



Vol. 4 | Social and development concerns in Africa (c)

Vol. 4 Article 1/7 | December 2018

Copyright © 2018 The International Journal of Social and Development Concerns (IJSDC) All Rights Reserved

(An International Publisher for Academic and Scientific Resources)

CHILD UPBRINGING AND FAMILY STABILITY IN BLENDED HOUSEHOLDS. A CASE OF GIHOSHA COMMUNE, BUJUMBURA PROVINCE, BURUNDI

Authors: ¹Carine Irankunda, ²Shem Mwalwa and ³Michael Sitawa

Corresponding author: Carine Irankunda. Carinekunda5@gmail.com

^{1,2&3} The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, P.O BOX 62157 00200, Nairobi, Kenya

Website: www.cuea.edu

Chief Editor

Web: www.ijfdc.org

Email: info@ijfdc.org

Editing Oversight

Impericals Consultants

International Limited

Abstract: *Child-upbringing in blended households has the potential to be remarkably complicated compared to traditional families. Important factors contributing to this complexity in blended households is the conflicting emotions, challenges of acceptance, rejection, ambiguity of identity, and poor parent -child relationships. Therefore, there is a need to question whether family stability could be affected by the way children are raised in blended households. For the purpose of answering whether child-upbringing impacts on family stability in blended households, the research was conducted as a qualitative study. The effects of child-upbringing on family stability were investigated by using interviews guides generated from research questions. Structured interviews were conducted by using video calling, audio recordings, as well as notes taking. The total sample size comprised of 40 respondents from parents and children living in blended households. The data was analysed using content analysis, the information was organized into themes. The findings indicated that child upbringing in blended households does indeed affect family stability. However, to mitigate the negative influence of child upbringing, this study recommended that there should be policies and programs that deals with blended households issues. Additionally, all parties involved in blended households should adopt good communication skills, they should build a loving, peaceful and healthy parent –child relationships, they should love and respect each other so that they can live in harmony .Children should have a loving and a peaceful place they can call home.*

Key terms: *Child upbringing, family, blended households, family stability*

1.1 Study background

Child upbringing can be defined as a process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. It entails providing education, shelter, nourishment, and protection (Capetta, 2013). Hence, it is the duty of parents to bring up their children in an atmosphere of peace, encouraging confidence and in an environment free from threat and abuse. Parents are also expected to support learning, teach social skills and help spiritual development, as well as creating ethical value systems with social norms that contribute to the child's beliefs, culture and customs (Bulus, 2013). For this reason, the way a child is raised makes a huge impact on the family stability (Carlson, 2012). In this, looking family stability can be referred to the consistency of activities and routines (Walters, 2014).

Across the world, the proportion of children living with blended household has increased dramatically due to high rates of divorce, remarriages, single parenthood, cohabitation among other factors (Coleman, 2012). It is estimated that more than 2.3 billion households are blended households (Kramer, 2009). Blended households are created through remarriage or repartnering, after there is a divorce, death, or abandonment, are described as blended families. They consist of a parent, a step-parent, any children brought into the family by either party, or any subsequent children. Usually, by their nature, these families have difficulty with boundaries, which could lead to a stressful life for everyone involved (Carlson & Robey, 2011). There are additional stresses that parents and step-parents must work through as they initiate a new life together, which traditional marriages may not face. Parents have issues of raising the children, which may lead to problems in the family (Amato, 2000).

In Africa, there is an increase in blended households due to rising incidences of divorce, single parenthood, and other changing family patterns (Jakob, 2006). Some Studies have shown that children raised in blended households in Africa are hundred times likely to be abused and molested by step-parents than in nuclear families because parents tend to be less tolerant and less receptive to interactions with those children (Cromdal, 2012). In Namibia, Runda (2011) found that stepchildren go through discriminatory treatment within the home in terms of access to food, affection and unequal burden of household labour which often lead to family instability because the kind of care and attention children receive from their parents affect family stability either negatively or positively (Hetherington, 1992).

In Burundi, family stability has been affected by civil wars and political instability. A significant number of family networks have been torn apart (World Report, 2015). However, there is lack of data on the effect of child upbringing on family stability in blended households and therefore, this study was very important as it sought to make contributions to the body of knowledge in Burundi by investigating the child upbringing and family stability in blended households .

