ACHIEVING POSITIVE STEPFAMILY RELATIONSHIPS:

NEGOTIATING FAIRNESS, FORGIVENESS, AND ACCEPTANCE

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ABSTRACT

Being part of a stepfamily is a common experience for many children and parents in Aotearoa New Zealand. This type of family structure comprises a range of complex relationship dynamics that need to be negotiated, nurtured, and developed into healthy family functioning.

This research was based on a positive psychology perspective (the study of wellbeing) and examined the typical fairness issues stepfamilies encounter, and the strategies they used to resolve those issues. Each family member's emotional reactions to those situations, and if forgiveness was given and why, were also investigated.

Forty one stepfamilies were recruited to participate in this research, from which 79 were stepchildren and the rest were a combination of step and biological parents.

The research involved holding a family meeting, which was supported by an instructional DVD. During this meeting each participant recorded their responses in a specifically designed research booklet, and the Brief FAM General Scale was used to assess family functioning.

Each participant was asked to recall and offer a situation and a resolution in regards to fairness that they had instigated. From this all other family members would respond by rating their emotions, fairness, and forgiveness in their response booklets.

Descriptive statistics and Generalised Estimating Equations were used to analyse the quantitative responses, and thematic analysis tools to analyse the qualitative responses.

Fourteen scenario categories and seven resolution categories were developed from the 589 situations recorded. The top issues were *differential treatment of children,*

fighting amongst children, household chores, and missing out. The main resolutions were *compromise, communication, and sharing*.

Emotionally participants were more negative towards themselves than other family members around these situations. Situations causing the most emotional distress were when children missed out due to either living between two households or were neglected by their other biological parent. Forgiveness generally occurred when a situation had been rectified or improved, or a person wanted to move on from it. Forgiveness tended not to be given when a perceived offense was reoccurring or not rectified. Step relationships did not significantly influence fairness or forgiveness ratings compared to the nature of the situation and the resolution end result, both of which significantly influenced these ratings.

Advice was provided by the participating stepfamilies for other stepfamilies that are either in the beginning stages of their stepfamily development, or not functioning as well. Seven themes emerged from this advice using qualitative analysis: hold family meetings to work through issues; spend quality time with each other, listen to each other, use compromising and negotiation strategies, show every family member respect, treat all family members equally, express love to each family member, and do not bring your children into you and your ex-partner's feud.

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this research would not have been possible, and from your involvement other stepfamilies will be able to benefit from it.

Thank you to both my stepmother's for their input into my life and the inspiration they gave me for this project. They are living proof that stepparents can be essential to one's life and also make wonderful parents, thank you.

And last but certainly not least I am especially grateful to my wonderful husband James, who has supported me in every way during the years whilst I have been doing my doctoral study, and sharing the load while we had our two children (Gabriella and Hugo) during this time. You have been my rock, thank you so much my darling - I love you.

FOREWORD

It can be a difficult and at times thankless role for anyone to 'step' into an already established family as a new parent. It is difficult to create a new relationship with children, carrying with it the expectation to love and care for them immediately as if they are your own. I come from a large blended family where I have the experience of two stepmothers; one who brought me up from 5 years old, and the second who came into our family when I was 10 years old. The label of stepmother with all its baggage does not quite hold the true meaning of the relationship that I have with my Mum-Sera, my first stepmother, who I consider an additional parent as well as a loving person in every way. As far as I am concerned I have three parents that influenced who I am today (my father, mother, and Sera). If someone was to look closely at my personality they could make the mistake of assuming that I am actually Sera's biological child, as we not only look similar but I have gained several similar personality traits. The relationship that Mum and I have is one type of relationship that is possible between a stepmother and stepchild.

My second stepmother Yukiko and I have a different relationship. It was a little rocky when I was an adolescent but now that I am an adult there is mutual respect and love. Time can strengthen relationships and bonds if two people are willing to work at it, and our relationship is another type of stepmother-stepchild bond.

