of the relationships.

Researcher : How many times did you have bad feelings for someone in your family?

Akash : Aftab says that he used to hate his father.

Aftab : Yes, that was when he made my mother sad and she got sick. My granny told us that she had "nerves" trouble after my dad left her.

Akash : Well, I love my father but I get angry when he don't come to see us. I don't hate him.

Researcher : You don't understand how Aftab can hate his father?

Akash : Yes we should love our fathers because if they make us feel sad they still love us. My dad told me that. They buy us presents and make us happy.

Fahima : But you used to love daddy a lot before, you should go with him everywhere in the car and even to the mosque.

Aftab : I know that, but now I am more mad with him because of what he did.

Researcher : Do you think that he still loves you?

Aftab : I don't know, but I miss him, maybe because I still have some good feelings for him. He was a good dad and should only scold us when we were really naughty, but my mum is more cheeky.

Kerusha : I also had bad feelings for my dad when he left us and once I wished that he goes away and don't come back, but now I feel sorry for him and miss him. When he doesn't drink he is very quiet and good to us.

While Aftab and Kerusha admit that they experienced strong negative feelings (dislike) for their fathers, they simultaneously experienced a yearning for the absent father. Akash too acknowledged that he loved his father but felt anger when he did not see him (father).

Researcher : Lets talk about how you get along with your brothers and sisters at home.

Fahima : Aftab and I fight a lot now. Sometimes when he is cross with my father or mother, he comes and fights with me. One day Mum scolded him for not doing his work properly [cleaning his room] and when I asked him why he got a scolding he hit me.

Aftab : That was because you are always behind me and you like it when I get in trouble.

Fahima : That is not true, I used to feel sorry for you but you don't listen to Mummy and that is why you get in trouble.

Researcher [to Aftab] : Don't you think that your sister cares for you and that is why she is "behind you" so often?

Aftab : Maybe, but she also likes to fight with me.

Fahima : That's because he likes to act mean and he is a big bully [angrily].

Kerusha : I think that they love each other, but don't know how to show it. That's what my big sister told me one time when I was angry with my mum for leaving Dad. She told me that Mummy left my dad because she loves us and didn't want us to feel more sad about Daddy's drinking and see him hitting my mum. I love my mum but I get angry with her sometimes.

Researcher : Thank you Kerusha. Do you fight often with your sister?

Kerusha : Sometimes, but she is very good to me, she looks after me very well when my mum is at work. Once I wanted popsicles and she said I can't have it because it was very cold. Then I was angry and told her that she acts like my mother but is not my mother. She kept quiet and was sad. My sister and I go to Allateen. We learn there that we must love everyone at home, no matter how angry they make us and we must always say we are sorry if we were mean. Now I don't say mean things to my sister.

Medisha : I fight with my brother more now because he just doesn't listen to me and takes my things without asking. He acts like a big man because my mum told him that he must be in charge when she is at work. I don't like to complain to my mum about everything because she gets angry with me.

Vinolan : Yes, my mother too comes home in a bad mood sometimes and later she tells me she is tired.

Aftab and Fahima (siblings) admitted that they did fight more after the divorce and Fahima realised that Aftab at times transferred his angry feelings towards his mother or father to her, related an incident when her mother rebuked Aftab. This angered him and he transferred his anger to Fahima when she enquired about his "bad mood". Kerusha was very perceptive and added that in spite of sibling rivalry, the siblings did love each other, and the transference of angry feelings to others was not unusual because she had also experienced this. She acknowledged that she enjoyed a good relationship with her older sister.

Researcher : Do you children spend some time with your parents?

Vinolan : I spend little time with my mother everyday because she comes late from work and we have no time to talk much, but during the weekend, on Sundays, we have some time together. But I hardly see my dad because he moved away. Sometimes he phones and talks to me. When my mother is angry she tells him that I am not there and I feel very upset. My mother then tells me that he doesn't worry about us and I should forget him.

Kerusha : That is a cruel thing to say. We all love our fathers and we can't forget them even if they were bad to us.

Medisha [to Vinolan] : I think your dad thinks of you and that is why he phoned you. My mother told me that she and my dad cannot stay together because they always fight but my father still loves me and my brother. I was very sad when he left but also happy that he can't hit my mum anymore.

Fahima : My mother now has to work and comes home late. I see her in the evening but she is tired and is busy with some housework and cooking. After supper I have to have a bath and go to bed. We don't talk a lot, sometimes I want to tell her about something but she tells me she is busy.

Researcher : How does that make you feel?

Fahima : I feel sad and angry.

Akash : My mother explained to me that she doesn't get enough time to talk to me at times, even help me with schoolwork, because she works and finishes late. She tries to help me with schoolwork but she don't understand the maths very well. On Sundays we go to the shop and go to the ground to watch a match. I enjoy that.

Researcher : Do you spend time with your father?

Akash : I don't see my father often. I miss him and he should help me with my schoolwork and now I don't get my maths right. He also should help me with my science projects now my mum don't have time to help me.

Fahima : I see my father sometimes [once a fortnight or weekly] at his new house. But when I go there I have to look after the baby and I don't get a chance to go anywhere with my father. One day he wanted to take me to the shop but my stepmother told me to stay and look after the baby because she had to have a bath. I know she don't like my father taking us anywhere.

Aftab : I should tell you that but you used to tell me to be quiet. She is a bad and mean person; even Mummy knows that.

Vinolan and Fahima indicated that their mothers could not spend enough time with them due to their other demanding roles, and Akash, Fahima and Vinolan admitted that they did not see their fathers regularly. Akash added that his progress at school had been adversely affected because his father was not available to assist him as he usually had.

The children were told that the session was over and informed briefly about the contents, date and time of the next session and transport arrangements. (The researcher transported all the children to and from their homes for the sessions.)

### SUMMARY

Aftab and Akash were aware of negative thought patterns and Aftab and Kerusha were able to attribute new meaning to the relationships with their fathers which resulted in changes in the emotions experienced in relationships. They found the expression of the anger thus experienced in the relationship with their fathers very cathartic and the exploration of their feelings resulted in the attribution of new meaning to their

relationship with their fathers, whom they no longer saw as an uncaring person but as an individual who could love and care for his family. With regard to sibling rivalry, parental availability and parent-child interaction, all the children indicated that they were aware of the conflicting feelings experienced in each relationship and through the verbalisation of feelings, they were able to understand the reasons for certain behaviour patterns instigated by sibling rivalry and parental unavailability. Fahima, Kerusha, Aftab and Vinolan examined the reasons underlying sibling rivalry and Fahima and Aftab were able to see through their stepmother's manipulative behaviour regarding her reluctance to allow the children to spend time with their father. The children were able to gain an insight into the nature and quality of their involvement in their interpersonal relationships.

## SESSIONS 3 AND 4

### AIM

These sessions were aimed at helping the members become aware of various identities that were significant to them and to encourage elaboration on the feelings that they experienced in those identities. They examined the various roles or identities they now had and how the identities were affected through the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

### CONTENT

A brief summary of the contents of the previous session was made. The children were encouraged to discuss their various identities. They were referred to the story told to them in session one (Appendix 14) about the new identities that were thrust upon children after marital disruption.

The members acknowledged an awareness of their roles (in session one) and their feelings regarding the various roles, and confirmed that they had different new roles after the divorce. The researcher then initiated a discussion about which identities were significant to the children, encouraging them to elaborate on the feelings that they experienced in the respective identities.

Researcher : Let us talk about how we feel about doing certain chores.

Medisha : I like to wash dishes and sweep the house because my mummy does these jobs and I like to be like her. But my mummy tells me that I don't do the job properly and I feel bad because I try but I can't do it right. I also can't make the beds nicely. I get a scolding for this and I don't like the job it makes me tired.

Aftab : My mum tells me to look after my sister when she is at work and I don't like to do this because my sister don't listen to me. But I like doing the other work, like buying the bread and milk and delivering the newspaper.

Fahima : Yes, because you like to loaf and play with your friends on the road. You don't do your schoolwork.

Researcher : Is that true?

Aftab : I don't get time to play with my friends and they tease me when I tell them that I have to stay at home and look after my sister.

Researcher : How does this make you feel?

Aftab : I get angry with my sister and my mum because my friends tease me.

Vinolan : My mum tells me that I am a big boy and can be in charge at home. I help her to buy the bread, mow the grass, wash the car and take out the bin.

Researcher : How do you feel about your new duties?

Vinolan : I like being treated like a big boy and I now get an allowance for helping but sometimes I get tired and I don't like to do certain things, like mowing the grass and cleaning the house; and my mum gets angry when I don't do the work.

Researcher: Do you do your schoolwork?

Vinolan : Sometimes I don't understand my homework, and my mother comes late and she has no time to help me.

Akash : I like to do my schoolwork because my mother tells me that I must work hard and then I will get a big present for Christmas. I want a bike but my teacher gets mad when I don't get my work right. Then I don't enjoy doing that homework because I fright for that teacher.

Fahima : My stepmother lets me carry the baby when she is busy or gone to the shop. I like the baby but get tired carrying him for long because he is so heavy. My stepmother gets cross when I put the baby down because he puts things in his mouth.

Aftab : I told you she is mean and you only look after the baby because you fright for her and you want to make Daddy happy.

Fahima : Yes, I want my daddy to like me and not only the baby.

Researcher : So you take care of the baby because you want to please your dad and you don't want to upset your stepmother.

Fahima : I want her to let me stay with my daddy too because I don't want him to forget me. I don't like it when my stepmother shouts at me and then I don't like to carry the baby.

The children indicated that they enjoyed performing certain chores like going to the shop, being "in charge" and being the "paper boy" because they enjoyed certain privileges. However, they didn't like the roles of scholar, babysitter and housekeeper because they did not receive adequate support, praise or encouragement in attempting to fulfil these roles. For example, their mothers or teachers became angry if the task assigned to them was not completed properly. Because of this, the children thus attributed unrealistic meaning to the various roles or identities and developed a dislike for a particular identity.

Researcher : So you don't like doing something that is forced upon you, like being a babysitter, Fahima, or the man of the house, Vinolan. [Both the children nodded in agreement.]

Researcher : Do you feel that if you have good feelings towards certain family members then you don't mind taking on certain identities?

Vinolan : Yes, when my mum praises me about the work then I like to make her proud of me and then I do my best in my different chores. But when I do certain things that my

dad used to do I feel all mixed up because I feel angry with him for not being there to help me and I miss him too.

Akash : I also don't like to do certain things when my big sister bullies me to do it. When she is nice to me then I do all my work properly. This makes my mum happy too and she promises me a present. I like going to the shop, mopping the floor, but not my schoolwork.

Researcher : Why not?

Akash : After my father went away my mother was too busy to check on my work and when I didn't do my homework the teachers used to scold me and hit me. Now I don't like school very much because the work is getting hard and even my sister don't like to help me. Then I get fed up and watch television and she tells my mother about it.

Fahima : Aftab does the same thing to me. He likes getting me in trouble and only helps me to do my schoolwork if I give him something or help him to do his work.

Aftab : You only helped me once and then you told mummy now I don't let you help me. I don't like to help you sometimes because you make me cross.

Kerusha : I am lucky my big sister helps me with my schoolwork. I should do bad work after my daddy went away. My teacher called my mother and now my sister helps me

with my daily news and reading. I try to help at home but I can't do certain work like cooking and washing the clothes. I mop and sweep the house and clean my room.

The children confirmed that their performance of certain roles was influenced by the nature of relationships they experienced with certain people. If they were encouraged or praised for their performance they attempted to do better and enjoy the specific role.

The investigator thanked the members for their contribution during the session and told them briefly about the contents of the next session. They were informed that the session was over.

#### SUMMARY

The children were aware of the various identities that were significant to them and they elaborated on the feelings they experienced in those identities. They all indicated that the type of relationships they experienced with certain family members affected their role functioning (in identities such as babysitter, housekeeper, sibling and scholar).

Through awareness and exploration the children were able to verbalise feelings regarding their interpersonal relationships and the associated identities. They acknowledged that certain relationships affected the manner in which they performed a particular chore (schoolwork or housework). They understood that by performing a certain chore they had taken on a particular identity.

The children became aware that their feelings were subjective and that they all

experienced feelings which were unique to each relationship. Kerusha realised that she was fortunate to have a good relationship with her sister compared to the relationship between the siblings Fahima and Aftab, who very often disagreed and fought.

Through exploration of their feelings experienced in their relationships, the children identified negative thought patterns which were common to several relationships (with their fathers, mothers and siblings) and also became aware of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning in relationships which were unrelated to the problematic relationship. Aftab transferred his feelings of anger that he experienced with his stepmother to his relationship with his sister Fahima.

## STAGE 2 - EXPLORATION

### SESSIONS 5 AND 6

#### AIM

These sessions were aimed at facilitating insight into the nature of relationships and promoting an understanding of related problems. All aspects of meaningful relationships were explored and the following problems in relationships such as parental conflict, sibling rivalry, role reversal, role strain and self-evaluation were examined.

#### CONTENT

A summary of the previous session was made and then the researcher initiated a discussion on expectations in various relationships with regard to improvement and deterioration after marital disruption, and expecting either too much or too little from a relationship.

Researcher : Let's discuss why you had bad feelings for certain members.

Medisha : I used to get very angry with my father when he should hit my mother and sometimes I should hope that he dies, but now I feel sorry for him.

Researcher : You had these bad thoughts because he hurt your mother.

Medisha : Yes, but now I get angry with my mother because she is busy most of the time and does not talk to me so much; and now she can't help me with my schoolwork.

Kerusha : I also feel sorry for my father. He should get drunk and then they should have a fight. I used to think that he goes far away and not come back to trouble my mother. Now I miss him a lot.

Kerusha expressed the need to talk about her painful feelings concerning her father's drinking problem as indicated in her following response. The discussion on alcoholism resulted in an awareness of the alcoholic's behaviour and Kerusha appeared to be exploring the personal meaning she has attributed to her relationship with her father.

Kerusha : When my father got drunk and hit my mum, I used to think bad things about him because he hurt my mum. My sister should tell her to leave him and go away but my mother used to feel sorry for him and stay. She only left him when my sister hit him back and he pushed my sister and she fell. I know that he is an alcoholic and hope he doesn't die. [She broke down and cried.]

The researcher comforted her and explained to her and the other members that it was good to talk about the problems that worried them so that they would feel better afterwards. They were reminded that by talking about the problem others would realise that they too had similar problems and so would not feel so left out.

The researcher wanted to ascertain whether the children had insight into problematic relationships, and so broached the following question :

Researcher : Do you know why you had bad feelings towards certain members in your family?

Fahima : I used to be cross with my dad when he left us and married my stepmother but I miss him and get happy when I see him. He buys me things and tells me I am still his special baby. My mother gets cross when I tell her that.

Researcher : Why do you think she gets angry?

Fahima : She says that my father just says that to make me happy. I get cross with her and don't like to listen to her.

Researcher : Does that make you feel good?

Fahima : I get more cross because I also don't want my mother to get sad. She also shouts at me to do my schoolwork and some housework. She tells me that my big sister is only doing all the work. But I clean my room too.

Akash : I also get upset with my mum when she gives me a lot of work to do. If I don't do it nicely she gets mad then I don't want to talk to her and feel sad and lonely, and I miss my father who should help me with schoolwork.

Researcher : So you get angry with your mum because she gives you a lot to do.

Vinolan : Me too, sometimes my mother tells me nicely to do certain extra work and sometimes she screams at me when I sit and watch T.V.

Researcher : You don't mind doing your work if she asks you properly.

Vinolan : Yes, I like to make her happy but I get tired of doing the same work everyday.

Kerusha : I also don't like my mummy or sister shouting at me then I don't like to do the work.

Fahima : When Mummy gives Aftab some work that Daddy should do, he gets cross and say that he doesn't want to do the work.

Aftab : That is because I used to help my father before to do the work [washing the car and mowing the lawn] but now my mother wants me to do it myself.

Researcher : Do you blame your dad for the extra work you have to do? [Aftab acknowledged this.]

Medisha : Before I never used to do so much work.

Vinolan : That is because your mother works and she gets tired to do everything by herself and we should help. I feel sorry for my mother and get cross with my father for this.

Akash : Before my father used to help my mother at home but after he left us he doesn't worry.

Researcher : How do you feel about this?

Akash : I feel sad and angry because I have to do this work too and before she should help me with schoolwork and now I don't do good at school.

Researcher : Do you think that you fight more now with your brothers or sisters at home?

Fahima : Yes, now Aftab only fights with me. Before he should fight for my father now when we fight my big sister has to stop the fight. He likes to bully me.

Aftab : That is because you trouble me when I am busy with my schoolwork.

Fahima : When I tell my sister he plays T.V. games then he hits me because he is not supposed to play games everyday.

Medisha : I also fight more with my big sister because my mother only tells her to look after us and she shouts at us when we don't do what she tells us to do. My mother treats her like a big girl.

Researcher : How do you feel about this?

Medisha : I got angry because my mother thinks I am a baby but still want me to help them clean the house. Sometimes when we don't listen then my big sister shouts and bullies us. My mother told us that we must listen to my sister when she is not there but if my sister is wrong then we must tell her.

Through the verbalisation of feelings experienced in various relationships the children gained insight into the nature of certain relationships and understood the reasons related to problematic relationships. This was evident during Medisha's and Kerusha's examination of their feelings towards the behaviour of their alcoholic and abusive fathers. Fahima and Aftab explored their feelings about their father's unavailability and their sibling rivalry. Vinolan and Akash, through verbalisation of their feelings regarding their parents' unavailability, realised that their negative feelings influenced their problematic relationships with their parents.

The pupils were given worksheets to fill in (Appendices 15, 16, 17, 18). The researcher read aloud as the children ticked off each item. Time was allowed for the completion of the worksheet and explanations were provided where necessary. The responses are indicated at the end of the session. The items in the worksheets were intended to examine role strain, reaction to role strain, the effect of added responsibilities on relationships, expectations from relationships, an acknowledgement of improving relationships, feelings about respective identities and relationships and self-evaluation.

After completing the worksheets the researcher prompted a discussion on self-evaluation with the following question :

Researcher : You have all filled in how you feel about certain relationships and identities, now let's talk about how you feel about yourself.

Kerusha : When my dad left home, I felt bad because I wished that he go away and he went away. I was also angry with my mum for really leaving him. One time I didn't want to go to school even. But now I know that it is not my fault and my dad has a problem with drinking. I love my mum, dad and sister and I feel better that I understand my father now and I try to help my sister and mother at home.

Fahima : I used to be very angry with my dad also for going away and told my mum that she shouldn't let him go away. I don't like my stepmother because she is not nice. My mum gets mad when I should talk about them at home. When I tell my mum that I feel sorry for my dad because he stays with the mean lady she laughs and tells me that I have a big heart. That means I am good but Aftab always tells me I have a big mouth. Now I don't worry when he teases me and I know that I can be kind and understanding.

Akash : I used to have bad feelings for my father and mother because of the divorce. I shouldn't like doing anything at home. Now I try to help my mum and know that things are different and my mother is not so sad and angry now. She tells me that I am a helpful child and she is proud of us. I must try to do good work in school and she will be more happy with me.