1.2 Statement of the problem

Children raised in stable nuclear families with two biological parents present are loved, cared for and protected (Coleman, 2001). However, due to high increase of divorce, remarriages and single parenthood, children are being raised in blended households (Valerie, 2011). Thus, disagreements over issues on how a child or children from previous relationships should be raised may arise between biological and step parents, thereby causing instability in the family (Karen, 2006). With more children being raised in blended households it is commonplace that parents are bound

to have different opinions on how children should be raised (Santrock, 2000). An important concern is that nobody knows how child upbringing is affecting family stability in blended households. This study therefore, sought to address this gap in the existing body of knowledge on child upbringing and family stability in blended households focusing on Burundi.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to find out the effects of child upbringing on family stability in blended households.

Specific objectives are:

- a) To find out how the various modes of discipline affect family stability in blended households in Gihosha, Bujumbura, Burundi.
- b) To investigate how the provision of the basic needs affect family stability in blended households in Gihosha, Bujumbura, Burundi.

1.4 Justification of the Study

Families have long been recognized as a building block of society, thus, the stability of the community depends on the stability of the families (Corbett, 2004). Hence a good child upbringing is important to family stability because lessons and principles learnt from parents will result in a stable family as well as stable society (John, 1997). However, child upbringing has become an issue in the contemporary society. Some parents have neglected this basic responsibility thereby exposing their children to danger and blighting their future. The effect of child upbringing on family stability in blended households is seldom addressed in the normal routines of policy and program development. This study therefore, sought to create more awareness on the impact of child upbringing on family stability in blended households in order to strengthen interactions between children and parents in blended households as well as contribute to the existing body of knowledge dedicated to breaking the cycle of family breakdown across generations. The more we learn about blended households, the better we can understand the needs of children and offer support to stepparents in the child's upbringing in order to improve family stability. Additionally, there is a limited research that has been done to understand the effects of the child upbringing in blended families focusing on Burundi. Therefore, lack of data has awoken the researcher a deep concern for this research in Burundi.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are of a great importance having both theoretical and practical value. The theoretical value lies in the fact that it made important contributions to the limited body of knowledge on the effect of child upbringing on family stability in blended households in Bujumbura, Burundi. It also provided Burundians with local knowledge. The practical value of this study lay in the fact that it would serve as a foundation for the law makers to introduce a blended family Law that guide the interactions between blended households members because blended households face unique challenges that need a unique attention. The findings might also help the government, religious and non-government agencies to encourage high quality child-upbringing to avoid problems associated with a poor upbringing such as family instability. To counselors, psychologist and social workers, the findings will provide an understanding of the blended households operations and behavioral patterns to help parents and children cope better with the negative attitudes within the family. Lastly, the findings may motivate other researchers from Burundi to undertake future research in this area in other towns.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The following is a diagrammatic illustration of the conceptual framework. It depicts the relationship between the independent variable, dependent variable and the intervening variable.

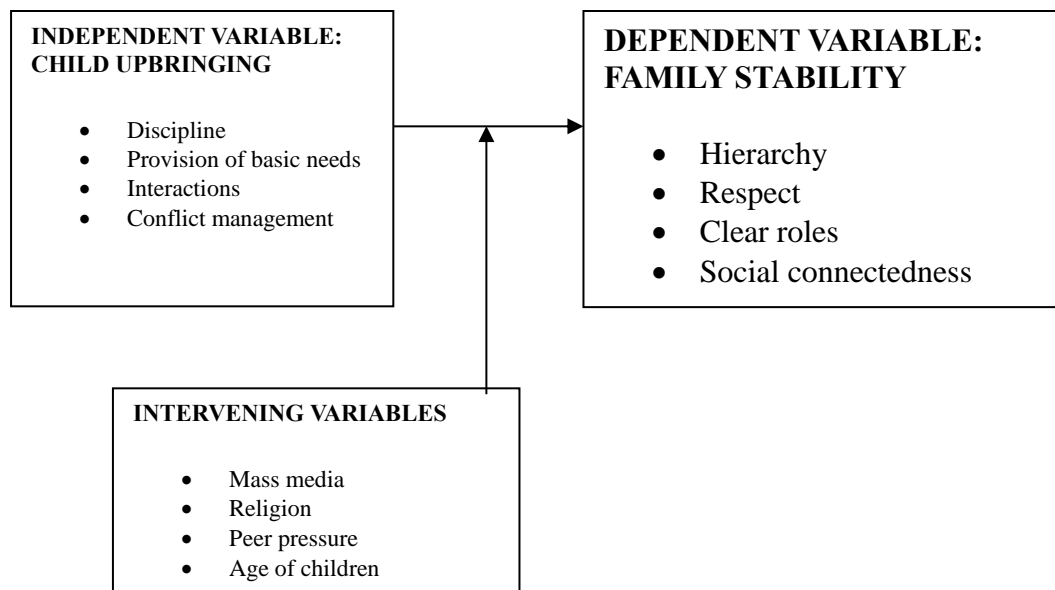


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The above conceptual framework illustrates the link between child upbringing and family stability. According to Gatara (2010), an independent variable is a factor that determines the phenomenon we wish to explain while the independent variable represents the phenomenon to be explained. The independent variable for the study was child upbringing. Its indicators were discipline, basic provision of needs, interactions, conflict management. The dependent variables are family stability. Its indicators are hierarchy, respect, clear roles, and social connectedness. The intervening variables for the study will be mass media, work, religion, age, peer pressure.