Mum (Sera) brought up my brother and me as an extension of her own children. After asking her how she felt about us when we first came into her life she replied:

> *"My first thoughts of you Celia when I first met you was this tiny little 5-year-old girl that was a little nervous, wore glasses but very mature for your age, acted very brave to come into my home, and seemed to accept me straight away. From that moment our connection was solid although you were often teary as you were frightened because you were so confused and worried about both of your parents.*

You soon became clingy to me and started to call me Mummy Sera and became adjusted to your new family very quickly

You became my little buddy and you were always happy with me no matter what we did and where we went. When you dropped calling me Mummy Sera to MUM and hearing two little children calling me Mum made me very proud and very important in your life.

Money was scarce but we seemed to get by. You and Andrèa were just as important to me as my own children. I nursed you both when you were sick, bathed you, took you to school and school concerts, and took you both backwards and forwards to your Mother's every school holidays and every second weekend. It broke my heart having to drop you off at boarding school and seeing you get distressed when I left, but I was rewarded with a big smile when I used to pick you up.

I sometimes have tears in my eyes when people ask me about you and Andrèa; they are tears of love, joy, and memories. You and Andrèa are my children and I will love you both forever.

Celia you have made me proud.

Love you,

Mum."

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CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION OF STEPFAMILY RESEARCH

While there is a certain amount of advice and information available to step-families, new stepparents, and even stepchildren, none of this material has been explicitly designed for bi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand. At a more clinical level, family therapists and other supportive professional agencies can access a large amount of information on issues confronting stepfamilies and the dynamics of stepfamily relationships. However much of this excellent scientific evidence relates to problems experienced in stepfamilies and far less is concerned with the everyday practical negotiations that make up more successful and harmonious stepfamily dynamics. Thus professional resources are typically targeted to the very few, most challenged stepfamilies, with the remainder left to muddle through on their own.

Stepfamily research became more predominant in the late 1970's. However, for the following decades the research was typically from a dysfunctional philosophy. This early research would make comparisons between the stepfamily and the intact family[1], and the stepfamily would be regarded from a research perspective as damaging to the children and adults involved (Ganong & Coleman, 2004). Information that circulates in the media and even in research commonly portrays step relationships with a dysfunctional image. Yet I have come across many New Zealand families who have managed to achieve positive and successful step relationships as well as coming from a large blended family also with close relationships. This research area is the new frontier where international studies about stepfamilies with a positive psychology approach are still reasonably sparse. Rarer still are investigations into how harmonious step relationships

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[1] An intact family comprises of a married or defacto couple with mutual biological or adopted children, and where either parent does not have other children from previous relationships.

develop and are maintained, especially from a child's perspective. To date a minimal amount of research has been published from a child's perspective (not including teenagers) of their relationship with their stepparent with a positive psychology approach of well being.

Foundations in Positive Psychology

Originally pre World War II applied psychology had three distinct aims: understanding and curing mental illness, identifying and nurturing talent, and identifying how to improve the lives of all people towards being more productive and fulfilling (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). After World War II psychology mostly focused on the science of healing and measurement, which was strongly encouraged by the Veterans Administration in the United States of American (now know as Veteran Affairs) (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This organisation along with the National Institute of Mental Health founded in 1949, were major funders of psychologists' and researchers' work in the field of mental health and dysfunction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is no surprise due to lack of other major funding contributions elsewhere that other branches of psychology concerned with typical development and healthy adjustment had fallen by the wayside until half century later.

Since 2000 the study of positive psychology started to re-emerge with its primary focus on investigating human resilience, strength, and growth (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), with Martin E. P. Seligman as one of its main research leaders in the field. It was Seligman's children, in particular his daughter Nikki, who triggered an epiphany with how he perceived the discipline of psychology. He learnt that as a parent raising children it was about identifying and nurturing their strongest

qualities, helping them find their niche in life rather than fixing what was wrong with them (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

It is very important to note that the field of positive psychology does not imply that other psychological research is negative. Rather it developed as an alternative approach from a focus on dysfunction to focusing and using strengths and resilience for the prevention and treatment of mental health illnesses (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) argued that using the disease model approach in the study of dysfunction, did not lead a researcher any closer to prevention of the many serious mental health issues. They explained that prevention research gained much of its knowledge from a "*perspective focused on systematically building competency, not on correcting weakness*" (p. 7).