The children acknowledged that soon after the divorce they experienced strong negative feelings towards their fathers and this affected their behaviour at home. However,

through an exploration of their feelings they accepted the reality of the disruption and this was reflected in their attitude and behaviour, that is, being more helpful and positive about themselves.

Researcher : So you feel better about yourselves when someone praises you when you do something well and when you are good?

Medisha : Yes ma'am, I feel that I can talk about all the things that used to make me sad before. Kerusha said that she goes to this meeting (Allateen) and she has learnt to understand why her father drinks and now she is more understanding. That is how I feel now because now we can talk about what worries us and no one teases us and laughs at us here. I feel good and not so sad now.

Aftab : I too used to feel angry with my dad and his wife. He used to help me with my schoolwork. Now I don't do good work in school. I used to think that I was stupid and my big sister and mother are too busy to help me.

Fahima : That's because you should ask them to help you in the night and Mummy told you to do your schoolwork after school.

Aftab : Yes, I know but I still had to do my work at home. My job is to mop and clean my room and I want to watch T.V. Now my mum told me that I can only watch two programmes and do my schoolwork. I listen to her and now my big sister helps me with

my schoolwork. I think that I am improving at school and I try not to get my sisters and my mum mad.

Fahima : Yes, we won't fight so much now and my mum told us that me and Aftab are very good because she doesn't get a lot of complaints.

The children were thanked for their active involvement and were reminded to keep up the good work and to feel free to express themselves openly in all sessions. They were informed about the contents of the next session and the session ended.

The following responses were noted in the respective worksheets (Appendices 15, 16, 17, & 18).

#### COPING SKILLS (Appendix 16)

83% of the children felt stress because of their parents' expectations, too many responsibilities and difficulty in talking to their mother and father. They experienced stress at school with regard to not being able to handle the pressures imposed by friends and teachers. Their parents' behaviour and attitudes had also affected them adversely.

#### REACTION TO STRESS (Appendix 15)

Many of the children (67%) reacted to stress by isolating themselves from others, and some behaved badly and did not want to talk with their families and friends.

### FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH STRESS (Appendix 15)

The children admitted that they felt sad and helpless when they could not cope with the added responsibilities. With regard to the manner in which they behaved when they felt left out by parents and friends, some indicated that they stayed out of the way, others (50%) mentioned that they became angry, and two children (33%) stated that they just remained quiet and became uncommunicative.

### POSITIVE REACTION TO BEING REJECTED/ISOLATED (Appendix15)

67% of the children indicated they involved themselves with other activities to keep themselves occupied, like playing television games, watching television and reading.

### EXPECTATIONS FROM CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS (Appendix 17)

While some children (50%) mentioned that their relationship with their mothers improved, others (50%) indicated that it worsened. 67% of them indicated that their relationship with their father worsened after the divorce compared to the 33% who stated that this relationship had improved. Four children (67%) confirmed that there was more sibling rivalry and three children (50%) stated that their relationship with their friends had worsened.

All the children had expected their mothers to spend more time with them, to give them less to do, to be more supportive with their schoolwork and not to ask too much of them (in respect of their expected role functions). They also expressed the need to spend more time with their friends and to have time to themselves.

### ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS (Appendix 17)

The children indicated that they could improve certain aspects of their relationships with different family members by being more helpful, by listening to them, by demonstrating that they still cared for them and spending more time with them.

### COPING WITH ROLE FUNCTIONS (Appendix 16)

The children indicated that they had more chores to do and more identities to deal with.

This made three children feel frustrated and depressed although two children accepted the added new responsibilities and identities as a challenge and felt able to cope.

With regard to coping strategies, in various identities, two children acknowledged that they tried their best in the different roles, three only performed pleasant chores and two children indicated that they did not like doing anything that they found difficult to accomplish, only those things that they preferred doing.

### INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP ON ROLE FUNCTIONS (Appendix 16)

When questioned about whether the children's relationships affected their various role functions (identities), they indicated that a negative relationship influenced a particular identity adversely, for example, sibling rivalry affected the role of babysitter; parental alignment affected the role of scholar; and parental unavailability affected the role of scholar, housekeeper and babysitter.

An analysis of different feelings experienced by all the children, towards certain people

(including the school) and towards specific identities follows. Percentages are illustrated to reflect the number of children who experience these feelings.

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS RELATIONSHIPS(Appendix 18)

<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>FEELINGS EXPERIENCED</b>
Mother	All the children (100%) experienced love for their mothers, 67% felt sympathy and 50% were proud of their mothers.
Father	While four (67%) felt anger, two (33%) felt guilt, three (50%) were sympathetic and five (83%) experienced love for their fathers.
Siblings	Four (67%) were angry, four (67%) felt love, two (33%) were tolerant and two (33%) were proud of their siblings.
Friends	Four (67%) experienced love and two (33%) disliked their friends.
School/schoolwork	Three (50%) disliked school, three (50%) liked school and two (33%) were proud of their schoolwork.

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS IDENTITIES (Appendix 18)

<b>FEELINGS</b>	<b>IDENTITIES</b>
Pride	Four children (67%) felt proud to be a single-parent child, three (50%) were proud to be scholars and friends and two (33%) felt proud of being housekeepers and shoppers.
Happiness	Four (67%) were happy to be friends and siblings and three (50%) felt happy being babysitters and shoppers.
Confusion	Two (33%) experienced confusion about being a housekeeper, babysitter and a single-parent child.
Sadness	Three (50%) felt sad about being a single-parent child.
Anger	Two (33%) experienced anger for being a single-parent child and a babysitter.
Guilt	Two (33%) children felt guilty being single-parent children.

The above tables indicate a mixture of feelings towards relationships and identities.

### SUMMARY

During group interaction, the children explored their feelings experienced in different relationships (such as parent-child and sibling relationships) and towards certain identities. The children initially experienced strong negative feelings towards their parents and siblings but through awareness and the exploration of the respective relationships, they attributed new meaning to these relationships. Where they previously experienced anger, they now felt sympathy and tolerance (for example, the feelings experienced by Fahima and Kerusha towards their father). Vinolan and Akash indicated that their mothers subjected them to role reversal and role strain. They expressed their feelings about the manner in which the chores were thrust upon them which caused them to dislike the respective chore/identity (e.g. being a housekeeper/cleaner). The children also explored their own behaviour and evaluated their feelings towards themselves. They acknowledged that they had more or less come to terms with the divorce and found the adjustment process difficult but now manageable. The responses indicated that the children had attributed unrealistic meaning to certain relationships and were also aware of unrealistic meaning given to certain identities which caused identity conflicts.

### STAGE 3 - PERSONALISATION

#### SESSIONS 7 AND 8

##### AIM

These sessions were aimed at providing an opportunity to identify realistic and unrealistic identities and positive and negative relationships to assess each accordingly. The members would also be helped to become aware of unrealistic meaning given to certain relationships and identities which caused problematic relationships and identity conflicts.

##### CONTENT

After a brief discussion of the previous session the members were provided an opportunity to identify realistic and unrealistic identities.

Researcher : Let's talk about how you feel about certain identities you now have. [The researcher referred them to the discussion in session three and four regarding their various identities.]

Medisha : I like sweeping the house and washing the dishes and I don't like making my bed and doing my schoolwork. My big sister hits me when I get my work wrong. She acts like my mother and when I tell my mother she tells me to listen to her [sister.]

Researcher : If your sister helps you with your schoolwork do you think that you will begin to like doing your homework?

**Medisha** : Yes. I don't do my maths homework because sometimes I don't understand and my sister don't teach me nicely, she only shouts at me . My teacher also gets mad at school.

**Fahima** : My big sister teaches me nicely and I like doing my schoolwork . I also like to help her at home and then my mummy gives me an allowance for doing the work . I like washing the dishes, mopping and making the beds . When I go to my father's house I like to look after the baby . Sometimes my stepmother shouts at me and then I don't like to look after the baby and stay there .

**Akash** : I like delivering the newspapers (and I get paid ) and buying the bread, but I don't really like doing certain work at home like mopping, cleaning my room and mowing the lawn . That used to be my father's job, it is hard to do it alone. I like to do my schoolwork because my teacher likes me and knows my mummy is divorced and she tells me that I am smart and shows my work to the others .

**Researcher** : So you like certain roles because you enjoy them and you get something out of it like getting paid and getting praises .

**Aftab** : I don't like school because my teacher only shouts at me .

**Researcher** : Would you enjoy school if someone helped you with your schoolwork at home?

Aftab : Yes, but my big sister also shouts when I don't do my work properly . My father used to help me before and I should do good work . Even my friends think I am silly now.

Kerusha : I also have a very cheeky ma'am . She only likes the children who get all their work right . She called my mummy to school to talk about my work . I told my mummy I'll try harder .

Medisha : I also like doing certain things at home like cooking but my mummy won't let me cook when she is at work . My father used to let me cook. My mum used to get cross about that .

The children admitted that they enjoyed certain roles (like housekeeping and delivering newspapers) but did not like others (such as babysitter and scholar ) because they did not receive the expected support or encouragement from the people concerned. For example, Kerusha , Aftab and Fahima did not enjoy being a scholar because their teachers or siblings did not provide the motivation they desperately needed to improve their progress further. Fahima admitted that although she loved her baby stepsister and didn't mind babysitting,, her stepmother's irrational behavior caused her to resent this identity as a babysitter.

It is evident from the extract that the children attributed unrealistic meaning to certain identities because of the negative feelings experienced towards the people who influenced these identities. When the researcher questioned them about this, the children's replies further support this.

Researcher : Do you think that you dislike certain identities because of your bad feelings with certain people? For example, Medisha doesn't like to do schoolwork because her sister scolds her when she doesn't do her work properly, and Fahima sometimes doesn't like to babysit because her stepmother makes demands on her.

Akash : Yes, if we were treated properly then we would do the different chores and enjoy them too, like cleaning the house and schoolwork. We will feel better when we get praised for it.

Medisha : When my sister helps me nicely then I understand and get my work right and like to do more.

Aftab : I should blame my father for not being at home and I had to do his work and also for not helping me with my schoolwork. Now I must try harder and ask my sister to help when she is not busy.

The researcher then prompted a discussion about the children's relationships.

Researcher : Let's talk about your relationships with others at home.

Fahima : My mummy used to laugh more before; now she is sad and fed up. I get sad when I see her tired. Sometimes she makes me cross because she shouts at me when I ask her something.

Aftab : That's because you trouble her. When she is tired and when I tell you that you shout at me.

Medisha : My sister always shouts at me and treats me like a baby. She acts like my mother and my mother talks to her like she is an adult. They don't let me listen and I get mad with them.

Fahima : My brother also bullies me because I am smaller. When I tell my mother she tells me to listen to him, and I tell my father about that. He talks to Aftab but he still bullies me. Before when my father was at home, no one should bully me.

Researcher : Does you brother bully you all the time?

Fahima : No, sometimes he helps me with my schoolwork when I tell him that I will give him something and when I ask him to help me nicely.

Kerusha : My big sister doesn't shout at me, she is like a mother to me. Sometimes we fight but most times she takes care of me and helps me. She gets mad with me when I talk about my father because she is still sad about his drinking. She used to take me to our room before when my mother and father used to fight.

Medisha : I used to get mad with my father when he hit my mother. Once I bit him hard and he wanted to hit me too but my mother pulled him and started crying. Then I hoped

he would leave us and die. Sometimes he and my mother still argue when he comes to see me and I feel very sad. I miss him.

Researcher : How do you feel about him now?

Medisha : I miss him and hope he changes so that my mother can let him stay with us, but she told me he won't change and I get cross with her but I don't want him to hit her again.

Vinolan : Sometimes I also wish that my father comes back but they always fight. I used to get angry with my mother too because I should hear my father saying that she likes to bully him and then she left him.

Researcher : How often do you see your father now?

Vinolan : About three times a month. He moved away and lives in Tongaat. I feel sorry for him because he have to do everything himself now.

Akash : I used to get mad with my father too because before he used to take us to the mall, now we hardly go anywhere with my mum. She doesn't have a car.

Researcher : Do you blame your dad for not being there when you need him?

Akash : Yes. I also don't like doing his work at home because he used to help me to mow the grass, take out the bin and tidy the rooms.

Researcher : Let's talk about your feelings as a single-parent child.

Fahima : I should feel different at school when my friends talk about their fathers and when Father's day came we had to make a card; my friend knew my father was not at home and she asked me why I made a card. I got angry with her. I should feel very sad but now I don't feel so bad I got used to it.

Akash : I also felt different especially at school. I didn't want anyone to know that my dad left, but my ma'am knew and she asked me about it in class. Now all my friends know. I felt bad and thought that Dad left maybe because of me but Mum told me it was not because of me.

Medisha : My mum told me when my father went away that I don't have to tell anyone at school. When my friends used to tell me that their fathers bought something, I used to bluff that I also got a present. I don't like being a single-parent child.

Vinolan : I felt very bad on Father's day because I made a card at school and I couldn't give it to my dad because my mother took us to my aunty's house for the weekend and I didn't get a chance to give him the card. I also don't like being a single-parent child.

The following analysis briefly illustrates the contents of the previous extracts and indicates that the children had attributed unrealistic meanings to certain relationships and these relationships have influenced their identity formation.

Fahima experienced negative feelings towards her mother because she was often unavailable and reproached her. She also transferred her anger to her brother who was trying to help her. Medisha attributed unrealistic meaning to her relationship with her sister who acted in a protective mothering role which she regarded as her mother's prerogative. This resulted in sibling rivalry. Kerusha indicated a positive relationship with her elder sister who took on a motherly role. She also indicated that she experienced ambivalent feelings towards her father. Vinolan and Fahima's identity formation (as man of the house and babysitter) was adversely affected because they experienced negative feelings towards the family members who influenced the particular identity. Vinolan had guilty feelings towards his father because he had wished that he would leave. Now that he had to take on his father's identity as "man of the house", he had mixed feelings about that identity. Akash did not enjoy certain identities he had to assume (being the house cleaner and gardener) because his father used to help him with the chores, and blamed his father for being alone in these roles. Aftab did not enjoy his role as a scholar because he did not have much assistance or guidance any more. His sister and his teacher had no patience with him and this discouraged him.

### SUMMARY

Three children were able to identify realistic and unrealistic identities and positive and negative relationships and explored each accordingly. They acknowledged that they had

attributed unrealistic meaning to certain identities because of negative feelings experienced in certain relationships. The children were also aware that they enjoyed certain identities because they experienced positive feelings in those relationships. Fahima and Akash admitted that they enjoyed certain identities because they gave them pleasure and they were also reimbursed and praised. The children indicated that certain identities (man of the house, housekeeper, scholar) did cause conflicts mainly because of their problematic relationships with the family members who influenced those identities.

The members gained insight into the coherence between interpersonal relationships and identity formation and became aware that unrealistic meaning given to identities resulted in identity conflicts.

## STAGE 4 - CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR AND REASONING

### SESSIONS 9 AND 10

#### AIM

These sessions were aimed at encouraging members to make decisions about improving the quality of certain relationships and considering how to solve certain problems. In so doing, they were stimulated to make attempts to initiate changes in problematic relationships.

#### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session, the researcher encouraged discussions about improving the quality of certain relationships.

Researcher : How can we improve our relationship with the members in our family?

Kerusha : Now I know why my daddy used to drink and behave like that: because he is an alcoholic. He doesn't mean to hurt us because sometimes he used to cry and tell us that he loves us but Mother used to get mad. Now I don't hate him anymore. I feel sorry for him and I miss him. I will show him that I love him.

Medisha : I used to hate my father when he should hit my mum. I don't know why he should get so angry but now when he comes to visit he is also friendly with my mum, but she don't like to talk to him for long. I told my mum that if she talks nicely to him he will always be good but my sister says I talk nonsense. I know I am right.

Researcher : Do you think that your father is sorry for hurting your mother?

Medisha : Yes, because he cried when my mother left him. He said he won't hit her anymore but she doesn't believe him. I feel sorry for him and I love him.

Akash : I was very angry with my father when he left us but now I know he loves us because he visits us and buys us presents. I wish he comes back but now he has a girlfriend and my mother is still angry with him.

Researcher : Do you think that you also caused a problem in your relationship with your dad?

Akash : After my father left, I was very angry with him. Even when he wanted to help me with schoolwork and talk to me, I should be stubborn.

Researcher : What did you do?

Akash : I used to tell him I don't need any help from him but he should help me before. I was angry with him for leaving and not help me anymore. Then I started doing badly at school. Now I understand that he also loves his girlfriend and when my mother talks about her I will tell her not to say bad things.

Kerusha : I also know that my dad has a drinking problem. I can't tell him to stop drinking. I now go to Allateen with my big sister and I know that I can't blame him for

drinking. We try to explain this to my mother and now she too feels sorry for him. She told us that she will also try to be nice to him when he comes home.

Fahima : I understand that my father also loves me and my brother and sister but I don't really like my stepmother because she only wants me to help her with the baby. She doesn't love me.

Aftab : Now you know that, I also love my father but not my stepmother. She is mean. She only likes my father and the baby. One day they had a fight and she told my dad to go back to our house. I was happy.

Vinolan : I used to get mad with my father for fighting with my mother all the time and making her angry and sad. Now I understand that it wasn't my fault that they used to fight. I know that some people can't live with each other sometimes and then they should leave. But I know that they both love me and that makes me happy. I understand why my mother gets tired and moody. I will try to help her more.

Researcher : I am glad that you are thinking that way.

Medisha : At times I used to wish my father was dead and think that it was my fault he hits my mummy. Now I know that he can't help it when he gets angry. I know that he loves me. He also tries to be nice to my sister but she acts stubborn. She still feels bad about the divorce but she will feel okay. I'll talk to her.

Aftab : I will be good to my father when I see him and listen to him. Even at home I will be a good son and that will make my mother happy.

Fahima : Yes, Daddy and Mummy will be very happy. I know Daddy was sad that day when you didn't want to go to the shop.

All the children admitted that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to their relationship with their fathers due to their abusive and alcoholic behaviour or due to them leaving. However, after exploration of feelings that they experienced towards the father, the children realised that they could understand the reasons for their fathers' behaviour. In so doing, they could initiate an improvement in their relationships with their fathers. Aftab and Fahima acknowledged that they would also try to be better siblings.

The researcher initiated a discussion on the evaluation of each identity and the acceptance and rejection of certain identities.

Researcher : Let's talk about our different identities. Which do we like and which ones don't we like?

Fahima : I like looking after the baby and my father tells me that I am good. I also like cleaning the house. Sometimes my mother complains but she also tells me that I am a helpful child. Sometimes I fight a lot with my brother and a little with my big sister, but now I will try to be a better sister and help them. I will let them help me with my schoolwork then I will do okay and my mummy will be happy.

Aftab : I will try to be good brother too.

Researcher : Do you think that a little fighting is okay?

Medisha : Yes, because we can say sorry and become friends again and that will make us feel happy.