1.7 Review of literature

Modes of discipline and family stability in blended households

Discipline can be a huge issue in blended households, this is because the very fact that blended households exist suggests that something negative, a death, divorce or separation has happened, and that is sure to affect children's behaviour (Ricochet, 2017). Discipline in a traditional family is tough, but in blended households step-parents face even greater challenges, thus affect the family stability. Family psychologist Patricia (2016) reported that step kids are constantly testing the boundaries of the new family dynamic and are likely to push some buttons. This may be because stepfathers are apparently less involved with discipline and control but more involved in positive social behaviour with children than fathers in intact families" (Blais & Tessier, 1990). A

study by Clingempeel, Brand & Levoli (1984) that was purposed to assess the step-parent/step-child relationship in stepmother and stepfather families revealed that for 9 to 12 year-old families were more problematic than step-parent-stepson relationships. Important differences between a parent-child relationship and a step-parent to stepchild relationship involve discipline and affection. Step-parents tend to exert less control over and are less toward their stepchildren than are biological parents with their children warm (Amato, 1987; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Fine and Kurdek (1994) examined differences in parenting cognitions between fathers and stepfathers and between mothers and stepmothers and found that they “have differing ‘parenting scripts’ regarding how often they themselves should, and how often typical parents do, express warmth and control. Many blended families run into issues when it comes to different discipline styles. One parent may be lenient, while the other one is very strict

Provision of basic needs and family stability

Collins (2015) argues that the importance of provision of basic needs cannot be understated; the consequences of lack of play, a warm, loving and stable environment coupled with parental involvement can be dire to family stability. On the other hand, a stable environment and direct parent involvement in the upbringing of a child are crucial for stable families. Attachment which is a deep and enduring emotional bond that a child develops towards a primary and consistent caregiver greatly influences the psychosocial and cognitive development of a child. Although the finding of this study can be mostly attributed to lack of knowledge on development requirements of children, one cannot rule out economic and societal strains of modern day life as factors influencing the prioritization of these requirements (Walter, 2013). Knowledge alone does not automatically influence behaviour. The knowledge has to interact with an enabling environment in order for it to result in actual positive behaviour. The associations between levels of parental warmth and support with family stability have been well established in the parenting literature (Mooney, 2014). Warmth is the degree to which the child is loved and accepted, usually measured by items such as how often the mother or father listened carefully to their child’s point of view and helped them with something important. Higher levels of parental warmth are associated with significantly family stability (Marini, 2015).

Theoretical framework

Bowen family systems theory

Bowen family systems (1913–90), is a theory of human behavior that views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. It is the nature of a family that its members are intensely connected emotionally. Often people feel distant or disconnected from their families, but this is more feeling than fact. Families so profoundly affect their members’ thoughts, feelings, and actions that it often seems as if people are living under the same “emotional skin.” People solicit each other’s attention, approval, and support and react to each other’s needs, expectations, and upsets. The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person’s functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others.

Cinderella effect

The Cinderella effect was first summarized in the early 1970s by P. D. Scott, a forensic psychologist who made a shocking observation about a small sample cases in which a child was killed out of anger: 52 percent of them were committed by the child’s step-father. Further

evidence compiled from official reports of child abuse cases and homicides, clinical data, and victim reports showed that non-biologically related parents are up to 100 times more likely to be abusive than biological parents. A stepfamily parenting style came to be. The strongest evidence supporting the Cinderella effect appears in households with both genetic and stepchildren. In two separate surveys of abuse cases, parents in such households exclusively targeted their stepchildren with abusive behaviour: 90 percent in one survey, 86 percent in the other. Studies have also suggested that stepparents are less likely to display positive behaviours toward their children than biological parents, including investing time in those children's education and do have a different and defining step family parenting style.