Given that psychological research has tended to focus more research on dysfunction until recent decades, it would come as no surprise that stepfamily research had most of its research based on divorce and its harmful impact on adults and children, deprived step-relationships, and negative comparisons with intact families. However, at the same time positive psychology was starting to make its re-emergence so were some researchers leading the way on a change of focus with stepfamily research investigating stepfamily resilience, strengths, wellbeing, and positive functioning (see Banker & Gaertner, 1998; Coleman, Fine, Ganong, Downs, & Pauk, 2001; Coleman, Ganong, & Russell, 2013; Hutchinson, Afifi, & Krause, 2007; Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008; Michaels, 2006).

Harmonious Functioning Stepfamilies

Research into the strengths and resilience strategies that functioning stepfamilies manage to achieve is still quite sparse. Many questions still need to be answered into how

stepfamilies manage to function together harmoniously especially considering the unique complex challenges that they face. The seemingly straightforward issue of what wellbeing in a functioning stepfamily looks like has not yet been systematically investigated. While limited there is some research that has contributed to understanding in this area.

Existing research has been beneficial in this area, such as Banker and Gaertner's (1998) study of stepfamily harmony: how working together as one unit creates a more harmonious environment. This research also had a strong implicit fairness concept due to family members perceiving themselves as one unit rather than a divide of 'my rules versus their rules'. In addition to this, one of the strengths discovered was that children would find themselves as a valuable member of this joint family rather than an outsider using this approach. Whiting, Smith, Barnett, and Grafsky (2007) also contributed to stepfamily studies in fairness and forgiveness with their research on stepmothers. They revealed how forgiveness was an important trait in helping stepmothers move beyond conflicts with their partners and stepchildren by being able to ask for forgiveness and understanding that it will take considerable effort.

According to Michaels (2006), several factors contribute to stepfamily success, such as (a) having realistic expectations on what is needed to make a marriage successful; (b) coordinated rules for the whole family; and (c) couples to have a strong commitment to the family unit as well as their relationship. Children who felt respected and accepted by the stepparents tended to have more successful relationships. Michaels' research was also supportive of the 'one unit' approach similar to Banker and Gaertner's work, with the strong sense of 'one' family unit. Her findings went further with parents perceiving issues as 'ours' rather than 'your child versus my child'. In these families, stepchildren were treated like their own biological children, as conveyed by the expressed sentiment '*child of my heart*'. Coltrane, Gutierrez, and Parke's (2008) study looking at Mexican-

American stepfathers also supported the concept of 'oneness' in the family unit. They reported that these fathers had good relationships with their stepchildren, where over 75% of the step fathers believed that they were fully responsible as a parent of their stepchild, and treating the child as their own.

Stepparents play an important role in contributing to the development, harmony, and strengths within their families. Michaels (2006) revealed that healthy stepfamilies were successful due to behaviours of acceptance, flexibility, respect, patience, communication, and having a sense of humour. This study also acknowledged that in the development of the stepfamily the first two years were the most challenging. White and Gilbreth (2001) discovered that the more a stepfather was involved with his stepchild, the better the child did in school along with fewer behavioural problems. Golish's (2003) research explained that the 'stronger' stepfamilies did better than others due to use of everyday talk, and good communication skills.

Stepfamily Dynamics

Pryor (2008a) acknowledged a current shift in stepfamily research from family members studied as individuals and dyads, to the whole stepfamily as a social unit. This makes sense considering the complexity of the differences between many stepfamilies. Stepfamily types can consist of the following:

- one biological parent with their child/ren and one household stepparent;

- two biological parents both bringing children from prior relationships which would make both parents also stepparents

- either of the above options plus a shared child born or adopted into the family

- a stepparent and their stepchild/ren (where a biological parent has died or separated and the stepparent still has living arrangements or contact, and a relationship with their stepchild/ren).