Aftab : I feel bad that I am not good at school but I will try harder then my mother will be happy too. I love shopping for my mother and delivering the paper. I don't like mowing the lawn and cleaning the house. Now my mother told me that we can do the garden work together during the weekends.

Vinolan : I also like delivering the paper and like washing the car and I like being in charge of the house when my mother is working. I will try to improve my schoolwork and do my work everyday.

Kerusha : I know that I am a good sister to my big sister and a good daughter to my mummy. Even if I get cross with them I still love them a lot. I will try to do good work at school.

Akash : I do good work at school and my teacher likes me. I like going to the shop with my mother but I don't like doing certain work at home like sweeping and cleaning the room.

Medisha : I love cooking when my mother lets me and I like doing the housework. I don't like schoolwork but I will try to do all my homework, then I will do better. I think I am a good sister to my big sister even if we fight sometimes.

The children specified which identities they enjoyed and which identities they could improve on. Aftab, Vinolan, Kerusha and Fahima indicated that they would make an attempt to improve their progress at school so that they could enjoy being a better scholar.

Researcher : Do we have to take on identities we don't really enjoy and like?

Medisha : I know I am not a good scholar and don't sweep the house properly. Both these identities are important and I have to improve myself. I cannot stop going to school and even stop cleaning the house.

Vinolan : You are right Medisha. We need to improve some identities, but we don't have to like certain ones, like being the man of the house or a gardener. I don't like those and my mum says it's all right if I don't mow the lawn; she will help me.

Fahima : I also don't like to look after my stepsister because my stepmother tells me to. I will tell her that when she forces me to do it.

Aftab : That is very good. You don't have to be afraid of her. She can't do you nothing.

Akash : It gives me a good feeling to help my mum and to work hard in school and do well.

### SUMMARY

All the children attributed new personalised meaning to certain relationships and they all made a concerted effort to change their behaviour and improve their relationships with certain members in the family. The awareness and exploration of different identities enabled the children to evaluate certain identities realistically and accept and improve them. Medisha realised that she had to try to be a better scholar even if she didn't enjoy that identity because it was an important and necessary one. Fahima accepted the fact that she did not have to be a babysitter whenever her stepmother demanded it and she could exercise her right not to agree if she was not happy.

The children used their insight to initiate changes in their relationships. After attributing new, realistic meaning to their problematic relationships, they were able to explore new and more appropriate ways to interact within these relationships.

In looking at their own behaviour, the children realised that they did have choices regarding their actions, attitudes and relationships and that they needed to explore their options in order to initiate any changes.

## SESSIONS 11 AND 12

### AIM

The researcher's aim was to observe how members acknowledged a change in their reasoning and reaction towards relationships and the formation of identities and aimed to help the children understand that they could not change other people but could change their own behaviour and attitudes.

### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session the researcher initiated the discussion to allow the children to acknowledge their changed reaction and attitude towards relationships.

Researcher : If you could be with your mum or dad right now what would you want to tell them about how you feel about yourself, about them and your identities.

Fahima : I'll tell my father that I am sorry for not being a better child when he was trying to show me he loves me after the divorce. I understand now why my father can't live with us anymore.

Aftab : I will try to be a good son because I used to feel very angry with my dad, I know that he won't come back. I will try to be helpful at home too and then my mother will be happy with me.

Researcher : What about your different identities?

Aftab : I will try to do well in all my jobs. If I can't manage I'll tell my mother, she will understand.

Vinolan : I like to tell my father how I felt when he left us but now I don't feel so bad. I still hope that my father comes back but if he doesn't I will still love him and I will show them that I love them both. I will try to do my schoolwork everyday and ask for help.

Medisha : I will try not to fight with my sister and listen to my mum. I know that they both love me, even my dad loves me. They do have bad moods sometimes and I will understand if I can't do a job properly. I'll tell my mum, she will understand.

Kerusha : I understand now why my father drinks and why he behaves that way. I still love him and tell him that when he comes to see me. I won't get angry with mum when she is in a bad mood and is busy.

Akash : I will tell my father that he is still my father and I do miss him and like to spend more time with him. I will tell my mum that I do love her and will help her but she must also allow me to see my father when I want to.

The children were determined to apply change-initiating strategies in their relationships. A positive change was noted in their attitude and behaviour towards their parents and siblings.

The children were then given worksheets (Appendix 19) to fill in. Each item was read out and briefly explained as the children completed each item. Sufficient time was given for the completion of the worksheets and then responses were read out and discussed (with the permission of the children).

During the discussion of the worksheets on "Changes" (Appendix 11), all the children indicated that their attitude had become more positive, understanding and tolerant towards others. They felt that their behaviour had now improved, become more positive, caring, loving and considerate. All the children stated that they enjoyed more positive interpersonal relationships and were convinced that their schoolwork would improve further. In evaluating their feelings about themselves, they acknowledged that they felt more positive, confident, and good about themselves. They enjoyed their roles and found them challenging. These responses are reflected in the following analysis of the worksheets on "Changes" (Appendix 11).

CHANGES	RESPONSES
Attitude	All the children (6) felt more positive and understanding and five children felt more tolerant of others..
Behaviour	The children (6) indicated that they were more friendly, caring and loving and five of them acknowledged that they were more considerate .
Relationships	All the children indicated an improvement in their relationships with their parents, siblings and friends. Their relationships became more positive.
Identities	All the children acknowledged that they liked and enjoyed certain identities.
Self-actualisation	All the children indicated that they would try to improve their progress at school.

The children were thanked for their involvement, contribution, enthusiasm and honesty during the sessions. They were informed that they would be contacted two months later for an interview. They were then treated to refreshments, provided with a token of appreciation and were then transported home.

### SUMMARY

All the children indicated a changed attitude and behaviour towards certain relationships (especially the parent-child and sibling relationships). By attributing realistic meaning to them, they explored new and appropriate ways to interact within these relationships and so improve the quality of the relationships. They were able to evaluate their identities and decide which ones to accept and improve on in order to attain self-actualisation. The

children had come to terms with their new identity as a single-parent child, and indicated that they would utilise their potential at school to the maximum.

#### **5.3.4 The Later Latency Children's Group**

##### **SESSION 1**

##### **AIM**

This session was aimed at encouraging the children to become aware of their experience of different feelings associated with divorce and to understand that feelings are either good or bad, to identify specific feelings and to seek ways of dealing with these feelings.

##### **ESTABLISHMENT OF RAPPORT**

This followed the same procedure used in the early latency group.

##### **CONTENT**

The researcher enquired about the different feelings that children experience regarding divorce. Thereafter the children were presented with a handout (Appendix 12) which detailed situations with possible corresponding feelings which aimed to clarify the meaning of each feeling. The children might have many different feelings concerning the same situation, for example, while one child might experience sadness for not seeing his father, another child might experience anger. During the discussion they saw how these various feelings affected their behaviour at home and at school.

After a period of discussion, a second worksheet was given (Appendix 13) out, addressing the different feelings experienced with different people. The children ticked

off the relevant feelings they experienced towards different family members, including themselves. (The responses are noted at the end of the session.)

The children were then given an opportunity to discuss how they felt about certain family members.

Therusha : (11 years; worksheet responses included anger, sadness, self-blame) I don't see my dad often, because when he does come to see my sister and I, I stay in my room. I am still angry for what he used to do to us when he was drunk. My mum is always busy and tired so I try to help her. I feel sorry for her.

Kantha : (11 years; reported feeling sadness, anger) Sometimes I feel sad and unloved. My father has his own family and my mother is sad most of the time. I worry about her and don't play with my friends much now. My brother and I fight more now and I get cross with him.

Yugesh : (12 years; reported feeling relief, sadness) There is no fighting now between my mum and dad and I feel better. Before when they used to fight I used to get mad with them and wanted to run away somewhere. At school I used to get cross with my friends because they wanted to play with me and I wanted to be left alone. I even hit my class boy and got in trouble because he teased me.

Arulan : (10 years; reported guilt, sadness, self-blame) I feel guilty about my dad because when he used to fight, he hit my mum many times. I wanted to hit him and

wished that he should die or go away. When my mother left him I thought it was my fault. My mother is still not happy now. I wish that my dad stops drinking then maybe he will come back.

Dayalan : (12 years; isolated, sad, unloved) I feel like nobody worried about me because my father left my mother, she works and she hardly talks to me after work. Once I asked my mother why she don't like to talk to me nicely. She felt bad and told me that I must give her a chance and during the weekend she will spend more time with me.

It is evident that the children experienced negative feelings in their interpersonal relationships after the divorce. They were encouraged to deal positively with negative feelings (like anger and sadness) by playing some form of sport, going for a walk, or punching a pillow.

The researcher then initiated a discussion on the feelings associated with different identities. The concept of identity or roles was explained through the use of a short story (refer to the E.L.C. group) and by using puppets where the role of a mother and her children was played out, depicting their feelings about respective roles.

The use of puppetry evoked a strong response from the group, as is evident in the following extract.

Researcher : Let us talk about your new responsibilities.

Arulan : After the divorce my mother tells me to help a lot at home and I do get tired. Sometimes she tells me to look after my small brother [6 years old] after school. He doesn't listen to me and sometimes I hit him and I get into trouble when he tells my mother.

Therusha : I also take care of my younger sister [Kerusha] but we get on well. I also clean the house, iron the clothes [over weekends] and even cook certain days. I do get tired and sad sometimes because I don't get time to do what I like doing. My sister is not doing well at school. I help her with her schoolwork too.

Yugesh : I help my mum too. I buy the bread and milk and am in charge at home when my mother is at work. I also deliver the paper. I like staying at school and play cricket with my friends but my mum wants me at home right after school.

Najina (11 years) : After my father left, my mother had to work for the whole day. Now I have to help her to do the cleaning, cooking and looking after my younger brother and sister. Before my granny used to help at home but she died in July. My mother didn't go to work for long because she got very sick because of my granny dying. Now I help my mother.

The children indicated that they had more responsibilities after the divorce and two admitted that they felt tired after completing their chores.

The following analysis reflects the different types of feelings experienced by the children towards themselves and other family members after the marital disruption.

Percentages are reflected to illustrate the number of children who experience the various feelings .

ANALYSIS OF WORKSHEETS (APPENDIX 13)

FEELINGS	FAMILY MEMBERS, FRIENDS, DIVORCE & SCHOOL
Anger	Four children (67%) experienced anger towards their mother, five (83%) towards their father, three (50%) towards their siblings and two (33%) towards themselves.
Confusion	Two children (33%) felt confused about the divorce and their mother's behaviour, three (50%) were confused about their father's behaviour and about their school progress.
Guilt	Three children (50%) felt guilty about the divorce, and about their father leaving. Two (33%) felt guilty for causing the divorce and they also felt guilty about their mother being divorced.
Sadness/worry	Three children (50%) felt sad for themselves, and about their mother being divorced. Two (33%) were worried about their father and three (50%) were worried about their school progress.
Abandoned	Four children (67%) felt abandoned by their father and friends, and two (33%) felt abandoned by their mother and school teacher.
Pride	Five children (83%) were proud of their mother, four (67%) were proud of their siblings and two (33%) of their school progress.
Unloved	Three children (50%) felt unloved by their father, and two (33%) by their mother, siblings and friends.
Shame	Three children (50%) felt ashamed because of the divorce and their father's behaviour, and four (67%) about themselves as single-parent children.
Relief	Four children (67%) experienced relief about the divorce of their mother and two (33%) were relieved for themselves.

The responses from the worksheets indicate that the children experienced many diverse feelings towards family members after the marital disruption.

The session was concluded by thanking the children for their contribution and informing them that the next session would deal with problems experienced in their relationships.

### SUMMARY

The children's awareness of their experience of different feelings associated with family members was focused on in this session. Many subjects experienced negative feelings, especially towards the father. The children acknowledged that they had assumed different identities after the divorce. The analysis of the worksheets and the discussion about feelings experienced in interpersonal relationships showed that each child experienced different feelings for different people and similar feelings for different relationships. The children became aware that their feelings were subjective and unique to each relationship. Therusha, for example, was surprised that Arulan didn't enjoy taking care of his sister because she was so protective towards her own sister, Kerusha.

## SESSION 2

### AIM

This session was aimed at helping the individuals to become aware of the nature of their involvement in different relationships, the quality of their experience of the involvement and the meaning they gave to the relationship. The members were helped to perceive that their involvement in a relationship and the feelings experienced as a result determined how positively or negatively the relationship was evaluated.

### CONTENT

A brief summary of the previous session was made. The concepts of parental alignment and parental conflict were explained in a handout (Appendix 7) entitled "Games parents play" which was designed to evoke responses from members.

The researcher then asked the following question to prompt discussion.

Researcher : Has anyone of you experienced such situations? How did you feel about that?

Kantha : I get cross with my mum when she doesn't allow me to spend more time with my dad. When he buys a present for my brother and me, she tells us that he does that just to make us like him. She tells us that he doesn't care for us and that is why he got married again.

Therusha : I also used to hate it when my mum and dad used to fight. After the divorce my mother used to tell me that my dad is a weak person and unreliable and he doesn't care for us. I used to feel miserable. Even now he promises to pick my sister and he doesn't come. My sister waits all dressed up and then she cries when he doesn't come. Then my mother used to get so mad with him for that, and she says all bad things about him. I used to feel confused.

Researcher : Does it affect your feelings towards you mum or dad when they play these "games"?

Najina : Yes, I know that when my mother says bad things about my father and his wife, I get angry and don't want to listen to her. At that time I don't like helping at home because I feel depressed.

Yugesh : After the divorce I thought that my mother will be happy because they used to fight a lot. Now she is still moody and wants me to help her a lot. I get sad and angry when she talks badly about my dad and want to go outside and play with my friends.

Arulan : Yes, but your mother needs you to help her. She has no one else to help her. I help my mum and I also feel sad when my mum or dad say unkind things about each other but I know that they do that because they are angry still. I know that they can't live together because my mother explained why.

The children indicated an awareness of being subjected to parental conflict and parental alignment and all experienced negative feelings, and some responded in a negative manner towards the parent.

The researcher addressed the issue of problems in interpersonal relationships.

Researcher : Did your relationship with your brother or sister improve or worsen after the divorce?

Najina : There is more fighting now between my brother and sister and when I try to stop them they blame me for taking sides and also that I am not their mother. My mum leaves me in charge and I feel concerned when they fight and don't listen. I try to help my brother Aftab with his schoolwork because his ma'am complain to me that he is not working hard; he doesn't listen to me.

Therusha : My sister and I get on well. I look after her and she listens to me. We just started going to the Allateen group for children of alcoholics. We learn that we should forgive my father and try to become a better person and not blame him. We learn to protect each other and not fight with each other. Najina, you too must try to help your brother and sister to stop fighting. Tell them that they need each other more now, that your mother will be proud of them if they stop fighting. My sister used to get angry with me too, but I told her that we must not fight but protect each other and now we don't feel so bad about my father's drinking.

Researcher : Does your mother spend more time with you now?

Dayalan : Now my mother spends a lot of time with me during the weekend. We must go out somewhere, mainly the mall and see a movie. I love that, but I don't get a chance to play with my friends and I miss them.

Researcher : Did you tell your mum about you wanting to spend some time with your friends as well?

Dayalan : No, I don't want to make her sad: she also feels lonely and wants to show me that she loves me and won't leave me like Dad did.

Arulan : My mother is always busy now and when I ask her to help me with my schoolwork she doesn't have the time and she don't understand the maths. Now I do badly in maths, because my father used to help me before.

Yugesh : I think it is unfair that our fathers are not at home to help us with our schoolwork. My father also used to help me and now my mother is too busy with the housework to help. I blame my father for this.

Dayalan became aware that his relationship with his friends was inhibited by his mother's possessiveness or overprotectiveness. Arulan was aware that he had difficulty with his schoolwork and unintentionally blamed his father for this. Yugesh openly acknowledged that his father was accountable for his poor performance at school. Najina was aware

that the sibling rivalry between her younger brother and sister increased after the marital disruption and expressed concern about their fighting and not listening to her. She also indicated that her efforts to assist her brother with his schoolwork proved unsuccessful. Therusha enjoyed a good relationship with her sister and acknowledged that going to the Allateen programme had helped them to come to terms with their father's drinking.

### SUMMARY

Through the verbalising of their feelings, the children became aware that they were subjected to parental conflict and parental alignment. They admitted that their parents (especially their mother) did not spend enough time with them due to their added responsibilities. However, Dayalan stated that his mother's attention on the weekends prevented him from spending time with his friends. Yugesh and Arulan expressed disappointment about their parents' unavailability. They admitted that their father had previously assisted them with schoolwork and so blamed him for their poor performance after the divorce. The children's involvement in their relationships and the feelings experienced as a result of their interaction determined how positively or negatively the relationships were evaluated.

## SESSIONS 3 AND 4

### AIM

These sessions were aimed at helping the children become aware of the various identities that were important to them and at examining each identity to see how it was affected by the quality of interpersonal relationships.

### CONTENT

A brief summary of the previous session was made. The children were referred to the awareness of specific identities already discussed in session two and reference was also made to the story (Appendix 14) and puppetry used in session 2 regarding the clarification of identities. The children came to understand that by performing a particular chore (for example, looking after a sibling or cleaning house), they take on a specific identity (for example, a babysitter or a housekeeper).

Researcher : How do you feel about taking on the different identities; for example a babysitter?

Kantha : I have to look after my small brother [6 years], clean the house, cook and go to the shop. I also have to do my schoolwork. I get tired and my mother comes from work and sees if the work is done. She gets very angry when the house is not cleaned.

Researcher : How does this make you feel?

Kantha: I get fed up sometimes when my mother wants me to do all these things. I like to do what I can manage. My brother listens and sometimes he gets stubborn. When I shout at him he wants to hit me. I don't get time to do my schoolwork at times and now I don't do very well at school.

Najina : My mother also tells me to cook, look after my brother and sister. I have to give them supper when my mother comes late and tell them to have a bath. They don't listen to me sometimes because they want to watch T.V. I get angry because I don't have a chance to watch my programme.

Dayalan : My mum keeps telling me that I am the man of the house and I must not be childish. I have to help her to clean the house and the car, buy the bread and sometimes put the washing in the machine. I get very tired and I don't get the time to watch my favourite programmes on T.V. and playing with my friends too.

Arulan : I think that we should do what we can manage and tell our mothers if we can't manage. They'll understand. I tell my mother when I can't do certain things and she understands. I don't like doing some things that my father used to do but I have to do it, like mowing the grass and washing the car.

Researcher : Do you think that if you have a good relationship with your brother or sister, you can be a better babysitter, and if you enjoy a good relationship with your mother or father, you can be a better housekeeper, cook, gardener, etcetera?

Therusha : Yes. When my mother tells me to do something in a nice way then I like making her happy and do the work properly. Sometimes when she shouts then I want to go to my room and stay there. Even my sister when she is naughty then I don't like doing things for her.

Kantha : My mother always tells my brother that he must not grow up like my father who doesn't worry about us because he has a girlfriend. She also tells him that he is the man in the house and then he acts like a big bully when she is not at home. I get mad and don't like doing any work at home.