1.8 Study findings

Mode of discipline and its effect on the relationship between parents

The study also sought to find out whether the modes of discipline used on children in blended households tend to have an effect on the relationship or harmony between the parents. The interviewees were asked to give their observation on the above. The findings indicated that biological parents did not agree with the stepparents' choices of disciplining styles. Hence, their differing views on how children should be disciplined often led to misunderstandings. For this reason, the biological parents were of the opinion that their spouses are very abusive towards their children in the name of discipline. On the other hand, the stepparents think that their spouses want to give a bad upbringing to their children by not spanking or insulting them when they make a mistake. Therefore, quarrels over how children should be brought up becomes a daily struggle in blended households due to the conflicts and tensions it causes between parents.

Shana (2018) agrees with the findings that relationships in blended households get increasingly complex over how children should be disciplined. Many parents fight; others divorce over differences in their parenting styles. In cases where parents do not file a divorce, they often end up ensnared in arguments about whose parenting style is right. Therefore, issues around the discipline of the children tend to agitate parents.

The provision of the basic needs and family stability

The study sought to find out the kind of basic needs parents provide for their children in blended households. They were therefore asked to give information. The findings of the study indicates that shelter, clothing, food, education are provided for the children. However, other children's basic needs such as love, affection, warmth are neglected yet they are necessary to facilitate mental, emotional, and physical growth. Physical basic needs sustain life while emotional basic needs such as love and affection promote human relationships.

Though the respondents admit that physical needs are provided, the condition and degree with which the needs are provided are worrying. For example, most stepchildren accept that sometimes they eat food that is left by their siblings; others are underfed. Furthermore, when biological children eat meat, bone are left for stepchildren to crack. Stepparents take their children out to eat good food while stepchildren stay at home to do the chores. When stepchildren get sick, they are taken to poor hospitals whereas biological children are taken to best hospitals. Stepchildren are taken to the cheapest public schools around, bought the cheapest

clothes for a lame purpose of reducing expenses.

Love and affection are vitally an integral part of family stability. Unfortunately children in blended households have most likely very little or no experience of tender love and affection by their parents. Most parents do not acknowledge the emotional needs of children. As a result, even with the provision of physical needs, most children remain miserable and emotionally starved. In this regard, the findings show that though the basic needs are provided in most cases, the qualities of the basic needs are not the best. More so, other basic necessities such as emotional needs seem absolutely out-of-the-way. Obviously, this is hurtful to children. Undoubtedly, it is clear how stepchildren are treated unfairly, discriminately, and differently in terms of basic care. Therefore, an emotional harm to the voiceless children who long for the protection of their biological parents calls for an attention.

1.9 Conclusions

In regard to the modes of discipline used to discipline children directly affect family stability in blended households. 100 per cent of the respondents reported that step-parents use severe physical punishment against children such as spanking, beating, and verbal abuse such as ridicule, shaming, and insults. As a result, those modes of discipline cause parents to argue and fight often. Frequently, the biological parent thinks the children are over-punished by their stepparent and the stepparent thinks that the biological parent is siding with the children. Hence, instead of working together as a team, they work against each other. These disagreements create unpleasant marital discord. Sometimes parents' fights over discipline get out of control that they yell at each other, use many unkind words such as you are an irresponsible partner, and as well as threats to break up or divorce .

In regards to basic needs such as clothing, shelter, food are provided. However when biological parents spend money on their children such as buying new clothes, paying school fees, buying gifts for their children, taking a child for an outing, supporting a child emotionally, stepparents get angry at their spouses as a result, this generates conflicts and disagreements. Meanwhile, most biological parents provide their children's basic needs in secrecy. They do not want their spouses to find out because if they do, it triggers disagreements and conflicts. Furthermore, stepparents display favouritism towards their biological children in terms of the provision of basic needs. In most cases, parents often discuss the unequal treatment among their children which typically fuels problems in the family. In this regard, 100 per cent of the respondents uphold that the provision of basic needs affect family stability in blended households.

1.10 Recommendations

From the study findings, this research recommended the following ways forward in relation to child-upbringing and family stability in blended households in Gihosha Bujumbura, Burundi. It is common knowledge that families are the foundation of communities and play a critical role in the well-being of all its members. Hence, such structures can only thrive if children are valued and have a strong sense of belonging in their individual units. However, in the case of blended families children are mostly rejected, maltreated, sexually harassed, etc. Thereby leading to an increase in social delinquencies which places undue burden on society and the law enforcement arm of government. To this end, the study calls on the government of Burundi to put in place actionable policies that would protect the rights of step-children in blended families and initiate

programs geared towards educating its citizens about the consequences of the maltreatment and neglect of such persons by their step-parents. With specific emphasis on the need to love and care for children which must be closely monitored at the local levels by government authorities such as local chiefs.