The analogy used to describe family systems theory fits well when explaining the many interactions between stepfamily relationships *"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"* (Smith & Hamon, 2012, p. 146). The complex interactions between various members within a stepfamily such as partners, children, stepchildren, siblings, stepsiblings, parents, stepparents, extended family members, and ex-partners (or two households sharing the child care arrangements), would always influence the emotions and behaviour of other family members around them either explicitly or implicitly. Family systems theory at present may provide therapists with the closest explanation to date on how a complex stepfamily can function or fall apart with the system perceived as dysfunctional rather than the individuals. This becomes apparent when considering that two healthy adults can merge into two existing families and risk dysfunction due to old communication habits, rituals, histories, misunderstanding family member's behaviour and intentions, and child/ren portraying negative behaviours towards new family members. All or any of these factors can create negative behaviour feedback loops (i.e., a child acts hostilely towards a new stepparent for wanting to engage with them, the stepparent would then withdraw from the child, child would then be upset that the stepparent acts cold or distant towards them, and so on and so forth), which can either hinder or damage potential family relationships.

Intact families typically have a chance for adults (parents) to establish communication and conflict-resolution strategies before children arrive, whereas in stepfamilies this is not usually the case (Smith & Hamon, 2012). Parents need to be able to negotiate a new relationship as a couple, and with any new stepchildren, all whilst

maintaining the old relationship with their children, as well as renegotiating interactions with an ex-partner. All of these dynamics can put a potential strain on any new and developing stepfamily. Papernow (1984) developed a stepfamily development cycle based on family stems theory and Gestalt theory. There are seven stages in the cycle with an average of 7 years that a stepfamily is assumed to progress through. A limitation with this model is that it is based on nine families, however other stepfamily research implies agreement with the first stage of this model that describes the first 2 to 3 years as the most vulnerable time where a stepfamily will either make it or break it (see Coleman et al., 2013; Hutchinson et al., 2007; Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003). The seven stage cycle involves:

1. Stage One: The fantasy stage where family members have unrealistic expectations on what the stepfamily and their relationships will be like.

2. Stage Two: Assimilation stage is where family members try hard at implementing their fantasy into their relationships but not achieving the desired results (i.e. stepparent still feeling like the outsider, or trying to nurture / or discipline unwilling stepchildren).

3. Stage Three: Awareness occurs when family members realise or make sense out of what is occurring in their relationships and are able to put labels onto their painful experiences. This stage is usually initiated by the stepparent first, although some biological parents are insightful enough perceive problematic step-relationship issues first.

These first three stages according to Papernow can take on average 2-3 years to work through.

4. Stage Four: Mobilization where differences are aired, and stepparents finally speak out on what their needs are

5. Stage Five: The action stage, where the adults work together to resolve issues, differences, and create new ways of doing things.

These previous two stages can also overlap with the first three stages and can take on average between 1 to 3 years to achieve.

6. Stage Six: This stage is the contact stage where intimacy and bonding occurs between step-relationship and the biological parent has taken a step back. This is also the stage where stepparent differences can enrich the family unit (i.e. an expressive stepparent has influenced a conservative stepchild how to express their emotions more).

7. Stage Seven: The resolution stage is where the step family members are solidly established within the family unit, where stepparents can find themselves allying with their stepchild with disagreements with the biological parent, and new traditions / rituals are firmly established.

Papernow perceived that a completion of all these stages could take anywhere from 4 to 12 years.

Stepchild's perspective.

Colman and Ganong's (1997) review on stepfamily perspectives illustrated that in well-functioning stepfamilies an additional parent figure (that of the stepparent) was mostly well-received. Within this review Colman and Ganong disclosed some of their experiences with the child participants from their own research into stepfamily relationships. Some of those children considered their stepparents to be additional parents whereas others would consider them to be more as a confidant or a friend. Children can also have very intense emotions towards their stepparents whether it be positive or negative, and depending on the child can view a stepparents efforts towards gaining a

relationship with them as either positive (caring, supportive) or negative (interfering, bribing) (Coleman & Ganong, 1997). A family systems perspective would argue that this would create a spiral loop effect, with a stepparent reacting accordingly to their stepchild's feedback to their initial attempts at developing at relationship with them.