All the children indicated that they had undoubtedly more responsibilities at home after the divorce, including helping with the household chores, cooking, babysitting and shopping. They also admitted that they found the added responsibilities demanding enough to prevent them from enjoying their own leisure activities (such as watching television and playing with friends). Kantha and Najina didn't enjoy their roles as a babysitter because their younger siblings resented being told what to do and so behaved aggressively and were disobedient. The children acknowledged that they enjoyed certain identities mainly because they experienced a good relationship with the individual who influenced that identity. For example, the children enjoyed being a babysitter if they enjoyed a good relationship with the younger siblings, and enjoyed cleaning the house if they had a good relationship with the mother.

Researcher : Let's talk about our different identities and see which ones we can manage well.

Dayalan : I don't mind doing all the chores I am supposed to do at home. I do get tired sometimes but I don't like telling my mother because she'll get upset. She is very good to me. I like delivering the paper, going to the shop and washing the car. I don't like cleaning the house. I miss my dad because he used to help me to do some work.

Najina : That's what my brother tells me too, when he cleans the car. I don't like to think of my dad sometimes because I feel miserable now and things are different. When we visit him at his flat he takes good care of us and buys us things too. He asks us if we want any help at home. My brother told him that we had to fix our tap and the car hooter is not working but my mother got mad when he came home to fix them.

Yugesh : Sometimes when I don't like to do a job like cleaning my room and taking the bin out. My mother tells me I am stubborn like my dad. I feel angry and sad. Then I don't like doing those things. She doesn't like me playing with my friends like before because I have to do my schoolwork and help her. I don't tell her to help me with my schoolwork and I don't understand the work sometimes.

Dayalan : I also don't like to do certain things because I get tired but I have to because my mum gets mad. Then when I don't do it properly she still scolds me and then I think of my dad who should help me before. Sometimes I go to my room and don't do any work and eat supper then my mum gets worried.

Najina : When my brother and sister fight then I don't like to be with them. I like to just go to my room and do what I like to do but I can't do that because I have to help

my mother to clean and even cook. I get fed up with them and when I tell my mother she gets cross so now I just keep quiet but I feel bad.

Kantha : I don't like looking after Akash because he doesn't listen sometimes and then I have to do more work. My mother gets very tired to do more work at home. I can manage the sweeping and washing dishes but not mopping and cleaning the bathroom because I don't get time to do my schoolwork. When Akash don't help me I get fed up.

Arulan : I can't manage my schoolwork and also going to the shop and feeding the dog. My father should buy the bread and feed the dog. I like doing these work but I can't do all every day.

Najina : I like doing the cooking and my schoolwork and I manage all right. But I can't do everything one day like cleaning all the rooms and helping my brother with his schoolwork. When I want to help him then he wants to watch T.V. He gets us mad at home.

Researcher : Do you think that your mother expects you to do too much?

Therusha : I think my mum gives me a lot to do but I think I can manage with most of it. I feel good because I feel I am helping her she also has to do a lot now.

Yugesh : Before my dad used to do a lot at home, but now I have to do certain things and I hope my mum can understand that I need some time to do what I like to do. I get

tired and can't do my schoolwork properly. Before my dad used to help me now my mum is too busy to help me.

Arulan : My mum did explain to me that now that my dad is gone, I have to help her a lot and I feel sorry for her but at times I can't manage with all the work she gives me and I get upset.

The children explored their various identities and realised that they had to take on certain roles that had previously belonged to their fathers, for example, helping with household chores, mowing the grass, buying the bread and feeding the dog. The children did not really enjoy taking on these identities because they either still yearned for their fathers or were angry with them for leaving with the added chores. Most of the children indicated that they could not cope well with the demanding roles and felt tired and even angry at times about this role strain. Three children, (Yugesh, Kantha and Arulan) admitted that they neglected their schoolwork due to the added responsibilities.

Researcher : How do you all feel being a single-parent child?

Therusha : I used to feel very sad and ashamed and didn't want to talk to my school friends. I did not want anyone to know about my father but some of my friends knew because they used to see my father drunk in the village. Now I don't feel so bad.

Dayalan : My mom and dad used to fight a lot and for a long time my mom told me that she is going to leave my dad because they can't be happy. I knew that they will divorce.

When my father went away I felt very sad and didn't want my friends to know that I was a single-parent child, even my teacher.

Arulan : My father should hit my mother when he got angry. When she left him she told us that we can do without him because he was always fighting. She told us that we must not feel bad because lots of other children also live without their fathers. I know that but I felt different after the divorce and was angry with my father.

Yugesh : Before I used to feel very ashamed about being a single-parent child. My mum told me that I should not feel bad because there are other divorced families too and now that my mum is okay, I don't mind being a single-parent child. My mum told me I should be proud because I do more than other children and she is right.

Najina : When my father left us, my mother was so angry she told us not to tell anyone at school and if someone asked we must tell them it is not their business. This used to make me feel sad and one teacher knew and I had to tell her the truth. Now my mother don't mind if people know and I also think we should be proud to be single-parent children because we all help our mother more.

The children initially experienced sadness and embarrassment about being a single-parent child. While some parents had told their children that they should be proud because they handled many more responsibilities than other children, one parent even discouraged her children from disclosing the fact that they were single-parent children. However, all the

children had now come to terms with their status and had now accepted it with realistic expectations.

The researcher thanked the members for their participation and informed them briefly about the contents of the next session. The session was concluded.

### SUMMARY

The children appeared to be exploring the personal meaning they had attributed to their interpersonal relationships (their interaction with their parents and siblings) The discussion on their various identities (cook, paper boy, single-parent child, babysitter etc) enabled them to verbalise their feelings about specific identities which resulted in an awareness and exploration of their feelings. The children acknowledged that if they enjoyed a better relationship with their parents or siblings then they were better able to cope effectively with the different identities. Problematic relationships were indeed festered as a result of the attribution of unrealistic meaning to relationships and identities and in realising this, the children seemed to gain insight into the correlation between interpersonal relationships and identity formation.

## STAGE 2 : EXPLORATION

### SESSIONS 5 AND 6

#### AIM

The sessions were aimed at encouraging members to explore relationships, role strain, and self-evaluation in order to facilitate an insight into the nature of respective relationships and to promote an understanding to related problems.

#### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session, each member was given handouts (Appendices 15, 16, 17, 18) during the sessions which were completed with the researcher's assistance. After filling in the worksheets, the children were given an opportunity to discuss the aspects that they addressed. Active discussion ensued, confirming the responses in the handout which are described below.

#### COPING SKILLS (Appendix 16)

Four children (62%) felt stress because of their parents' expectations, too many responsibilities and difficulty in talking to their mother and father. They experienced stress at school as they felt unable to handle the pressures from friends and teachers. Their parents' behaviour and attitude had also adversely affected them.

#### REACTION TO STRESS (Appendix 15)

67% of the the children reacted to stress by isolating themselves from others. Some became aggressive and uncommunicative with their families and friends.

### FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH STRESS (Appendix 15)

The children acknowledged that they feel sad and helpless when they could not cope with the added responsibilities. When asked to describe the manner in which they behaved when they felt left out by their parents and friends, some (33% percentage) indicated that they stayed out of the way, while others (33%) mentioned that they become aggressive and two children (33% percentage) stated that they simply remained quiet and became uncommunicative.

### POSITIVE REACTION TO BEING REJECTED/ISOLATED (Appendix 15)

Some children indicated they involved themselves with other activities to keep themselves occupied like playing television games, watching television and reading. One mentioned trying to talk about the problems with the brother and sister.

### EXPECTATIONS FROM CERTAIN RELATIONSHIPS (Appendix 17)

While 50% of the children mentioned that their relationship with their mothers had improved, the others indicated that this relationship had worsened. Four children indicated that the relationship with their father had worsened after the divorce while others (33%) stated that it had improved. Three children confirmed that there was more sibling rivalry and four children stated that their relationship with their friends had worsened.

All the children had expected their mothers to spend more time with them, to give them less to do, to be more supportive with their schoolwork and not to ask too much of

them concerning expected role functions. They also expressed the need to spend more time with their friends and to have time for themselves.

#### ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS (Appendix 17)

All the children acknowledged that they could improve certain aspects of their relationships with different family members by being more helpful, by listening to them, demonstrating they still cared for them and spending more time with them.

#### COPING WITH ROLE FUNCTIONS (Appendix 16)

The children indicated that they had more chores to do and more identities to deal with. 50% of them felt frustrated and depressed because of this while only one child accepted the added new responsibilities and identities as a challenge and felt able to cope.

The children's coping strategies varied: some children (33%) acknowledged that they tried their best in the different roles, while others (33%) did only what they liked and one child who did not like doing anything that she found difficult to accomplish, only did those jobs that she preferred.

#### INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP ON ROLE FUNCTIONS (Appendix 16)

When questioned about whether the children's relationships affected their various role functions (identities), they indicated that a negative relationship influenced a particular identity adversely, for example, sibling rivalry affected the role of babysitter; parental alignment affected the role of scholar; and parental unavailability affected the role of scholar, housekeeper and babysitter.

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS RELATIONSHIPS (Appendix 18)

<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>FEELINGS EXPERIENCED</b>
Mother	All the children (100%) experienced love for their mothers, 50% felt sympathy and 67% were proud of their mothers.
Father	While four (67%) felt anger, two (33%) felt guilt, three (50%) were sympathetic and seven (83%) experienced love for their fathers.
Siblings	Three (50%) were angry, four (67%) felt love, two (33%) were tolerant and three (50%) were proud of their siblings.
Friends	Four (67%) experienced love and two (33%) disliked their friends.
School/schoolwork	Three (50%) disliked school, four (67%) liked school and three (50%) were proud of their schoolwork.

FEELINGS EXPERIENCED TOWARDS IDENTITIES (Appendix 18)

<b>FEELINGS</b>	<b>IDENTITIES</b>
Pride	Four children (67%) felt proud to be a single-parent child, two (33%) were proud to be scholars and friends and three (50%) felt proud of being housekeepers and shoppers.
Happiness	Three (50%) were happy to be friends, and siblings and three (50%) felt happy being babysitters and shoppers.
Confusion	Three (50%) experienced confusion about being a housekeeper, babysitter and a single-parent child.
Sadness	Two (33%) felt sad about being a single-parent child.
Anger	Two (33%) experienced anger for being a single-parent child and a babysitter.
Guilt	Two children (33%) felt guilty being single-parent children.

The researcher then provided an opportunity for the children to evaluate themselves through the exploration of feelings experienced in relationships and identities.

Researcher : You have all indicated in the worksheet how you feel about your different relationships and identities. Let's now talk about how you feel about yourself: whether you regard yourself as a useful or useless person.

Therusha : When my mother just left my father, I had to do a lot at home and then I used to blame my father and think badly of him. I blamed him for forcing my mother to work and then I had to do the work at home after school. I used to feel helpless and frustrated but when I used to see how tired my mum looked after work I felt sorry for her and tried to do all the work properly. She used to tell me that she is really proud of me and I do feel better. Even Kerusha tells me I am very good.

Najina : I used to feel the same way too. Because I was the eldest, I had to take care of Aftab and Fahima and do the housework and my schoolwork. I was angry with my father for doing this to me and when my granny died I felt worse because she used to help me. I used to feel miserable at home and wanted to run away sometimes, but my mother always told me that she needed me to help her. She told me I was very helpful and she can't manage without me. Now I don't feel so useless, even my brother listens to me and that makes me feel good too. I am also doing well at school.

Dayalan : I feel sorry that your granny died. I know how you feel. My grandfather lived with us and he also died last year. He used to help me with my schoolwork and

gardening. He died in a car accident. My mum and dad used to fight when my grandfather was alive but not too much. After he died my mum left my dad. I try to help my mum everyday but she told me that it is okay if I can't do all everyday and that makes me feel okay. My mum told me that I am doing all right and she is very proud of me. She always buys me little presents to show how much she cares.

Yugesh : I should feel very bad when I couldn't do all my work properly at home and even my schoolwork. Now my mother is not so fussy and she told me that I must finish my schoolwork every day and she will help me when I find it hard. Even my teacher gets happy when I try to complete all my schoolwork.

Kantha : When my father went away my mother had to do a lot after work. I used to help her and sometimes she used to get angry when I didn't do the work properly. Then I used to think she also might just leave us and go away and then I have to stay with my aunty. That is what happened to my friend at school. Her mother left them and she and her sister went to stay with their aunty. I should try to make my mum feel okay and help her a lot. Then I shouldn't complete my schoolwork and I used to feel all mixed up. One day I told my mum that my friend had to stay with her aunty because her mother went away then my mum told me that she will never ever leave us. That made me feel very happy.

Arulan : When my mother left my father she had to work till late and I used to feel bad because she told me that I was in charge when she was at work. Sometimes my sister should not listen and I used to get angry. I had to help my mother a lot. I didn't feel

like doing my schoolwork even. But now my mother tells me to do some work everyday and after my teacher complained about my work she told me to do my schoolwork first and if I don't understand I can ask my friend from next door to help. I feel okay now and my mother also is not so sad and moody.

### SUMMARY

During the discussion and the completion of the worksheets the children explored their feelings about role strain and self-evaluation, and gained insight into the nature of respective relationships through an awareness and exploration of their feelings. In this way, Therusha became aware that she did not only have negative feelings for her father. The children were aware of role strain and role reversal and the effect this had on their (parent-child and sibling) relationships. The worksheets (Appendices 15, 16, 17, 18), addressed the following issues: coping skills, feelings about and reaction to stress, expectations from relationships, attempts to improve relationships, the effect of added responsibilities on relationships and the influence of relationships on role functions. The responses indicate that the children had attributed unrealistic meaning to certain relationships had become aware of unrealistic meaning given to identities which resulted in identity conflicts. The children were given an opportunity to explore the feelings they experienced towards themselves; all of them acknowledged that they had experienced negative feelings towards others and blamed them for feeling depressed and negative about themselves. However, they were now able to evaluate their relationships which had positively influenced their own realistic evaluation of themselves.

### STAGE 3 - PERSONALISATION

#### SESSIONS 7 AND 8

##### AIM

These sessions were aimed at providing an opportunity to identify realistic and unrealistic identities, and positive and negative relationships and to assess each accordingly. The researcher also wished to facilitate an awareness and exploration of unrealistic meaning which had been given to certain relationships and identities causing problematic relationships and identity conflicts.

##### CONTENTS

The researcher initiated a discussion pertaining to the meaning given to children's identities through their involvement and experience of these identities.

Researcher : Do you enjoy the different roles or identities you now have, for example babysitter, housekeeper, etc?

Arulan : I enjoy going to the shop everyday and delivering the paper but I don't like taking care of my sister and doing the chores that my dad used to do. He used to help me to do these chores before now I have to do it myself. It makes me think of him and I miss him a lot.

Researcher : Why do you enjoy shopping and delivering the paper?

Arulan : I get a chance to see my friends and have some free time. Also, I get good pocket money for delivering the paper. I also like to do my schoolwork but I don't get time to do all my homework sometimes.

Kantha : I also like going to the shop daily and enjoy cooking but I don't like cleaning the house but I have to, so that my mum doesn't have too much to do and she gets happy when I help too. I don't mind looking after my brother, but sometimes he gets me angry when he doesn't listen. I don't enjoy doing my schoolwork because my father used to help me and now I have to do it myself. I don't understand my maths and science work very well.

Yugesh : Yes, I also don't enjoy doing my schoolwork now because I don't understand my maths. My dad used to help me and now my mum is too busy. My teacher always shouts at me when I don't get my work right.

Researcher : Do you blame your father for not doing well at school?

Yugesh : Yes, I get angry with my dad because he is not there to help me when I need help. Now my mother gets tired and I don't want to trouble her when I need help with a project.

Najina : I have to do a lot at home like cleaning, cooking, looking after my younger brother and sister and even do my schoolwork. I get very tired but I enjoy my cooking

and schoolwork. I do only some cleaning everyday, like one day I sweep and the next day I mop the floor. My mum says then I won't get so tired and my brother and sister help too. They listen to me and they also fight with each other. Before my granny used to help to do the housework and looking after my brother and sister. Now I have to do all that.

Researcher : Does your mother tell you that she is thankful to you?

Najina : Yes, and that is why I like to help her but sometimes she gets so tired after work she gets moody, and when I complain about my brother and sister fighting she gets so angry that she hits them or shouts at them. Then I feel bad. I can see she is also mad with me but she tells me that she depends on me to help her. I feel sorry for her.

Dayalan : I also help my mum with the shopping and cleaning the house. I even cook my own supper when she is late. I enjoy that because I can eat what I like. I enjoy doing my schoolwork. My teacher likes me and tells me that I am a smart boy. That makes my mother very happy.

Researcher : Does your mother tell you that you are in charge when she is away?

Dayalan : Yes, and then I think of my dad who used to be the person in charge and the head of the family. When I do certain things at home I think of him I don't see him very often because we moved away. My mother doesn't like me spending too much time with him. She is still mad with him about the divorce.

The children were then referred again to the worksheet (Appendix 16) which showed that the type of relationship the children had with certain family members affected their identity formation. Very relevant and strong responses followed the discussion and completion of this handout:

Therusha : After my father left, my mother and I got very close. She talks to me about her problems. I feel like I am her sister sometimes and this makes me feel good and I want to take care of her. I don't want her to be sad anymore. She feels better after she talks to me. When she is at work I make sure that I take care of my little sister [Kerusha] and clean the house. My mother is very proud of me.

Researcher : So you enjoy a good relationship with your mother and this helps you to be a good listener [confidante] and a good, caring babysitter .

Arulan I don't like doing some of the things my mother tells me to do sometimes because she shouts at me when I don't feel like doing it. I can't do all the things every day. I have to go to the shop with my sister, she walks so slowly, clean the house, do my schoolwork and look after my sister.

Researcher : Do you think that if she asked you nicely you could explain that you cannot do all the chores daily?

Arulan : Yes, maybe, because when I tell her that I want to play with my friends or play

a television game she gets very angry and tells me that she has to do so much and I don't want to help. I like to help but I can't do all the work.

Dayalan : I think that you should talk to your mother when she is not angry and tell her that you need some time to do what you like. She will understand. You must also try to help her because she can't do all herself too. That's what I do when I can't do a job my mum tells me to do, I talk to her and then she understands. Before she never used to let me see my friends or let me watch television or play cricket but now she lets me do these things. Once my friend teased me when I couldn't stay in school to play with them and I hit him. I felt bad after that.

The researcher attempted to ascertain whether the meaning given to certain relationships caused problematic relationships by posing the following question.

Researcher : Do you think that you were at times stubborn with certain members in your family after the divorce and this caused a problem?

Najina : Yes, my brother and sister feel that my mum always tells me to be in charge when she is at work and they tell me that I am not their mother and they won't listen to me. Once I hit my brother and he hit me back and then I didn't like taking care of him when my mother was not at home.

Therusha : I used to hate my father before when he drank and hurt my mother. After the divorce when he used to come to see my sister and I, I used to go into my room

and not see him till he went away. I used to feel like crying because I still loved him and I felt sorry for him but I blamed him for making us all feel miserable. I used to get mad with my small sister for seeing him but my mother told me that my sister needs to see him because she used to cry for him.

