

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Using only volunteer participants may have excluded subjects who, because they were uncomfortable discussing personal opinions with a stranger, might have provided some additional insight on a child's experiences in a stepfamily.
2. Data analysis was subjective and reviewed by a single researcher.
3. Sample size was limited. A larger population may have given more conclusive evidence.
4. Due to the self report data collection methods and limited subject numbers, there was no corroboration, of the data, by other stepfamily members.
5. The accuracy of the subject's reflections may be slightly distorted due to the passage of time between the actual events, and the recording of those events.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Responses given by the adults and children who participated in this project demonstrated how essential a child's perspective is if researchers are to discover the complete truth of why stepfamilies thrive or fail. Communication, favoritism, lack of permission for private time with their biological parent and lack of available counselling, for long-term grief (due to loss of family, friends and lifestyle), are mentioned by several subjects as issues which cause personal pain and dissatisfaction. Behavior changes too, are pinpointed by the participants, as a way in which they signal that they are under a great deal of stress and frustration, from living a life in which personal choices are often limited.

Future research that delves more deeply into the child's perspective of life in a stepfamily, and what the children, in this project, have cited as needed changes, might include:

1. Research, utilizing open-ended questions or self-report surveys, that focuses on the specific areas of communication within stepfamilies, favoritism, grief and loss issues, and/or one-on-one time that a child in a stepfamily is allowed to enjoy with their custodial parent, may help to improve the quality of stepfamily relationships.
2. Replication of this study using other age groups, e.g., age 6 to 12 years, or a larger population would provide greater statistical validity.
3. Revisiting this project, with a larger cross-cultural sample, to verify that the findings are generalizeable.

4. Validating project findings. Researchers might find it useful to do their research within a group setting, utilizing similar age peers (possibly age 12 to 14). Ideally, the program would include 5 to 10 sessions. The first 2 sessions should be on general topics, to build trust within the group, and then more specific topics could be introduced, i.e., How would you identify a good stepparent? A poor stepparent? Responses could be recorded by taping; asking for written comments by group members or through notes recorded by a secretary and then collated for analysis.
5. Research that explores the impact of stepchild participation in family decision-making. This research would utilize several biological parent-child groupings (from stepfamily environments). One half of the study groups would not have any intervention other than an initial introduction meeting and a follow-up session in 6 weeks. During the same six-week period, the other half would, after their initial introductory meeting, attend weekly goal setting sessions. At the end of the 6 week period, each partnership would meet with the researchers and discuss the progress they had made in their relationship.
6. Research that involves participants from newly formed stepfamilies in grief and loss counselling sessions. If a family is chosen as a positive candidate, all members should be included in the counselling.
7. An essay contest, open to stepchildren from 6 to 18, that utilized the topics “My Stepparent” (Collection of positive traits) or ‘If I Were a Parent in a Stepfamily” (Needed changes).