Research into how a child reasons about their stepfamily behaviours (such as how family members negotiated step-relationships, and how they managed conflict), and their emotions and attitudes towards this is rare. One study by Coleman, Fine, Ganong, Downs, and Pauk (2001) found that children were able to show good insight into understanding what is occurring in the household and of their stepparents, as well as describing how they felt about their relationships when issues occurred. Stepchildren can also be strongly influenced by their stepparents when they have a good relationship. One study concluded that stepchildren not only could be at least moderately close to their stepparents, but some females wanted to try to be like their stepmothers more than females in stepfather families wanting to emulate their mothers (Ganong & Coleman, 2001). This research illustrates the importance of including the perspective of stepchildren in any study which seeks to explore the dynamics of a stepfamily and its functioning. Unfortunately research from the viewpoint of the stepchild is still very sparse.

Stepparent's perspective

Relationships between stepchildren and their stepparents can be a central factor in a stepfamily's happiness more so than the couple relationship (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). Several studies suggest a range of positive relationships exist between children and their stepparents which have positive effects on the children / adolescent's wellbeing. King (2006), for example, discovered that emotional close ties with resident stepfathers (and when it also included non resident fathers) was a protective factor against externalising

and internalising problems, and failing school. In Robertson's (2008) research with a large participant population from London, the stepfather's role was varied and reflected the degree of which a stepfather was willing to put into it. Over half the stepfathers did not consider themselves to be a '*stepfather*' instead they considered themselves to be a normal father living in a normal family.

There seems to be a lack of research into residential stepmothers and positive relationships with stepchildren. Research has generally shown that the stepmother role seems to have more strained relations with their stepchildren than stepfathers, and stepmothers seem far more dissatisfied with their role (see Coleman & Ganong, 1997; Svare, Jay, & Mason, 2004; Weaver & Coleman, 2005). More research in this area needs to be instigated as other research from the perspective of the stepchild confirms that warm close, satisfying and positive relationships with residential stepmothers can and does occur (Crohn, 2006; Falchi, 2008; Svare et al., 2004).

Biological parent's perspective

Biological parents in stepfamilies can play several roles to either help or hinder the development of the stepparent-stepchild relationship. In the case of playing the gatekeeper, where a parent prevents the involvement of the stepparent with the parenting of their child, it can make the stepparent feel like an 'outsider' and isolated within the family unit. In Papernow's (1984) stepfamily development cycle, this would occur in the early stages of the stepfamily's development, and if not resolved (or accepted by the stepparent) can cause a strain on the couple relationship contributing to the breakdown of the family unit. Helpful roles that biological / adoptive parents have taken on within the family would be that of either a mediator and / or interpreter between their partners and children. This role helps to consolidate a bond between a stepparent and their stepchild as

the parent has helped them understand each other better (Weaver & Coleman, 2010). Another good example of how biological parents could help with the stepparent and stepchild relationship is knowing when to take a step back and allowing the other family members to work out their issues. This way they would not be seen as 'taking sides', but would also imply that the stepparent was a fully fledged family member within the family unit (rather than an outsider). An example in Coleman et al.'s (2001) study illustrates this point where one mother explained graphically how when her children were rude or inconsiderate with her new partner she would in the past have intervened, but that she realised that her children needed to understand how her partner felt and to be able to reverse their attitude. She then learnt that by stepping out of an argument she was able to ensure that the children and her partner were able to work it out on their own.