Researcher : Do you still feel that way?

Therusha : No, now that my sister and I go to Allateen I understand that my father is an alcoholic and he doesn't mean to hurt us and he loves us; also I must not blame myself for his drinking and violent behaviour. I miss him and love him a lot.

Kantha : I also hated my father when he left us and didn't want to see him. My mother told us that he didn't care for us because he had a girlfriend. When I was little I used to love him a lot and follow him everywhere. After the divorce I felt very sad, I cried a lot.

Dayalan : When my father left I was so angry with him I told my mum to move to another town so that we don't see him anymore. When he phones to talk to me I used to put the phone down and feel very bad after that. I miss him a lot.

Arulan : My father used to hit my mother when he was very angry, while they were fighting I used to push him away and once he pushed me back. Then I wished that something bad happens to him. Once I got angry with my mother for staying with him,

after he hit her. Only when he pushed her and she hurt her face badly she left him and I felt very confused and guilty.

Yugesh : I was also angry with my father but I was also mad with my mother because after the divorce she was so sad that she used to stay in her room and I felt very lonely. She used to get very moody and shout at me and say that I am like my dad , stubborn and lazy.

The researcher initiated discussion through the use of puppets and dramatisation of a situation where two siblings expressed their feelings regarding the various identities they now had, and their reaction and attitude to this situation.

Researcher : How many of you experience the same situation?

Najina : I have the same problem. I sometimes get confused about my identities, being a babysitter, mother figure, confidante and a daughter. I want to please my mum so that I act like a bully with my brother and sister. They didn't like that. I like listening to my mother and helping her with her problems about work and my father but I also wanted to be more like a daughter and sometimes I need her help too but I felt she had too much to do to help me.

Yugesh : My mother also told me that I am the man in the family after my father left. I got confused and guilty because I liked it when my mother treated me like a big boy and let me do a lot of work at home but I didn't like my father for leaving us. I hope

I don't become like him when I grow up. But I miss him and hope he comes back. He used to help me to mow the lawn and clean the house.

Dayalan : I also felt that way when my father left. My mother used to feel very sad, I was very angry with my father and didn't like doing any work that reminded me of him. My mum wanted me to do the chores that he used to do and I used to get angry with her for that.

Researcher : You feel that affected the way you perform certain roles, like being a gardener?

Dayalan : Yes, when I do certain chores that my dad used to do I think of him and get all upset and don't feel like doing that work anymore, even my schoolwork.

Through awareness and exploration of the behaviour of alcoholics, Therusha attributed new meaning to her relationship with her father. Through the insight gained through awareness, exploration and the attribution of new meaning her relationship with her mother became a more positive relationship which fulfilled her needs. Najina too experienced a better relationship with her mother through awareness, exploration and the attribution of new meaning. She gained insight into her parent's divorce and although she regrets it, accepts that they were making each other unhappy. She became aware of the feelings of jealousy she had for her father's girlfriend. She also became aware that she experienced a conflict of identities ("babysitting" and being "in charge") because it caused a problematic relationship with her siblings. Through the same process,

Arulan attributed new meaning to his relationship with his parents. He attributed new meaning to his mother's behaviour towards his father, realising that it was out of fear and contempt for her husband (after being physically abused) that his mother belittled his father. Yugesh initially experienced strong feelings of resentment towards his father but through awareness and exploration, he was able to attribute new meaning to this relationship; where he previously felt anger towards his father, he now experiences sadness and longing. Yugesh acknowledged that he was confused about being "the man of the house" because while his mother wanted him to accept the role he could not enjoy that identity as it reminded him of his father whom he yearned for and resented. Kantha had not yet come to terms with the conflicting emotions she experienced in her relationship with her father. She found it difficult to accept her father's "rejection" of her in favour of his girlfriend. Her mother's negative remarks about him increased her dilemma further. Her dependence on her father for reassurance and support of his affections for her is evident in her remark that she used to follow him around everywhere when she was little.

### SUMMARY

The children became aware of realistic and unrealistic identities and positive and negative relationships. Through the process of exploration, they realised that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to certain identities because of the negative feelings experienced towards those identities. Kantha, Najina and Dayalan found that they enjoyed a particular identity because they experienced a positive feeling in the associated relationships. Arulan, Kantha, Therusha and Dayalan enjoyed certain identities because they gave them pleasure, yet disliked others when they caused a conflict in their

relationships with certain people. Examples here are Najina who didn't enjoy her "babysitter" identity because it caused a problematic relationship with her younger siblings and Yugesh who experienced conflict in his "man of the house" identity because it reminded him of the father whom he simultaneously resented for leaving them and missed because he had helped him with chores. The children gained insight into the coherence between their relationships and their identity formation, and were consequently able to attribute more realistic meaning to their experience of interpersonal relationships and identities.

## STAGE 4 - CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR AND REASONING

### SESSIONS 9 AND 10

#### AIM:

These sessions were aimed at helping the members to make decisions about improving the quality of certain relationships, thus influencing the process of identity formation. The researcher also aimed at encouraging members to consider how to solve certain problems and to determine their role in the creation of a problem. In this way, the children would not be stimulated to make problematic relationships and attempt to initiate changes.

#### CONTENT

The children acknowledged that certain relationships could be improved and accepted or rejected with realistic expectations.

Therusha : I have already tried to improve my relationship with my dad, because I know that he didn't mean to hurt us and he still loves us.

Najina : My brother and sister felt that my mother only listened to me because I was bigger and that is why they did not get on with me. I will try to show them that I care for them and I will talk to them properly even if they are stubborn and naughty.

Kantha : I will try to improve my relationship with my mum and understand when she is in a bad mood I will be more helpful. My schoolwork needs to improve and I will

spend time doing it properly. I will even ask my dad when he visits to help me. I will try to be a better sister to my brother and play cricket with him when he wants to.

Dayalan : Now I try to be nice to my dad. When he phones I talk to him and I spend a whole day on a Sunday with him. My mother now understands that I need to see him too. I don't have to play with certain friends who don't understand me, like the one who teases me often.

Arulan : After the divorce my father tried to tell my mother he is sorry but she was still angry and that made me feel bad too. I will try to get closer to my dad but my sister misses him a lot and wants to see him. Before I used to get angry with my sister about this but now I understand that she loves him too. My father told me that he still cares for us and he is sorry for hurting my mum; but I still think about how he used to hit her and it is hard to forget that. She still doesn't believe he will change.

Therusha : Please give him a chance that you make you feel good too. Think of all the good times you had with him and that will help you to improve your relationship with him.

Yugesh : I sometimes wish my dad comes back but my mum tells me that she cannot live with him anymore. Before I used to get mad when she said that but now I know how she feels. I will try to show her that I love her and spend more time with her. I will also be a better person towards my dad too when he sees me and takes me out. I will ask him to help me with my maths.

The children acknowledged that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to their interpersonal relationships with siblings and parents. Najina and Kantha experienced problems with their siblings and Dayalan, Yugesh and Arulan, with their friends. Through exploration and verbalisation of their feelings, they came to understand the reason for the problematic relationships and could thus initiate an attempt to improve in these areas.

The researcher questioned the children about their identities and wanted to ascertain whether they accepted, rejected or wanted to improve on certain identities.

Researcher : Do you think that you have to accept a particular identity and improve on it?

Najina : Yes, I think we can improve certain identities. I have to look after my brother and sister when my mother is at work. I didn't enjoy that because they used to fight and not listen to me. But I have to learn how to make them stop fighting and listen to me. I let them watch a programme they like if they were good and that helps me to be a better babysitter.

Therusha : That is a good idea. Sometimes we don't like a certain identity like being in charge at home for everything, and that is hard, but you have to learn to improve yourself and tell yourself that you can do it. My mum told me that I became more responsible and caring after the divorce. So we must try and not give up.

Arulan : I know what you mean, like my schoolwork. I have to do better than my mother will be happy and my teacher too. When they praise me then I like to do more work and try to do my best. Even at home my mum told me to do a few chores (like two) everyday but do it properly.

Yugesh : I also must improve my schoolwork. Before I used to fright for the teacher because I shouldn't do my work but now I try and get help from my friend. My mum told me that it is very important to do well in school. She promised me a good present for me when I get a good report.

Dayalan : I do okay in school but I have to do my work better at home, like cleaning my room and sweeping the rooms. If I do it properly then my mum doesn't have to do it again. One day I tried to do the work neatly and my mum got surprised and the next day she got me a set of tennis balls.

Kantha : I also must try harder in school and be a better sister to my brother. That will make my mum happy. When Akash and I get on well he helps me a lot at home and we share the work and then we have a few chores to do.

The children indicated which identities they could accept and improve on. They explored various possible ways of improving a particular relationship so that they could also enjoy it. For example, Najina and Kantha tried to improve their relationships with their siblings so that they could enjoy their babysitter roles. Arulan and Yugesh tried to

improve their progress at school so that they, their mothers and teachers would be pleased, enabling them to enjoy their scholar identity.

### SUMMARY

The children acknowledged that they had made an attempt to improve certain relationships. Through awareness, exploration and personlisation they were able to attribute realistic meaning to significant relationships and evaluate specific identities realistically with regard to accepting and improving them. They all intended to improve in their significant identities, especially being a good scholar, thus making an effort to utilise their potential to the maximum. They had used their insight to initiate change in their relationships. By attributing new realistic meaning to problematic relationships, they were able to explore new and more appropriate ways to interact within them.

## SESSIONS 11 AND 12

### AIM

The researcher's aim was to observe how members acknowledged a change in their reasoning and reaction towards relationships and the formation of identities.

### CONTENT

After a brief summary of the previous session the members were reminded that they were welcome to discuss how the programme had helped them in their relationships and identity formation.

Generally all the members agreed that their reasoning and behaviour regarding interpersonal relationships and the formation of the identities had changed positively, because they were now able to see each relationship in a new way and understand why they experienced difficulties in forming certain identities with realistic expectations.

Much of this topic was also covered in sessions 9 and 10, especially concerning change-initiating strategies, their changed attitudes and behaviour (or the intention to change), and the evaluation of their various identities, and so these sessions focused rather on self-evaluation and self-actualisation.

Researcher : What do you think about yourselves now after participating in the programme?

Therusha : I used to feel very sad, angry and guilty and even blamed myself for my parents' fighting. I did not want to talk to anybody after the divorce. I was also ashamed of my father's behaviour; I thought that my friends will think badly of me. Now that I understand my father's problem, I know that I am not to be blamed for his drinking and for the divorce. I now feel good about myself and even my mother tells me that she is proud of me because I help her a lot.

Dayalan : I also used to blame myself for my parent's fighting because sometimes they used to fight about me. When my father wanted to take me somewhere my mother said no. I used to feel very sad and confused. Now I think I also know that my mother left my father because they cannot live together happily and it is not my fault. That makes me feel better. I am doing well at school and I try to do my best at home as well.

Yugesh : When my friends at school used to fight with me I used to feel lonely and left out and thought there was something wrong with me. My mother also was always busy and hardly spoke to me. I thought she blamed me for the divorce. Now I feel different and I will try to do my best at school too.

Najina : I used to feel sad and useless because I felt I couldn't stop the divorce but now after I help my mum a lot at home, especially after my grandma died, I know that I am quite useful at home and even good at school.

Arulan : When my parents used to fight I also blamed myself because sometimes the fights used to be over me or my sister. I used to feel very guilty and worried about that.

After the divorce my mother used to tell me to help her and I felt that I couldn't manage because I used to feel sad most of the time. I think now I can manage and know I can do better if I make up my mind about it.

The children's efforts to apply the change-initiating strategies resulted in success in several relationships. They acknowledged changes in their attitude, behaviour, their relationships with parents, sibling and friends, and in feelings about themselves. The discussion in the group and the responses in the worksheet (Appendix 11) regarding changed reactions towards attitudes, behaviour, relationships and schoolwork confirm this.

The items in the worksheet (Appendix 11) were read out and briefly explained as the children completed each one. Sufficient time was given to complete the worksheets and then responses were read out and discussed (with the permission of the children).

While discussing the worksheet on "Changes", all the children indicated that their attitude towards others had become more positive, understanding and tolerant. They reported that their behaviour had improved and they had become more positive, caring, loving and considerate. All the children stated that they enjoyed more positive interpersonal relationships and were convinced that their schoolwork would improve further. In evaluating their feelings about themselves, they acknowledged that they felt more positive, confident, and good about themselves and that they enjoyed their roles and found them challenging.

The results of the worksheet (Appendix 11) are analysed below :

CHANGES	RESPONSES
Attitude	All the children (6) felt more positive and understanding. Four children were more tolerant towards others.
Behaviour	All the children (6) indicated that they were more friendly, caring and loving, while four acknowledged that they were more considerate .
Relationships	All the children (6) indicated an improvement in their relationships with their parents, siblings and friends. Their relationships became more positive.
Identities	All the children (6) acknowledged that they liked and enjoyed certain identities.
Self-actualisation	All the children (6) indicated that they would try to improve their progress at school.

The children were thanked for their involvement, contribution, enthusiasm and honesty during the sessions. They were informed that they would be contacted two months later and interviewed. They were then treated to refreshments and provided with a token of appreciation which concluded the session.

### SUMMARY

All the children indicated changed attitudes and behaviour towards certain relationships (especially the parent-child and sibling relationships). By attributing realistic meaning to them, they explored new and appropriate ways to interact within them thus improving

the quality of these relationships. They were able to evaluate their various identities and identify which one to accept and improve on for their own self-actualisation. The children had come to terms with their new identity and could face the reality of being a single parent-child. They all indicated that they would utilise their potential at school to the maximum.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### **FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of the study was to compile and implement a support group programme for single-parent families to assist them to form realistic new identities after marital disruption. This chapter investigates whether or not answers have been provided for the initial statement of the problem. It contains the findings from the literature study, support group programme and pre- and posttest interviews, and discusses defects of the study. Recommendations and suggestions for future research are made.

##### **6.1.1 Statement of the problem**

The research question guiding the research was :

Will a support group programme based on relational theory improve interpersonal relationships and assist single-parent families to form new identities realistically?

Furthermore, will the programme assist single-parent families to

- \* become aware of their problems
- \* explore their problems
- \* evaluate their relationships and identities
- \* use their insight to initiate changes in their problematic relationships
- \* form new identities realistically
- \* attain self-actualisation and utilise their potential to the maximum?

### **6.1.2 Demarcation of the field of study**

Only Indian single mothers who had been divorced or separated within the previous two years and their children aged between seven and twelve years were selected for this study. The group was representative of the Indian community in a small coastal town in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **6.1.3 Aims of the study**

The aim of the study was to design and implement a support group programme for single-parent families in order to improve their interpersonal relationships and assist them to form new identities realistically. The programme was based on the relationship theory and included the stages of awareness, exploration, personalisation and change initiation.

## **6.2 FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE STUDY**

The most significant findings from the literature review are summarised below.

### **6.2.1 Effect of marital disruption on the relationships of single-parent families**

In chapter two, the literature review indicated that single-parent families experience problematic interpersonal relationships after marital disruption. The study focused on the single-parent families' relationships with themselves, their children or parents, peers, work or school and objects and ideas. It was found that families attribute unrealistic meaning to certain relationships and this caused a lowered self-concept and consequently affected their identities.

Other significant aspects emerging from the literature were :

\* Parent-child interaction

Many children receive less attention from their parents following the separation. Preoccupied with their own distress and efforts to cope with the divorce, many parents are less sensitive to children's distress and have little energy to deal with its manifestations. Moreover, many mothers work full-time and so are physically less available. Many children feel that they have nowhere to turn for support and need assurance that their parents still love them and are still their parents despite the divorce (Kelly and Wallerstein 1976: 51-58). The following researchers who examined parent-child interaction were referred to in chapter two : Gardiner 1979; Tessman 1978; Franke 1989; Smith and Smith 1981; Rubin et al. 1979; Hetherington 1979; Johnston et al. 1989; and Johnston 1990; Houser et al. 1993 and Farmer and Galaris 1993.

\* Parental conflict and parental alignment

Conflict affects the relationship between husband and wife, resulting in a state of emotional disequilibrium. High levels of parental conflict cause children to feel constantly depressed and confused. Children are often used as pawns, a source of information and carrier of messages. In so doing, children alienate themselves from one parent when they take sides (Hess and Camara 1979: 83). Various researchers examined parental conflict after the marital disruption and the effect on the children and their findings are reflected in chapter two: Riseman and Park 1988; Johnston 1990; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Tschann et al. 1989; Conley 1981; Barber and Eccles 1992 and Houser et al. 1993.

\* *Siblings*

Dissension and conflict among siblings are one of the problems facing single parents. The presence of siblings in the single-parent family has a direct and significant impact upon the development of single-parent children. Children need to establish some special mark of distinction in order to stand out and be different. This process is known as "sibling de-identification". The necessity of determining one's identity implies that a spirit of competition exists between siblings. This competition may well be for the attention and responses of parents who are the prime dispensers of affection and attention (Kelly and Main 1979:39-47).

**6.2.2 Effect of marital disruption on the identities of the single-parent families**

Various literature (Chapter 2, Section 2.2) examines the effect of marital disruption on single-parent families' identities and how this affects their interpersonal relationships. The literature reveals that families are traumatised by the marital disruption to such an extent that it affects their self-concepts. This influences the families' relationships with significant others and results in problematic and conflicting relationships. Role overload, role reversal, spousal conflict, parental alignment, parental unavailability and social alienation are problems that single-parent families experience.

According to many researchers (Parish and Dostal 1989; Pardek and Pardek 1987; Pasley and Healow 1986; Johnston 1990; Wallerstein and Kelly 1980; Schorr and Moen 1979; Hyper and Ryder 1986; Rashke and Rashke 1979; Bishop and Ingersoll 1989; Du Plessis 1989; Soenher et al. 1988; Beane and Lipka 1980; Wijnberg and Holmes 1992; and Goldberg, Greenberger and Hamill 1992), many single-parent families experience

negative self-concepts after the marital disruption which affects their evaluation of their various identities.

Many single parents experience role strain or role overload due to added responsibilities and this results in identity conflicts as noted by Morino and McGowan 1976; Factor and Stensank 1988; Hetherington 1981; Riseman and Park 1988; Stuart and Edwin 1981; Mahler 1989; Johnston 1990; Wijnberg and Holmes 1992 and Alessandri 1992.

Children from single-parent families are subjected to parental unavailability, parental alignment and parental conflict. These factors affect single-parent families' ability to form sound new identities after the divorce or separation. When parental alliances break down and emotional boundaries are blurred, children are induced to assume spousal or parental functions. This situation, referred to as role reversal, can overburden children and cause identity conflicts (Riseman and Park 1988; Johnston and Campbell 1988; Semchuk and Eakin 1989; McKane 1991; Bayrakal and Kope 1990 and Barber and Eccles 1992).