The study findings further highlighted that physical punishments and verbal abuse were some of the approaches employ by step-parents in chastising their step-children. In view of the fact that physical punishment is a serious public health issue globally which has devastating consequences on health and the society at large, the study calls on practitioners (non-governmental organizations) and donor agencies to adopt programs and structures that caters to the psychological and emotional well-being of neglected children. Additionally, the study recommends the need for practitioners (non-governmental organizations) and donor agencies to provide mental health support to the victims on the on hand as well as their abusers (step-parents) on the other with the view of ensuring emotional health and well-being as well as attempting to stamp out this dangerous practice which is rapidly becoming a norm in many household with blended families.

An investigation into the various modes of discipline used by parents in disciplining their step-children revealed that such modes of discipline can be a major source of conflicts and tensions within the family structure. In a bid to curtail such negative energy within the family set-up, study calls on step-parents to refrain from using corporal punishment and verbal abuse as viable disciplinary strategies. As physically chastising a child is not only wrong but can cause severe emotional instability which can last over a protracted period. In view of the aforementioned, the study recommends , the need for parents to endeavour to use alternative forms of discipline such as negotiation, rewarding good behaviour such as showing appreciation when children performs well and/or when they exemplify praise worthiness. It is extremely important to stress that parents need to focus their attention on the positive behaviour of their children regardless of their status (biological or step-children). As such emphasis on positive behaviour in children tend to reinforce even better outcomes.

The study further highlighted that in order to avoid unnecessary tensions and disagreements within families and particularly with the step-parents; both parents should work together in establishing rules, expectations and disciplinary guidelines. And that such action must be executed as and when needed by the biological parents in a measured and proportionate manner with the view of keeping the dignity of the child in intact. The study also cautioned parents to remain cognizant of the fact that discipline is not meant to demoralize children or make them feel less about themselves. But rather, one that is intended to improve and enhance a child's sense of self and help a child become morally assured, self-motivated, self-efficacious, and determined. It is intended to make children morally upright so as to be able to meaningfully contribute to society. Lastly, families run the risk of bringing-up children who are filled with hate and anger if they continuously rely on utilizing harsh forms of disciplined as a way of reprimanding their children. Efforts should be devoted by parents in establishing open and honest two-way communication which will enhance better understanding and teachings about the complexities of life and how to better withstand its challenges.

In regard to the provision of basic needs, it was recommended that children need more than basic needs such as emotional support, love, affection as well as care and developmental needs for

them to become fully functioning members of the society. As a result, one of the most important needs beyond basic needs for stepchildren is a safe, peaceful and stable environment; a place, stepchildren can call home.

Moreover, it's very important for stepchildren to be accepted by their stepparents. It goes without saying that accepting people for who they are, is an important step into building meaningful relationships with them and promoting peace. Research shows that acceptance has serious benefits for one's mental health and it can result in a better quality of life, hence decreases murder and suicide. Additionally, children need parental love because it enhances the well-being and development of children. Obviously, lack of parental love is detrimental to the child's psychological growth. It also causes painful wounds to the child's psyche or predispose a lifetime of mal-adaptation and pain.

References

- Anderson KG, Kaplan H & Lancaster J (1999a) Paternal care by genetic fathers and stepfathers I: reports from Albuquerque men. *Evolution & Human Behavior* 20: 405-431.
- Anderson KG, Kaplan H, Lam D & Lancaster J (1999b) Paternal care by genetic fathers and stepfathers II: reports by Xhosa high school students. *Evolution & Human Behavior* 20: 433-451.
- Ackerman, B. P., Brown, E. D., D'Eramo, K. S., & Izard, C. E. (2002). Maternal relationship instability and the school behavior of children from disadvantaged families. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 694-704.
- Ackerman, B. P., Kogos, J., Youngstrom, E., Schoff, K., & Izard, C. (1999). Family instability and the problem behaviors of children from economically disadvantaged families. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(1), 258-268.
- Adam, E. K., & Chase-Lansdale, P. L. (2002). Home sweet home(s): Parental separations, residential moves, and adjustment problems in low-income adolescent girls. *Developmental Psychology*, 38, 792-805.
- Becker GS, Landes EM & Michael RT (1977) An economic analysis of marital instability. *Journal of Political Economy* 85: 1141-1187.
- Carlson, M. J. (2006). Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 68, 137-154.
- Carlson, M. J. (2006). Family structure, father involvement, and adolescent behavioral outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68, 137-154.
- Carlson, M. J., & Corcoran, M. E. (2001). Family structure and children's behavioral and cognitive outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63, 779-792.