Issues that Stepfamilies can Encounter

Stepfamilies deal with the same daily issues and conflicts that many other intact families come across (Coleman et al., 2001). Some of these conflicts would be caused by issues with finance, time, attention, space, household chores (Coltrane, 2000; Pasley, Sandras, & Edmondson, 1994; Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, & Goldberg, 2004), and children fighting (Sillars, Canary, & Tafoy, 2004). In addition to this, stepfamilies also have to navigate around conflicts due to the specific nature of their family system. According to Visher, Visher, and Pasley (2003) one major area of conflict that stepfamilies can engage in would be due to the continual transitions that can occur:

1. Outsiders versus insiders: New members are added to a family such as a stepparent, stepchild, or biological child changes parental residence.

2. Boundary disputes: the living arrangements of children between two households, and the space requirements that this entails.

3. Power issues: the children's parents continual power struggle with finance and resources (usually between households, but can include within the stepfamily too). Children can add to this power struggle by taking advantage of the situation and playing one parent off the other to gain resources, time, and attention.

4. Conflicting loyalties: generally where children feel that they have to hold back on feelings towards another family member due to loyalties they hold for another parent (this can include a stepparent or the other biological parent). This can include when children have to choose who they would rather spend time with for special occasions and would be torn between their two separated parents.

5. Rigid, unproductive triangles: this occurs when three individuals are in a heightened emotional struggle with each other, such as a parent hindering a relationship to develop between the stepparent and their stepchild, or child caught in the middle between two hostile parents.

6. Unity versus fragmentation of the new couple relationship: influence outside of the newly formed couple that can either hinder or disapproves of the relationship; such as extended family members, children in the hope that their parents would get back together, and schools, churches, and legal processes not recognising the stepparent as a parental figure for the child even if they have been responsible for their care for years.

Any of the issues above can lead to less cohesiveness and greater stress within the family unit.

Coleman et al. (2001) boundary issues incorporated most of the issues of conflict that Visher et al. pointed out and listed above. Their boundary issues were reported to

occur over four main areas of conflict within stepfamilies, and were identified as: (a) disagreements over resources; (b) loyalty conflicts; (c) some family members holding a protective ideology and behaviour over other family members; and (d) conflict with extended family members. Loyalty issues (defined also within boundary issues) by many other researchers have been identified as creating a lot of tension and angst for children and other family members within the stepfamily unit (Afifi, 2008; Golish, 2003). They can also severely prevent the development of a meaningful relationship between a stepchild and their stepparent (Visher et al., 2003).

With the development of a new stepfamily, family members are faced with the challenges of either integrating old routines and rituals or creating new ones if the old ones create conflict. Dickstein (2002) described routines and rituals as important to the development of cohesion and for functioning within a family. This was supported by Hawley's (2013) argument that rituals and routines are an important structure within a family to assist with stability when stressors occur. Rituals and routines also help to define a family's identity and are symbolic of the family's value systems (Doherty, 1997)

Fighting amongst children is a common occurrence within any family and can create a lot of family tension, even to the extent that a negative sibling relationship can impact on a child's externalising and internalising behaviours (Baham, Wimer, Braver, & Fabricius, 2008; Sillars et al., 2004). However, healthy sibling and stepsibling relationships can create a protective factor for the children's emotional wellbeing within a family and stepfamily (Baham et al., 2008).

Another potential issue of conflict within stepfamilies (that also occurs within intact families) is that of differential treatment of the household children. This can arise due to several reasons such as the differences of age, gender, and any special needs an individual child may have when compared to another sibling. Children generally are able

to justify why parents provide differential treatment to them and their siblings and still perceive this as fair (Kowal & Kramer, 1997). Research is still sparse in this area specifically studying stepsibling rivalry. Some studies have shown some insight on how stepmothers perceive and react to their stepchildren and have found it difficult to feel the same way about their stepchildren as they do their own children (Ceglian & Gardner, 2000). However, other research disclosed how stepparents have treated all children within their household equally and their stepchildren as if they were their own. (Coltrane et al., 2008; Robertson, 2008). Coltrane, Gutierrez, and Parke (2008) described many Mexican stepfathers as entering a stepfamily with the mindset that the additional children were a package deal, whereas over half of the stepfathers interviewed in Robertson's (2008) study didn't even perceive themselves as "stepfathers" rather as a "*normal father living in a normal family*" (p. 143).