According to researchers such as Breger 1974; Johnston 1990; Breakwell 1988; Kitty 1984; Tschann et al. 1989; Bonkowski et al. 1984 and Glenwick and Mowrey 1986, there is a connection between role strain and the quality of individuals' interpersonal relationships. Due to these factors single parents and their children are not able to actualise their potential at work and school (Semchuk and Eakin 1989; Hargreaves 1991; Richards and Schmiede 1993 and Houser et al. 1993).

The literature reviewed failed to uncover a support group programme designed to help single-parent families improve their interpersonal relationships and form new identities realistically. Since it is clear that relationships are significant for identity formation, relational theory was considered as a basis for the design of a support group programme. After marital disruption single-parent families need to form new identities to adapt to their new lifestyle. This can be achieved by their realistic attribution of meaning (which results from awareness, exploration and assigning personal meaning) to the new situation, involvement and experience.

On the grounds of the findings in chapters two and three, and based on the theoretical foundation of relational theory (section 3.3.3), the aims, method and process of the support group programme were formulated. Relational theory is based on the categories of involvement, experience, attribution of meaning and self-actualisation. Through these categories relationships are formed. The support group programme is aimed at gaining insight into problematic relationships and initiating change in order to establish sound relationships and so promote self-actualisation. The steps of awareness, exploration, personal meaning attribution and change initiation were used to gain insight into problematic relationships and thus promote the aims of the support group programme.

### 6.2.3 Conclusions

The investigator drew the following conclusions based on the literature review :

- \* The quality of interpersonal relationships affects the process of identity formation of single-parent families.

- \* There is a relationship between the quality of interpersonal relationships of single-parent families and the identity formation of their members..
- \* Some of the problems experienced by single-parent families are related to identity.
- \* Single parents experience identity problems when subjected to spousal conflicts and inadequate parent-child interaction.
- \* Single-parent children experience identity problems when subjected to parental conflicts, parental unavailability, parental alignment and sibling rivalry.
- \* Single-parent families attribute unrealistic meaning to their interpersonal relationships and so evaluate certain identities unrealistically.
- \* A support group programme based on relational theory could assist single-parent families to improve their interpersonal relationships and form new identities realistically.

### 6.3 PROCEDURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME

To confirm the findings from the literature reviews, preliminary interviews (information interviews) were conducted separately for the research group of single parents and their children. The hypotheses of the study were then formulated from the responses obtained from these interviews. These hypotheses served as criteria for the design of the support group programme. The hypotheses were tested after the implementation of the programme. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the support group programme, pre- and posttest interviews were conducted individually with single parents and single-parent children. The pretest interviews were administered a month before the implementation of the programme and the posttest interviews two months after the programme to gauge

the longitudinal effect of the programme. The programme consisted of twelve sessions. The sessions were held twice weekly for each group.

#### 6.4 FINDINGS FROM THE SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME

Each hypothesis was considered during the implementation of the support group programme and tested thereafter. The findings of the empirical group investigation (the support group programme) suggest the following:

##### 6.4.1 **Members of single-parent families gain insight into the nature and quality of their involvement in their interpersonal relationships**

The single-parent families became aware of the feelings they experienced in each of their significant relationships as well as which relationships were conflicting or problematic. They became aware that although they experienced the same feelings in different relationships, the intensity of the feelings varied. For example, the children's attempt to evaluate the good and bad feelings in different relationships promoted the awareness that the intensity of feelings experienced is significant. The family members became aware that their feelings in various relationships were not shared by others in the group. Najina (L.L.C.) for example, initially had difficulty accepting that Therusha could be protective and caring towards her younger sister while she experienced a problematic relationship with her younger siblings. Shamlal (S.P.M.) also had difficulty in understanding how Ragini could be so sympathetic towards her ex-spouse who was abusive towards her while she (Shamlal) still resented her ex-spouse for his abusive treatment of her.

Insight into their experience was facilitated through awareness and exploration of their

feelings. For example, through exploration of their feelings Kerusha and Medisha (E.L.C.) became aware that they did not only have negative experiences in their relationships with their fathers.

Through awareness and exploration, the members were able to verbalise their feelings and this had a cathartic effect for some members like Fathima, Shamla (S.P.M.) Kerusha (E.L.C.) and Therusha (L.L.C.).

The hypothesis stated in section 4.4.2.1, namely, that family members will gain insight into the nature and quality of their involvement in their interpersonal relationships is proved correct.

#### **6.4.2 Members of single-parent families attribute more realistic meaning to their experience of interpersonal relationships**

The family members became aware of all the feelings they experience in their relationships and of the unrealistic meaning they were attributing to these relationships as a result of these feelings. Aftab, for example, experienced negative feelings towards his father because he had divorced his mother and married another woman, but through awareness and exploration of the feelings he had for his father, he assigned more realistic meaning to the relationship. He realised that he yearned for his father, still loved him and remembered the good memories he shared with him. Kerusha and Therusha (sisters) also had negative feelings for their alcoholic, abusive father because of his abusive treatment of their mother and for being separated from him, but through their own awareness and exploration of their feelings they attributed more realistic meaning to this relationship. In

the verbalisation of their feelings they indicated a positive change in the emotions experienced because of a better understanding of the causes of their fathers' erratic behaviour. Shamla (S.P.M.) also experienced intensely negative feelings towards her ex-spouse but through awareness and exploration of her feelings, she assigned more realistic meaning to the relationship.

The family members became aware of negative thought patterns, and through exploration and verbalisation of their feelings they were able to attribute new meaning to their relationships. This resulted in changes to the emotions experienced in the relationships. Kerusha, Vinolan, Aftab and Therusha, for example, found the expression of anger in their relationships with their fathers very cathartic. The exploration of their feelings resulted in their attributing new meaning to these relationships. They no longer experienced their fathers as aggressive, uncaring men, but also as people who needed help and who cared for their families.

The members, through exploration of the feelings experienced in all their relationships, identified negative thought patterns which were common to several relationships and became aware of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to relationships which were unrelated to the problematic relationship. Aftab, for example transferred the feeling of anger that he experienced with his manipulative stepmother into other relationships (with his sister and mother) and displayed aggressive behaviour in these relationships.

The hypothesis that single-parent families will attribute more realistic meaning to their experience of interpersonal relationships as stated in section 4.4.2.2 has been supported.

#### **6.4.3 Members of single-parent families gained insight into the coherence between their interpersonal relationships and their identity formation**

The single parents and their children were aware of problematic relationships (ex-spousal relationship, parent-child relationship, sibling relationship, non-custodial parent-child relationship and stepmother and stepchildren relationship). Each relationship was explored and the group members gained insight into the connectedness between their interpersonal relationships and identity formation. Vinolan and Dayalan resented their fathers for leaving them and being unavailable at home and they experienced problems with identity-related roles that reminded them of their fathers (for example, mowing the grass, taking out the bin and buying bread and milk.) Suneetha, Shamla and Fathima (S.P.M.) identified negative thought patterns in their relationship with their ex-spouses and blamed them for their having to work and so neglect the children. Their resentment towards their ex-spouses affected their role functioning as a provider, caregiver and head of the household. Fahima (E.L.C.) was initially afraid of her stepmother and wanted to please her by offering to babysit her stepsister whenever she visited so that she could still see and spend time with her father. However, through verbalisation and exploration of her feelings towards her stepmother she gained an insight into the nature of her relationship with her stepmother and her role as a reluctant babysitter. Najina explored her relationships with her siblings and realised that due to the problematic quality of these relationships, she couldn't perform her role as a babysitter adequately. Therusha, on the other hand, enjoyed a loving relationship with her sister (Kerusha) and thus enjoyed her role as a babysitter.

The hypothesis that single-parent families will gain insight into the coherence between their interpersonal relationship and their identity formation may be accepted.

#### **6.4.4 Members of single-parent families became aware of unrealistic meaning given to identities resulting in identity conflicts**

The single parents and their children became aware of the effects of role strain and role reversal on their interpersonal relationships. They explored the feelings that they experienced towards role strain and role reversal and, subsequently, of the unrealistic meaning they were attributing to their respective identities. Fathima, Saras and Shamla (S.P.M.) blamed their ex-spouses for having to work and this caused conflicts in identities such as caregiver, provider and head of household. Through exploration of the feelings experienced in their ex-spousal relationship they became aware of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to identities and realised that anger was being transferred to their relationship with their various identities. Vinolan, Dayalan and Najina resented their reversal of roles (being "in charge") because it caused conflict in their relationships with their mothers and siblings. Vinolan and Dayalan attributed unrealistic meaning to their roles because they reminded them of their fathers. They thus transferred those negative feeling experienced with their fathers to their identities "man of the house". They also identified negative thought patterns accompanying their feelings towards their mothers for subjecting them to role reversal. Najina and Vinolan, through awareness and exploration of their feelings towards role strain, were able to attribute new meaning to their identities as babysitters.

The hypothesis stated in section 4.4.2.4, namely, that members of single-parent families will become aware of unrealistic meaning given to identities resulting in identity conflicts has been supported.

#### **6.4.5 Members of single-parent families formed new identities realistically through involvement, experience and attribution of meaning in relationships**

The parents and the children became aware of the irrational meaning they attributed to their relationships and identities and through exploration, attributed new meaning to their relationships and identities. They identified negative thought patterns which were common to several relationships and became aware of the unrealistic attribution of negative meaning to identities which were related to their problematic relationships. Suneetha and Fathima (S.P.M.) transferred their feelings of anger towards their ex-spouses into their roles as caregiver, provider and head of household. Najina and Vinolan (L.L.C.) transferred their anger experienced in their sibling relationships into their roles as a babysitter and being "in charge". Fahima (E.L.C.) became aware of the unrealistic attribution of meaning to her identity as a babysitter because of her problematic relationship with her stepmother. Her fear of not being able to see her father caused her to avail herself as a babysitter and this in turn resulted in a conflict situation with her brother who accused her of babysitting just to please the stepmother. Although she enjoyed the babysitter role she attributed unrealistic meaning to it. The verbalising of feelings towards the various identities thus had a cathartic effect for some members. Fathima and Shamlal (S.P.M.) , Fahima and Kerusha (E.L.C.) and Najina and Therusha (L.L.C.) were able to assign new meaning to their identities and thus were able to

evaluate their respective identities realistically. The hypothesis stated in section 4.4.2.6 may be accepted.

#### **6.4.6 Members of single-parent families used their acquired insight to initiate change in their relationships**

The single parents and their children gained insight into irrational feelings in significant relationships and, as a result of the new meaning attributed, changed their behaviour. Kerusha, Fahima and Medisha ( E.L.C.) gained insight into their experiences through awareness and exploration of their feelings in their relationships with their fathers. This resulted in their attributing new meaning to their relationships with their fathers and thus a change in behaviour and attitude in their interaction with their fathers was initiated. The parents too, especially Ragini, Fathima, Shamlam and Suneetha, explored the irrational meaning which they attributed in their relationships with their ex-spouses and through exploration attributed new meaning. They then found it possible to initiate a changed and improved relationship. Vinolan (E.L.C.) and Arulan (L.L.C.), however, experienced difficulty in initiating a change in their relationships with their fathers due to the severe nature of the problems causing conflict (physical abuse of the mother and children). These children had been using irrational thinking for a length of time and thus found it difficult to initiate a change in their relationships with their fathers. However, with the interaction and support of the group, these children were able to make an attempt to attribute new meaning to their relationships, to change their attitude and behaviour towards their father.

The hypothesis that the single-parent families will use their acquired insight to initiate change in their relationships is supported.

#### **6.4.7 Members of single-parent families became aware of the need for self-actualisation**

The single-parents and children realised through the exploration of their feelings, meaning attribution and resulting behaviour, that they frequently transferred feelings in one relationship to other relationships. As a result, they behaved inappropriately in other relationships and created further relationship problems.

Through attributing unrealistic meaning to relationships they also attributed unrealistic meaning to their identities, especially when the quality of a particular relationship influenced the quality and nature of an identity. For example, Najina (L.L.C.) did not enjoy being a babysitter because she had a problematic relationship with her sibling and Fathima (S.P.M.) did not enjoy the provider role because she blamed her ex-spouse for her need to work and thus neglect her children. Due to this their self-actualisation was affected and they were unable to fully utilise their potential (at work or school). Their actualisation of their roles were adversely affected. However, insight into their experiences in relationships and identities was gained through awareness and exploration, and they were able to acknowledge that they could try their best at work or school, attribute realistic meaning to respective identities and make an attempt to actualise in each identity. The families gained insight into their experiences in problematic relationships and with conflicting identities and became aware that they needed to initiate changes in their relationships so that their improved relationships could positively influence their

identities. This would enable them to utilise their potential to the fullest at work or at school. The single parents and the children came to terms with their new identities and expressed an ability to face the social reality of being a single parent or single-parent child. They were aware of the need to actualise their potential to the fullest.

The hypothesis that single-parent families will become aware of the need for self-actualisation is also supported.

#### **6.5 FINDINGS DERIVED FROM THE PRE- AND POSTTEST INTERVIEWS OF THE SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES**

These interviews aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the support group programme.

##### **6.5.1 The nature of involvement in interpersonal relationships**

The results of the interviews (table 5.2.1 - 5.2.8) indicate the nature of the interpersonal relationships in single-parent families and the various feelings they experience within certain relationships. The following aspects of relationships unique to families experiencing divorce were examined : parent-child and spousal conflicts, parental alignment and availability and sibling rivalry. The parents and their children were aware of the various conflicting and problematic relationships and indicated negative feelings about the conflicts, parental neglect and unavailability and sibling rivalry.

In the pretest results the parents and children responded negatively towards parental neglect, parental unavailability, parental alignment and sibling rivalry but the posttest results reveal a more positive and realistic response. While the children are more

sympathetic about parental neglect and parental alignment, the parents feel regretful but proud about their children's support.

The posttest results indicate a positive change with respect to parental neglect, availability, parental alignment and sibling rivalry thus acknowledging that the support group programme had succeeded in this regard.

### **6.5.2 Attribution of realistic meaning in interpersonal relationships**

The responses from the interviews (tables 5.3.1 - 5.3.2) indicate that the parents and children experienced negative feelings (anger, frustration) after the divorce. However, a different response was obtained in the posttest interviews after the support group programme. The families indicate more positive feelings (happy and relieved) with regard to the marital disruption as compared to the negative feelings (rejected, depressed, angry and frustrated), expressed in the pretest interviews. The parents (mother) and children initially blamed the father for the separation, but in the posttest interviews they indicate that they blame the fathers only sometimes. With regard to parental alignment, in the posttest interviews some mothers (50%) stated that they ignored their children when they made negative remarks about the father while other mothers (25%) admitted to reprimanding their children for making negative remarks. When the children were questioned about parental neglect in the pretest interviews, many (50%) admitted that they felt sad and angry. In the posttest interviews, these children felt more sympathetic towards their mother's neglect. The children (66%), in the pretest interviews also acknowledged that their parents were now not easily available to them especially with regard to assisting them with their schoolwork and they experienced anger (60%) and

concern (16%) about this. Most of the children (80%) admitted that there was more sibling rivalry after the marital disruption.

### **6.5.3 Unrealistic meaning given to identities resulting in identity conflicts**

The results from the interviews (table 5.4.1 to 5.4.5) indicate that single-parent families do experience role strain and role reversal. The fact that 62% of the parents and 50% of the children reported a reversal of roles after the marital disruption confirm that this is indeed a factor. The families also experience role strain. 75% of the parents admitted that they found the demands of being a single parent too much to cope with, while 62% of the children also experienced negative feelings about their role strain. However, in the posttest interviews the mothers (75%) acknowledged more positive feelings (manageable and confident) about their role load. With regard to sharing their responsibilities with their children, the mothers (87%) indicated that they share their duties all the time with their children and they experienced concern and even frustration about this. While 83% of the mothers expressed intense, negative feelings (anger and frustration) about added responsibilities in the pretest interview, 66% admitted in the posttest interviews that they were happy and proud to share their duties with their children. The children (table 5.7.9) also initially believed that their parents expected them to do too much and they experienced anger and concern. They changed their attitude in the posttest interviews, where they (66%) indicated that they managed with their roles and felt happy and proud to assist their parents.

### **6.5.4 Relationship between interpersonal relationships and identity formation**

90% of the parents admitted that they experience spousal conflicts even after the divorce

and that their children were subjected to parental alignment (where the parent makes negative remarks about the other parent). All the children believed that their parents still had conflicts (arguments) and made negative comments about the other parent. The responses in tables 5.7.3 and 5.7.4 concerning the relationship between parental neglect and role strain in single-parent families reveal that all parents experienced role strain which caused them to neglect their children (especially in respect of supervising and assisting with their schoolwork). All the children believed that the marital disruption was responsible for their parent's heavier workload which resulted in their being neglected to some extent. The families were questioned about their feelings with regard to parental neglect and role strain. 100% of the parents admitted that they experienced negative feelings (such as anger and frustration) about their demanding new roles and their neglect of the children. The effect of parental alignment on role reversal in single-parent families was also examined. All the parents admitted that they had very often made negative comments about the father and expected their children to take on adult roles (such as, "man of the house", being "in charge", babysitter, housekeeper, etcetera). The children, too, indicated that they were subjected to parental alignment and had to take on adult roles and experienced strong feelings (anger, depression and concern), and felt anger towards their parents because of this. The relationship between role strain and family conflicts was examined and it was found that all the parents experienced conflicts and found the demands of being a single parent very stressful (table 5.7.10). The children indicated that they had had to take on added responsibilities which affected their relationship with their siblings, resulting in sibling rivalry (table 5.7.11).

### 6.5.5 Indication of changed and improved interpersonal relationships

From the findings derived from tables 5.3.1 to 5.3.11 it seems that single-parent families experience problematic relationships and that they had attributed unrealistic meaning to certain relationships due to associated negative feelings experienced. A significant difference in the responses obtained from the pretest and posttest interviews was noted. The following aspects were examined: parental availability (custodial and non-custodial parents), spousal and parental conflict, parental alignment and sibling rivalry.

While 62% of parents indicated that it was not important for the children to see their father regularly in the pretest interview (table 5.6.1), 75% of the parents in the posttest interview believed that this was important. The children experienced anger (83%) and sadness (33%) about not seeing their fathers regularly, however, in the posttest interviews 50% of them admitted that they were sympathetic towards their fathers for not being able to see them regularly. With regard to relationships with family members, 66% of the children stated that they enjoyed a better relationship with their mothers compared to the relationship with their siblings, however, the posttest interviews reveal a change in the children's attitude to the relationship with their siblings (table 5.6.4), acknowledging a better relationship after the support group programme. While 66% of the parents indicated that they experienced spousal conflicts often in the pretest interviews (tables 5.7.1), in the posttest interviews, 80% admitted that they experienced spousal conflicts sometimes. The parents also indicated a change in their attitudes to the ex-spouse which resulted in parental alignment. While in the pretest interview, 50% ignored their children when they made negative comments about the father, in the posttest interview 25% reported reprimanding their children for their negative remarks.