A lack of respect and / or acceptance of new family members can also put strain on the stepfamily. Michaels (2006) study illustrated how stepparents that showed respect and acceptance of their stepchildren provided a solid foundation for a healthy steprelationship. The research also found that children were more accepting of their stepparent when: they perceived that they made their parent happy; their other biological parent was not in contact with them; or that their stepparent was easy going and made it clear to the stepchild that they were not there to replace their other parent.

In summary, conflicts occur in all types of family as it is considered a normal process of family interaction (Sillars et al., 2004; Turner, Markie-Dadds, & Sanders, 2001). However, what is important and helps to restore and / or maintain balance and harmony in the family is how these conflicts are resolved. As research is discovering more about the specific issues that stepfamilies encounter, there is still very little information about how this impacts emotionally on family members, whether or not

fairness occurred, and if it had whether or not it influenced emotions and family interactions.

Resolution Strategies that Stepfamilies Use

The specific resolution strategies that stepfamilies employ when conflict occurs, and how they engage in the prevention of serious issues, are important issues to identify to assist in developing resilient step-relationships. Although in the last two decades there has been some important research development in this area, it is still quite sparse (Coleman et al., 2013; Visher et al., 2003).

According to White and Gilbreth (2001), stepchildren who were able to have a close bond with their stepparents had better outcomes with an increase in wellbeing and developed more emotional and behavioural resilience. This was based on the accumulation model theory where the addition of the stepparent, rather than the loss or substitution of another parent was positive for a child's wellbeing rather than detrimental (White & Gilbreth, 2001). Although close bonds with stepparents are not exactly a resolution strategy, they are an important factor towards developing a resilient stepfamily (White & Gilbreth, 2001), and this strong bond contributes towards enhancing communication, negotiation, and collaboration skills which are effective resolution strategies (Golish, 2003; Sillars et al., 2004; Visher et al., 2003; Walsh, 2003).

Communication strategies are considered by some researchers as the main factor between stepfamilies that have strong satisfying relationships compared to those who struggle (Beaudry, Boisvert, Simard, Parent, & Blais, 2009; Golish, 2003). They also help stepfamilies resolve conflicts with greater ease thus increasing their chances at achieving cohesion and family stability (Saint-Jacques et al., 2011). Golish (2003) established that the communication strengths shown in higher functioning stepfamilies included the use of

active listening, directly addressing conflict, open sharing, spending time together, and family unity. Other communication strategies were also shown in this study to increase stepfamily cohesion, including holding family meetings to address issues, compromising, and engaging in everyday conversation.

As this research area is still quite sparse, more studies need to be conducted in the area of stepfamily conflict resolution to explore whether, different resolution strategies are necessary for specific stepfamily issues, and what impact these resolution strategies have on stepfamily members in terms of everyday functioning, emotional responses, and other issues such as fairness, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Fairness in Families

The experience of not being treated fairly by another individual may be a quite common occurrence in children's social relationships. Fairness matters to children strongly enough to influence how they think about, how they feel about, and how they act toward people in their everyday lives.

Fairness involves a subjective judgment of whether or not someone has received just treatment and the immediate feelings associated therewith (Evans, Galyer, & Smith, 2001). Children's perceptions of fairness are individually different and influenced by their own understanding of characteristics of situations (Thorkildsen, 1989a, 1989b). By defining fairness in this way, the concept can be seen as different from the abstract principles of justice, particularly distributive justice, which have been addressed in the child development literature. Early studies showed that judgment of fair distribution of goods is influenced by children's age and stages of cognitive development (Piaget, 1932), characteristics of friendships (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, Watkins, & Vinchur, 1994), and quality of sibling relationships (Thomson & Jones, 2005). These studies have informed us

regarding children's abstract ideas and universal rules associated with justice judgments. However, such studies did not tap into family differences regarding how fairness is defined and fair principles enacted. Families can construct their own personal perspectives on fairness, with each family member having a slightly different idea about what fairness means and how to ensure it. Their perception of fairness and the associated feelings are based on common experiences of fair and unfair treatments, especially in the context of disciplinary events such as punishments and rewards (Dobbs, 2007).