### 6.5.6 Self-actualisation in single-parent families

The single-parent families were questioned about their self-actualisation at work and school. While 66% of the children acknowledged that they only tried sometimes to improve their progress at school (table 5.9.1), in the posttest interviews, 66% admitted that they tried often to improve their progress. The information obtained in the posttest interviews (tables 5.9.4 and 5.9.5) reveal that both parents and children often tried their best in their specific roles, compared to their responses in the pretest interviews where they indicated that they tried their best only sometimes. This suggests that the support group programme helped the families to be more decisive in their attitudes towards the respective roles.

## 6.6 CONCLUSIONS DERIVED FROM LITERATURE STUDY, RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS AND SUPPORT GROUP PROGRAMME

The conclusions drawn from the literature study (section 6.2.3), the outcome of the support group programme, (section 6.4.1 - 6.4.7) the findings from the interviews (section 6.5.1 to 6.5.6) all support the hypotheses indicated in section 6.4.1 to 6.4.7. The general hypothesis, being *A support group programme based on relational theory will assist single-parent families form new identities realistically,* had also been proved valid.

The following conclusions can also be deduced in terms of the success of the support group programme, value of the programme to practitioners in the field and contribution of the research to relevant agencies (social workers, counsellors, educators etcetera).

The support group programme was implemented successfully mainly due to the fact that the investigator addressed the basic problems experienced by single-parent families-relationships. The flexibility of the programme and the special consideration given to the group members in terms of the nature of specific problems and the degree of their vulnerability after the marital disruption contributed to its successful implementation. The spontaneous establishment of rapport and genuine involvement during group discussions (which entailed verbalisation and exploration of respective feelings) bears testimony that the design of the programme addressed and accommodated the underlying needs and problems of the divorced single-parent families. Each member was made to feel worthwhile and special (thus boosting up the self-esteem) and the members were also encouraged to act responsibly and be accountable during their interactions with the people they encounter.

The self-concepts of the divorced single-parent families and the process of identity formation were adversely affected after the divorce and the families experienced problems in the various relationships. The programme based on relational theory assisted the families to improve their interpersonal relationships and form their new identities realistically.

The family counsellors, social workers and educationists could assist single-parent families by establishing support groups and conducting orientation programmes to help them be aware of the connection between their problematic relationships and their identity formation.

The findings from the research indicate that the various agencies (social workers, counsellors and educationists) need to readdress and re-evaluate the needs of the divorced single-parent families by identifying their specific problems and be more perspective, supportive and sympathetic. The support group programme outlines the specific steps that could serve as guidelines to assist the single-parent families to improve their interpersonal relationship and eventually initiate changes (in their relationships). This would positively influence their identity formation and also enable them to self-actualise (at work or at school).

#### 6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for further research :

- \* The present study could be repeated with preschool and adolescent groups of children in single-parent families to see if there are developmental differences in interpersonal relationships following separation or divorce.
- \* Longitudinal research with children of single-parent families from the period following immediately after the separation until adulthood to investigate how interpersonal relationships change over time.
- \* The present study could be implemented with subjects of different races and income levels to see if significant differences emerge across various class and racial lines.

- \* The support group programme could be implemented with non-custodial parents to see what effect intervention has on their interpersonal relationships and identity formation.
  
- \* Design, implementation and evaluation of a counselling intervention programme could reveal the effects of counselling intervention on interpersonal relationships and identity formation.
  
- \* Family group therapy sessions could be conducted where a family life educator may help family members to deal with problems.
  
- \* Single-parent family networks could be established where single-parent families may reach out to each other for support.
  
- \* Workshops for single-parent families may be established where professionals (including experienced counsellors, social workers, teachers and psychologists) may be approached to present educational programmes. The programmes need to be carefully planned and designed and should embody an application and problem-solving techniques flexible enough to address the unique needs of each group. It should be designed for the expression of frustrations and feelings while at the same time providing meaningful educational content.

- \* School as a support system could be encouraged. For this to occur,
  - the school needs to identify single-parent children and to be more sensitive and responsive to their needs. The school services and curriculum must be revised to better accommodate the identified needs of the growing number of single-parent children.
  - provision must be made for inservice programmes or workshops for teachers to sensitise them to their own values and possible prejudices regarding divorce and advise them on ways to help children who are experiencing unusual stress.
  - parents should be invited to information sharing sessions or workshops and other activities that include both single parents and school personnel.
  - the principal and teachers need to be responsive and receptive to the problems experienced by single-parent families so that a communication network between home, school and community may be developed meaningfully.

#### 6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- \* Due to the idiographic nature of this research, this study cannot claim that all single-parent families have problematic relationships and need assistance to form their new identities realistically.

- \* Since there exists no specific or standardised measuring instrument to aid in the exploration of the emotional lives of single-parent families, the investigator had to devise and implement her own support group programme. This results in subjective interpretation which may not be wholly reliable or valid.
  
- \* The results of the study may be questionable and further research may nullify the validity of this investigation.

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**APPENDIX 1****SINGLE-PARENT'S INFORMATION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS YOU CAN. THE INFORMATION WOULD ASSIST ME TO MEANINGFULLY IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME IN THE SUPPORT GROUPS SO THAT YOU WOULD BENEFIT.

Are you matriculated?

YES	
NO	

1. Are you working :-

FULL TIME	
PART-TIME	
NOT AT ALL	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER RESPONSE	

2. How long have you been divorced/separated?

MONTHS	
YEARS	

no response/other response

3. How do you feel about the divorce?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SADNESS			BITTERNESS		
ANGER			RELIEF		
SATISFACTION			FRUSTRATION		
NO RESPONSE			OTHER RESPONSE		

4. Who do you think was responsible for causing the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SELF			EX-SPOUSE		
CHILD/CHILDREN			OTHERS		
NO-ONE					

5. Do you and your ex-spouse argue in the presence of the child/children about certain matters?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

- 6.a) Do you find that at times the demands of working and being a single-parent too much for you?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

- b) How do you feel about this?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
HAPPY			SAD		
PROUD			WORRIED		
FRUSTRATED			NO RESPONSE		
OTHER RESPONSE					

7. Do you delegate certain household chores to your child/children?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

8. What chores do you let your child/children do?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
LAUNDRY			BABY SITTING		
COOKING			CLEANING HOUSE		
OTHER CHORES			NO RESPONSE		
OTHER RESPONSE					

9. a) Do you think that certain people treat you differently after the divorce/separation?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) If yes, explain further? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. a) At times do you "neglect" your child/children due to your added responsibilities?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) How do you feel about this?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
GUILTY			OFTEN		
HAPPY					
DEPRESSED					
WORRIED					
OTHER RESPONSE					

11. a) Do you at times speak "negatively" about your ex-spouse to your child/children?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) If yes, how do they react?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			CONFUSED		
FRUSTRATED			HAPPY		
DEPRESSED			DISAPPOINTED		
NO RESPONSE			OTHER RESPONSE		

12. a) Does the child/children talk openly about the other parent to you?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE			
OTHER RESPONSE			

b) If yes, what is your reaction, do you?

ENCOURAGE	
DISCOURAGE	
IGNORE SUCH DISCUSSIONS	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER RESPONSE	

13. Do you think that the divorce/separation has affected your child/children negatively in respect of :-

	YES	NO
a) their behaviour		
b) their performance at school		
c) their relationship with you		
d) Explain further _____ _____		
NO RESPONSE		
OTHER RESPONSE		

14. a) Do you feel that you need a form of support to help you deal with certain problems associated with the added responsibilities of being a single-parent?

YES	
NO	

- b) Would your children need such help as well?

YES	
NO	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER RESPONSE	

15. Do you think that you would be able to discuss certain matters honestly and freely during the support group sessions?

YES	
NO	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER RESPONSE	

16. What do you like about being a single-parent?

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---

17. What do you dislike about being a single-parent?

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---

18. a) Do you get involved in social or cultural activities? After the marital disruption?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE			
OTHER RESPONSE			

b) Explain further \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

19. Do you and your ex-spouse discuss matters concerning your child/children's general welfare?

SOMETIMES		ALL THE TIME	
ALL THE TIME		OFTEN	
NEVER			

20. Why did you volunteer to join the support group programme?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

NO RESPONSE

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 2****SINGLE-PARENT'S PRE AND POSTTEST INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

The purpose of this interview is to get information about your adjustment and inter-personal relationships, after the marital disruption to be able to assist you in the support group sessions. Please answer as honestly and accurately as you can, the confidentiality and anonymity of your response is assured.

1. How do you feel about the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			SAD			REJECTED		
FRUSTRATED			RELIEVED			HAPPY		
NEUTRAL								
OTHER, RESPONSE								

2. Who do you blame for the divorce/separation?

SELF		CHILD/CHILDREN	
EX-SPOUSE		OTHERS	
NO-ONE			

3. a) Do you and your ex-spouse still have arguments regarding the separation/divorce?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NOT AT ALL			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) If so why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

4. a) Has your relationship with your **FRIENDS**, **RELATIVES**, and **NEIGHBOURS** been affected after the marital disruption.

	YES	NO
FRIENDS		
RELATIVES		
NEIGHBOURS		

b) If so, how? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

5. a) Do you think it is important for the child/children to see the other parent as regularly as possible?

YES	
NO	

b) Explain why, \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

6. Would you rate your adjustment to a single-parent household as being:-

VERY DIFFICULT	
DIFFICULT	
NOT DIFFICULT	

7. a) Since the marital disruption do you think that at times you

	YES	NO		YES	NO
NEGLECT YOUR CHILDREN					
ABUSE THEM					
OVERPROTECT THEM					
ARE OVER INDULGENT			ARE TOO STRICT		

b) If so, how \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you at times make negative remarks about your ex-spouse to your child/children (especially when you are angry)?

OFTEN	
SOMETIMES	
NOT AT ALL	
OTHER	

b) Explain, why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

9. How do you react when your child makes a negative remark about your ex-spouse?

IGNORE THE REMARK	
REPRIMAND THE CHILD	
PRAISE THE CHILD	
Explain to the child that either parent should not be devalued. other response _____	

10. a) If the other parent is unavailable do you think that you are able to provide for your child's **PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, and OTHER NEEDS**.

	YES	NO
PHYSICAL		
EMOTIONAL		
OTHER NEEDS		

- b) Explain, further \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you try your best in the various roles you assume. (For example, provider, caregiver, head of household, housekeeper, financial manager, friend etcetera).

	YES	NO		YES	NO
PROVIDER			FINANCE MANAGER		
CAREGIVER			SINGLE-PARENT		
HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD			FRIEND		
HOUSEKEEPER					

- b) Explain, further \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. a) Do you find that at times, the demands of working and being a single-parent :

TOO MUCH FOR YOU	
NOT TOO MUCH	
COPING WELL	

b) Please elaborate \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you feel that when the demands are too stressful you tend to let your child/children share some of the adult responsibilities?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NOT AT ALL			
OTHER RESPONSE			

14. a) Do you delegate certain household chores to your child/children?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
GUILTY			HAPPY		
FRUSTRATED			PROUD		
SAD			WORRIED		

b) How do you feel about this?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
GUILTY			HAPPY		
FRUSTRATED			PROUD		
SAD			WORRIED		

15. How do you feel about the combined pressures of being an employee and a single parent?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
DEPRESSED			BITTER		
FRUSTRATING			MANAGEABLE		
OVERWHELMING			CONFIDENT		
OTHER RESPONSE					

16. Do you let your child be "in charge" at home when you are away?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SOMETIMES			OFTEN		
ALL THE TIME					
NOT AT ALL					
OTHER RESPONSE					

17. a) Do you think that the marital disruption has affected your child/children in some way?

	YES	NO
EMOTIONALLY		
PHYSICALLY		

- b) Explain further \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

18. Indicate the various roles you now have to assume in order of preference. (for example).

HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD		CAREGIVER	
PROVIDER		CONFIDANTE	
HOUSEKEEPER		FRIEND	

19. a) Which role do you manage the best?

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- b) Which role do you feel you cannot manage well enough?

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20. At times do you think that you cannot fulfill each role adequately enough? (For instance, do you think that you are good at one and worthless at the other)?

YES	
NO	

21. Do you think that your child blames you for the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SOMETIMES			OFTEN		
ALL THE TIME					
NOT AT ALL					
OTHER RESPONSE					

22. a) Do you feel that you need a form of support to help you deal with certain problems associated with the added responsibilities of being a single-parent?

YES	
NO	

- b) If so what kind of support do you need?

---



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23. How would you rate yourself as a single-parent?

VERY CAPABLE	
CAPABLE	
INCAPABLE	

24. Do you think it necessary to have a form of support group available to single-parent families?

YES	
NO	

- b) Why so? \_\_\_\_\_

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**APPENDIX 3**

**SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN'S INFORMATION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

*PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS AS HONESTLY AND ACCURATELY AS YOU CAN. THE INFORMATION WOULD ASSIST ME TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMME IN THE SUPPORT GROUPS MEANINGFULLY SO THAT YOU WOULD BENEFIT ADEQUATELY ENOUGH*

1. For how long are your parents divorced/separated? months/years

MONTHS	
YEARS	

2. Do your parents still talk to each other in a friendly manner?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER			

3. Do they have arguments about you in front of you?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER			

4. How do you think the following people reacted to the separation?

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Brother \_\_\_\_\_

Sister \_\_\_\_\_

No response/Other response \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you feel that your friends treat you differently, after the divorce/separation?

FRIENDLY		PROTECTIVE	
NOT FRIENDLY		IGNORE YOU	

6. How often do you see your other parent?

EVERY DAY		ONCE A WEEK	
WEEKENDS		ONCE A MONTH	
SOMETIMES		NOT AT ALL	

7. How much of time do you now spend with your parent at home (because of his/her extra duties)?

b) Does your father say unpleasant things about your mother?

LESS TIME	
MORE TIME	
NO TIME	
OTHER RESPONSE	
NO RESPONSE	

8. How does this make you feel?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			HAPPY			WORRIED		
SAD			DISAPPOINTED			FRUSTRATED		
NEUTRAL								

9.a) Do you have brothers and sisters?

	NUMBER	YES	NO
BROTHERS			
SISTERS			
BOTH			
NONE			
OTHER RESPONSE			

b) Do you fight now with your brother/brothers?

MORE	
LESS	
NOT AT ALL	
OTHER RESPONSE	

c) Do you fight now with your sister/sisters?

MORE	
LESS	
NOT AT ALL	
OTHER RESPONSE	

d) What do you fight about?

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10.a) Are you helpful towards your brothers/sisters?

MORE HELPFUL	
LESS HELPFUL	
NOT AT ALL	
OTHER RESPONSE	

b) Who helps your parent more with the duties?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SELF			EVERYONE		
BROTHER			NO-ONE		
SISTER					

11. Does your mother talk to you about some of her problems?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NOT AT ALL			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

12.a) Who do you think your mother blames for the divorce?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
FATHER			SISTER		
HERSELF			SELF		
BROTHER			OTHERS		
NO-ONE					

b) Who does your father blame for the divorce?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
MOTHER			BROTHER		
HIMSELF			SELF		
SISTER			OTHERS		
NO-ONE					

13. Who do you think was responsible for causing the separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
MOTHER			BROTHER		
FATHER			SELF		
SELF			OTHERS		
NO-ONE					

14. Do you think that you need some help to deal with some of your problems?

YES	
NO	

15.a) Does your mother tell you to be "in charge" at home while she is away?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) If no, does your mother tell someone else to be "in charge"?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

c) If yes, who? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

d) How does this make you feel?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
HAPPY			PROUD		
ANGRY			CONFUSED		
SATISFIED			DISSATISFIED		
SAD			WORRIED		
OTHER RESPONSE			NO RESPONSE		

16.a) Do you try your best at school after the separation/divorce?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

b) Has your progress at school become

BETTER	
WORSE	
THE SAME	

after the separation?

17. Do you think that your mother expects you to do too much at times?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER RESPONSE			
NO RESPONSE			

18. How do you feel being a single-parent child?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
HAPPY			PROUD		
ANGRY			CONFUSED		
WORRIED			SAD		

19. What do you like about being a single-parent child?

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20. What do you dislike about being a single-parent child?

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APPENDIX 4

SINGLE-PARENT CHILDREN'S PRE AND POSTTEST  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The purpose of this interview is to get information about your adjustment after the divorce/separation in order to help you in the support groups. Please answer as honestly and accurately as you can, your responses will be treated confidentially.

1. How do you feel about the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			REJECTED			RELIEVED		
PROUD			HAPPY			DEPRESSED		

OTHER RESPONSE (SPECIFY) -

---

2. After the marital disruption do you regard yourself as a

USELESS	USEFUL

person.

3. Who do you blame for the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
SELF			MOTHER			FATHER		
BROTHER			SISTER			OTHERS		
NO-ONE								

OTHER RESPONSE \_\_\_\_\_

4. Do your parents still have arguments when they meet regarding:

	YES	NO
VISITATION		
MAINTENANCE		
OTHER RESPONSE		
NO RESPONSE		

5. How does this make you feel?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			WORRIED			DEPRESSED		
HAPPY			RESPONSIBLE			OTHER RESPONSE		
NO RESPONSE								

6. a) Do your friends at school treat you differently after the divorce/separation?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SOMETIMES			OFTEN		
ALL THE TIME					
NEVER					
OTHER RESPONSE					
NO RESPONSE					

b) If yes, how do they treat you? Are they :-

	YES	NO
MORE PLEASANT TOWARDS YOU		
UNPLEASANT TOWARDS YOU		
MORE PROTECTIVE TOWARDS YOU		
LESS PROTECTIVE TOWARDS YOU		
OTHER RESPONSE		
NO RESPONSE		

7. How often do you see the other parent?

OFTEN	
SOMETIMES	
NOT AT ALL	
DAILY	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER	

b) Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

8. After the separation is your parent (at home) :-

MORE CARING	
LESS CARING	
NO DIFFERENCE	
NO RESPONSE	
OTHER RESPONSE	

9. Do you think that at times your parent : (Custodial) neglects you?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE			
OTHER RESPONSE			

10. Is your work at school, *BETTER* *WORSE* or *NO DIFFERENT* after the divorce/separation?

NO RESPONSE			OTHER RESPONSE		
-------------	--	--	----------------	--	--

11. a) Do you try your best at school?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE			
OTHER RESPONSE			

b) Why so? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

NO RESPONSE/OTHER RESPONSE \_\_\_\_\_

12. When you ask your parent for some help with your school work and she tells you that she is busy, how do you feel?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
ANGRY			SAD			CONFUSED		
HAPPY			SYMPATHETIC					

13. Do you think that your parent (custodial) does his/her best to provide for you?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE/OTHER RESPONSE			

14. a) Does your mother say unpleasant things about your father?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER			

- b) Does your father say unpleasant things about your mother?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
OTHER			

15. Does your parent sometimes let you take over a task that is too much for you to handle?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE		OTHER RESPONSE	

16. After the divorce/separation, do you think that you have more responsibilities at home than before?

SOMETIMES		OFTEN	
ALL THE TIME			
NEVER			
NO RESPONSE/OTHER RESPONSE			

17. How do you feel about this?

	YES	NO		YES	NO		YES	NO
HAPPY			PROUD			SAD		
ANGRY			WORRIED			CONFUSED		

18. Is your relationship with the following people, **BETTER**, **WORSE**, or **SAME** after the separation? Write the correct response next to each person.

MOTHER \_\_\_\_\_ FATHER \_\_\_\_\_  
 BROTHER \_\_\_\_\_ SISTER \_\_\_\_\_  
 NO RESPONSE \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER RESPONSE \_\_\_\_\_

19. a) Being a single-parent child, you might see yourself as a :-

	YES	NO		YES	NO
BABY SITTER			MOTHER SUBSTITUTE		
FATHER SUBSTITUTE			HOUSEKEEPER		
COOK			SCHOLAR		
FRIEND			BROTHER/SISTER		

Tick the relevant responses.

20. a) Which of the (above) roles you manage the best?

\_\_\_\_\_

b) Which of the roles you feel you are not good at?

\_\_\_\_\_

No response/other response \_\_\_\_\_

21. a) How do you feel after visiting your other parent?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
SATISFIED			DISSATISFIED		
HAPPY			SAD		
RELIEVED			CONFUSED		
NEUTRAL					

b) Do you feel disloyal to your parent at home when you visit the other parent?

SOMETIMES		
OFTEN		
NEVER		
NO RESPONSE		
OTHER RESPONSE		

22. How do you feel about being a single-parent child?

	YES	NO		YES	NO
HAPPY			PROUD		
CONFUSED			SAD		
ANGRY			REJECTED		
NEUTRAL					

23. How do you think you have adjusted after the separation?

VERY WELL		WELL	
NOT WELL ENOUGH		NO RESPONSE	
		OTHER RESPONSE	

24 a) After the divorce/separation do you feel more **NEGATIVE**, or **POSITIVE** about yourself?

b) Explain why \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

25. a) Would you like the group to discuss anything that interests you or bothers you?

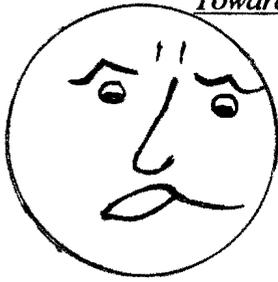
YES	
NO	

b) If so, explain \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

SINGLE-PARENT HANDOUT - FEELING FACE

Tick off the responses

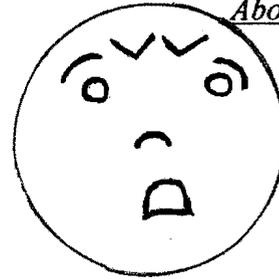
ANGER



Towards :

- Ex-spouse
- Children/ Sister
- Friends
- Others

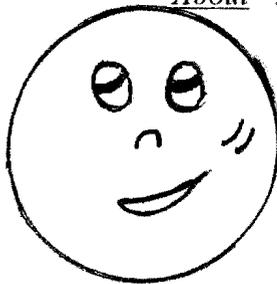
CONFUSED



About :

- Self
- Divorce
- Roles
- Children's behaviour

GUILTY



About :

- Divorce
- Working

SAD



About :

- Children
- Divorce
- Working

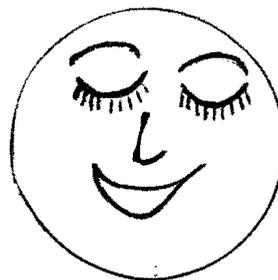
UNLOVED by Children



About :

- Divorce
- Working

PROUD



About :

- Children
- Divorce
- Self

ASHAMED



About :

- Ex-spouse
- Working
- Divorce

RELIEVED



About :

- Divorce
- Children
- Working

**SINGLE-PARENT HANDOUT**

**RELATIONSHIP, IDENTITIES AND FEELINGS**

The different role/identities I now have and my feelings about each:

*Parents are requested to tick off the appropriate feelings concerned next to each identity & relationship*

<u>IDENTITIES</u>	<i>FEELINGS</i>					
	<i>PROUD</i>	<i>HAPPY</i>	<i>CONFUSED</i>	<i>SAD</i>	<i>ANGRY</i>	<i>GUILTY</i>
provider						
caregiver						
housekeeper						
cook						
friend						
confidante						
single-parent						
head of household						

<u>MY IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS</u>	<i>MY FEELINGS TOWARDS EACH RELATIONSHIP</i>						
	<i>LOVE</i>	<i>ANGER</i>	<i>PRIDE</i>	<i>SYMPATHY</i>	<i>TOLERANCE</i>	<i>DISLIKE</i>	<i>GUILTY</i>
1. son							
2. daughter							
3. ex-spouse							
4. friends							
5. work							
6. school/teacher							

APPENDIX 7CHILDREN'S HANDOUT  
GAMES PARENTS PLAY

1. When I spend the weekend with dad, he asks me all kinds of questions. He'll say, "Does your mother go out at night?" "What does she say about me?" Then when I return home, mom asks the same kind of questions about him. I don't like getting caught in the middle. I feel like a spy.
2. Mom and dad are always saying things about each other and forcing me to take sides. I feel caught in a tug-of-war.
3. My mom keeps reminding me that I'm now the man in the house. She consults me on almost every decision she makes. Sometimes I like this because it makes me feel important. But then sometimes I think that I am still a child.
4. I like being with mom, but sometimes I feel more like the "mother" of the house. She expects me to clean the house, cook the meals and take care of my little brother/sister. I don't mind doing this sometimes, but I'm just a child myself.
5. Mom/Dad is always buying me gifts and taking me places. It's fun and I like feeling so important, but I wonder if he or she can afford it.
6. I don't know what's gotten into dad. He's different. He looks and dresses much younger than he is and he treats me like his buddy. I'd just like him to be my dad.
7. Mom takes me to movies, restaurants and concerts all the time. It's fun but I hardly have time for my own friends.
8. Sometimes I feel so trapped. Mom keeps telling me that she doesn't know how she'd get along without me. I wonder if I'll ever be free to live my own life.
9. I look forward to the times I can spend with dad, but often mom won't let me see him because his girlfriend is there. This really makes me angry.
10. Sometimes dad refuses to give mom any child support money just because she doesn't spend it the way he thinks she should. I feel I'm the one who loses out.
11. I hate it when mom and dad tell me how bad the other one is. I wish they'd leave me out of their fights.
12. Does your mom ever get angry when dad brings me home too early or too late? I seem to be the cause of all their fighting.
13. I like spending the weekends with dad since I don't see him during the week. But it also means I don't have time to spend with my friends. I wish he would understand.
14. Sometimes my dad doesn't even show up when he has promised to take me some place. This makes mom pretty mad. Yet I'm the one who gets hurt.

**APPENDIX 8****SINGLE PARENT HANDOUT- RELATIONSHIPS**

After the divorce I have more to do and this affects my different relationships.

	RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE DIVORCE		
	IMPROVED	WORSENEED	NO DIFFERENT
SON			
DAUGHTER			
EX-SPOUSE			
FRIENDS			
OTHERS			

How I reacted to each member because of my new identities (e.g. confidante, caregiver, provider, head of household).

	FRUSTRATED	ANGRY	RELIEVED	HELPFUL
EX-SPOUSE				
SON				
DAUGHTER				
FRIEND				

I expected my child/children to:

	spend more time with me
	be more helpful at home
	not to ask too much of me
	allow me to have time to myself
	allow me to spend more time with my friends
	listen to me

I can improve my relationship by:

		EX-SPOUSE	SON	DAUGHTER
	Listening to him/her			
	spending more time with him/her			
	showing that I love him/her			
	being more helpful			
	being more considerate/sympathetic			

**APPENDIX 9**

**THE SINGLE-PARENT HANDOUT**

**RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES**

*Tick off the correct responses*

My relationship with my ex-spouse affected my role as a provider, head of household, housekeeper.

My relationship with my child affected my role as a provider, housekeeper, cook, confidante, caregiver.

My relationship with my friend affected my role as a single-parent, friend.

After the divorce I have more, or less identities.

How do I cope with the added responsibilities?

- \_\_\_\_\_ try my best in all the roles
- \_\_\_\_\_ only do what I can
- \_\_\_\_\_ only do what I like
- \_\_\_\_\_ don't like to do anything at all.

**SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY HANDOUT**

**CHANGES IN MY FAMILY**

List the names of your family members below. After each name write the changes you have seen in each person since the separation or divorce. This might include changes in behaviour, disposition, dress, relationships, etc. Then tell what effect these changes have had on you.

<i>FAMILY MEMBER</i>	<i>CHANGES I'VE NOTICED</i>	<i>EFFECT ON ME</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

You cannot change others but you can make those choices necessary to change things for yourself. Is there anything you want to change in your behaviour, disposition, dress, relationships, etc.? What can you do to bring about these changes?

<i>CHANGES FOR MYSELF</i>	<i>WHAT I NEED TO DO TO CHANGE</i>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

APPENDIX 11PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S HANDOUTHOW I HAVE CHANGED

How have you changed:

Your attitude more:

positive	negative	understanding	tolerant
----------	----------	---------------	----------

Your behaviour is more:

helpful	friendly	stubborn	moody	considerate	caring	loving
---------	----------	----------	-------	-------------	--------	--------

Your relationship with your parents/children has/is

improved	worsened	same	no better	become positive	negative
----------	----------	------	-----------	-----------------	----------

Your relationship with your brother/sister has/is

improved	worsened	same	no better	become positive	negative
----------	----------	------	-----------	-----------------	----------

Your relationship with your friends/ex-spouse has/is

improved	worsened	same	no better	become positive	negative
----------	----------	------	-----------	-----------------	----------

Your schoolwork/performance at your place of employment has/is

improved	same	worsened
----------	------	----------

Your feelings about yourself has/is

improved	positive	negative	confident	unsure	good	bad
----------	----------	----------	-----------	--------	------	-----

Your feelings about your roles/identities:

enjoy	dislike	accept	reject	challenging
-------	---------	--------	--------	-------------

**APPENDIX 12**CHILDREN'S HANDOUTHOW I FEEL

SITUATION	POSSIBLE FEELINGS
I can't see mom/dad very often So many things have changed Mom/Dad behave differently	Anger
Mom/Dad doesn't care Nobody cares Nobody listens to me I don't fit in any place	Sad/Abandoned/Unloved
I am glad my parents are divorced and the fighting is over	Relief
People ask me about the divorce I don't know why my parents got divorced	Embarrassed Confused
I don't know what's happening to me I wonder what will happen to me/us Sometimes we don't have enough money I am afraid mom/dad will leave too.	Worried/Afraid
I wonder if the divorce is my fault	Guilt

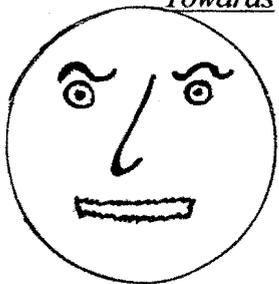
CHILDREN'S HANDOUT

FEELING FACES

Tick off the responses

ANGRY

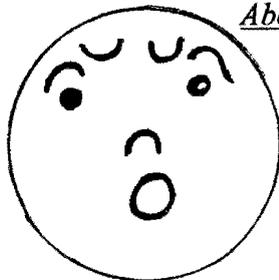
Towards :



- Mum/Dad
- Brother/Sister
- Friend
- School

CONFUSED

About :



- Divorce
- Mum/Dad
- Self
- School

GUILTY

About/towards :



- Self
- Mum/Dad
- Brother
- Sister
- Friend

SAD/WORRIED

About :



- Self
- Mum/Dad
- Brother
- Sister
- School

ABANDONED

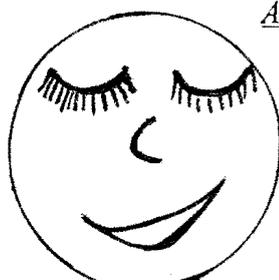
By :



- Mum/Dad
- Brother/Sister
- Friend
- Teacher

PROUD

About :



- Mum/Dad
- Brother
- Sister
- Friend
- School

UNLOVED

About/By :



- Divorce
- Mum/Dad
- Brother
- Sister

HAPPY

About :



- Divorce
- Mum/Dad
- Brother
- Sister
- Friend
- School
- Teacher

ASHAMED

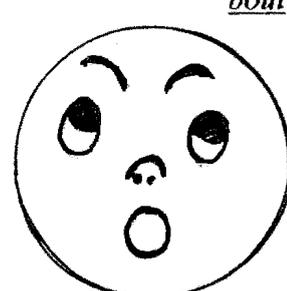
About :



- Divorce
- Mum/Dad
- Self
- Sister

RELIEVED

bout :



- Divorce
- Mum/Dad
- Self
- Sister
- Brother

## APPENDIX 14

### A STORY ABOUT A SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY

(Narrated to the children to clarify the concept of identities and roles).

#### HELPING MOTHER

A mother was recently divorced and she had two children a son, Vikash (9 years old) and a daughter, Prema (11 years old). One day she called them and told them that she wanted to discuss something that was very important. They sat next to her and this is what she said:-

MOTHER : Children, I need your help very much. You know that I have more to do now that your dad is not living here anymore. Can you tell me what duties I now have.

PREMA : You now have to work, take care of us, clean the house, cook, do the laundry, buy food and clothes.

VIKASH : Yes you also have to help us with our school work, and take us out during the weekend (like to the park or to the movies).

MOTHER : Yes, I am glad that you are aware of all my duties. Now I want to explain something to you, so listen carefully. When I perform these duties it means that I take on different identities, for eg. by going to work I am a provider, by cleaning the house I am a housekeeper, by cooking, I am a cook and I am a caregiver when I take care of you both and so on. Do you understand? Now I need your help so that I can manage with these new identities. Can you help me with some of the duties?

PREMA : Yes, I can help with cleaning the house.

VIKASH : I can buy the bread and milk every day.

MOTHER : Thank you very much. You both have to help me. When you help me with certain duties you also have new identities.

PREMA : You mean I am also a housekeeper, and cook because I help to clean the house and cook.

MOTHER : Yes, you both have new and different identities as well, like being a single-parent child, baby sitter, dish washer, daily shopper (for bread and milk) a school child (scholar) and so on. The mother thanked the children for listening and understanding and the children promised to help her as best as they could.

CHILDREN'S HANDOUT**A LOOK AT MY FEELINGS**

Indicate your experience of the following (*tick off the responses*)

I feel stressed out about :

\_\_\_\_\_ my parents' expectations \_\_\_\_\_ money  
 \_\_\_\_\_ pressure from my friends \_\_\_\_\_ school/teacher  
 \_\_\_\_\_ too much responsibility \_\_\_\_\_ not enough responsibility  
 \_\_\_\_\_ difficulty talking to mom/dad \_\_\_\_\_ my brother/sisters  
 \_\_\_\_\_ things my parents say and do \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes when the stress is too great, I \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes I cut myself off from others. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Whom do I cut off-family, friends, teachers? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What do I do/say instead of cutting people off? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sometimes I feel lonely, isolated and left out.

How does this feel? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What do I do when I feel this way? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

What are some positive things I could do/say when I'm feeling lonely, isolated or left out?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 16****THE CHILDREN'S HANDOUT****RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES***Tick off the correct responses*

My relationship with my dad affected my role as a scholar, housekeeper, "being in charge".

My relationship with my mom affected my role as a babysitter, housekeeper, cook, confidante.

My relationship with my brother/sister affected my role as a babysitter, brother/sister, mother substitute.

My relationship with my friend affected my role as a scholar, friend, single-parent child.

After the divorce I have more, or less identities.

How do I feel about these roles :- can manage, cannot manage.

How do I cope with the added responsibilities?

- |       |                                   |
|-------|-----------------------------------|
| _____ | try my best in all the roles      |
| _____ | only do what I can                |
| _____ | only do what I like               |
| _____ | don't like to do anything at all. |

CHILDREN'S HANDOUT

RELATIONSHIPS

*Tick off the correct responses*

	RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE DIVORCE		
	<i>IMPROVED</i>	<i>WORSENERD</i>	<i>NO DIFFERENCE</i>
MUM			
DAD			
BROTHER			
SISTER			
FRIENDS			
OTHERS			

How I reacted to each member because of my new identities (e.g babysitter, housekeeper, cook etc.)

	<i>ANGRY</i>	<i>RELIEVED</i>	<i>HELPFUL</i>
MY MUM			
BROTHER			
SISTER			
DAD			

I expected my mum to :

	spend more time with me
	give me less chores to do
	be more helpful with my schoolwork
	not to ask too much of me
	allow me to do what I like
	allow me to spend more time with my friends

I can improve my relationship by :

	<i>MOM</i>	<i>DAD</i>	<i>BROTHER</i>	<i>SISTER</i>
listening to him/her				
spending more time with him/her				
showing that I love him/her				
being more helpful				
being more considerate				
being more sympathetic				

**APPENDIX 18****CHILDREN'S HANDOUT****RELATIONSHIP, IDENTITIES AND FEELINGS**

My different role/identities I now have and my feelings about each:

*Tick off the appropriate feelings concerned next to each identity & relationship*

<u>IDENTITIES</u>	<i>FEELINGS</i>					
	<i>PROUD</i>	<i>HAPPY</i>	<i>CONFUSED</i>	<i>SAD</i>	<i>ANGRY</i>	<i>GUILTY</i>
babysitter						
shopper						
housekeeper						
cook						
friend						
brother/sister						
single-parent child						
scholar						

<u>MY IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS</u>	<i>MY FEELINGS TOWARDS EACH RELATIONSHIP</i>					
	<i>LOVE</i>	<i>ANGER</i>	<i>PRIDE</i>	<i>SYMPATHY</i>	<i>TOLERANCE</i>	<i>GUILTY</i>
1. mum						
2. dad						
3. brother						
4. sister						
5. friend						
6. school/teacher						

**CHILDREN'S HANDOUT**

**CHANGES IN MY LIFE**

*Tick off the correct responses*

1. Since my parents' separation/divorce, I have experienced the following changes in my life:

\_\_\_\_\_ two parent family \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with mom/dad  
\_\_\_\_\_ family vacations \_\_\_\_\_ familiar family routines  
\_\_\_\_\_ friends \_\_\_\_\_ money  
\_\_\_\_\_ school \_\_\_\_\_ different home  
\_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

2. I have noticed the following changes in myself:

\_\_\_\_\_ a tendency to worry about my parents  
\_\_\_\_\_ sick or not feeling well more often than usual  
\_\_\_\_\_ a need to take care of mom/dad  
\_\_\_\_\_ withdrawing from my friends  
\_\_\_\_\_ increased fighting, clowning and/or disrupting the class  
\_\_\_\_\_ resignation from school activities  
\_\_\_\_\_ choosing different friends  
\_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

3. I have tried to get my parents together again by:

- \_\_\_\_\_ promising to do better in school
- \_\_\_\_\_ taking on more responsibility at home
- \_\_\_\_\_ praying but God doesn't seem to listen
- \_\_\_\_\_ behaving badly
- \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Some things I would like to change in my life:

- \_\_\_\_\_ the way I feel about myself
- \_\_\_\_\_ the bad feelings I have about my parents' divorce
- \_\_\_\_\_ the way mom and dad talk about each other
- \_\_\_\_\_ the way I get caught in my parents' disagreements
- \_\_\_\_\_ my relationship with my friends
- \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_