Fairness underlies many aspects of interpersonal relationships. In terms of parent-child interactions, Kowal and Kramer (1997) studied the effect of differential parental treatment and qualities of sibling relationships. They showed that children actively compare fairness of parenting behaviour towards themselves and their siblings, and it is possible that this is particularly true in stepfamilies, where differential treatment becomes acutely salient to children whose underlying security has already been disrupted as a result of separation, divorce, and family splitting and blending. Interestingly, the Kowal and Kramer study showed that children who perceived parents' behaviour as unfair could nevertheless have positive relationships with their sibling as long as their parents were able to provide justifiable reasons for treating their siblings in different ways. Konstantareas and Debois (2001) examined young children's perceptions of unfairness of disciplinarily practices. In this investigation, children were presented with five different types of maternal disciplinary practices and asked to judge the degree of fairness and unfairness for each. Their findings were that children as young as four years of age were able to differentiate fairness across disciplinarily practices, with maternal differential treatments of siblings seen as the most unfair, followed by public humiliation.

Empirical studies strongly confirm everyday experience that the perception of unfairness results in negative emotional reactions. Mikula, Scherer, and Athenstaedt

(1998) have reported that anger, disgust, sadness, fear, guilt, and shame were commonly associated with unfairness judgments. Young children also recognise that people who have received unfair treatment would have some negative emotional experience (Evans, Goldberg-Arnold, & Dickson, 1998; Evans, Salisbury, Palombaro, & Goldberg, 1994). Evans, Galyer, and Smith (2001) have investigated children's perception of fairness of reward and punishment and its associated feelings with children of elementary school age. In this research, children were presented with a series of realistic scenarios describing daily events involving unfair punishments and rewards (not receiving the reward one deserved). For both types of unfair treatments, feelings of sadness and anger were the two major negative feelings reported by children, with anger being the dominant affective reaction.

The experience of unfairness may lead to expressions of negativity directly towards the person who was unfair. In a classroom situation, children's perception of unfairness of teaching practice was recognized as one of the causes of children's misbehaviour (A. Miller, Ferguson, & Byrne, 2000). Miller (2001) has suggested that retaliation and hostility may be common reactions by people who have been treated unfairly or unjustly by others. Similarly, with respect to children's reaction to perceived unfairness, Wilson and Evans (2002) argued that children who consistently receive unfair treatment may become hypersensitive to unfairness of others and thus motivated to retaliate or seek revenge. Arsenio and Gold (2006) have also proposed that the possible origins of children's motivation to deliberately harm others (e.g., morally relevant transgressions) may be related to their experiences of unfairness and injustice in their immediate and in their wider social contexts. Furthermore, one of the children who participated in Dobbs' (2007) focus group study responded to a question about her response to possibly unfair punishment by her parents and she stated that "*if it's fair then*

I don't try to get back at my mum and dad." It appears that perception of unfairness contributes to children's motivation to "get back at" or retaliate against a person who was unfair.

To date, there is currently no published research that I know of in which the issue of fairness is examined within stepfamilies and with a comparison to non-stepfamilies. However, previous research that I undertook explored this (Falchi, 2008). In this study, children from stepfamilies and non-stepfamilies were presented with scenarios in which the child in the story was apparently treated in an unfair way by either a stepmother or a biological mother. Children's perceptions of fairness, their emotional response to perceived unfairness, and their rationale as to why unfair behaviour may have occurred were explored in the context of stepmother or biological mother. Data were collected from 53 children from intact families and 16 stepchildren all attending several primary schools in Wellington, New Zealand. Unfair scenarios where a mother or stepmother broke a promise were presented to the children, and they were asked to rate their emotional responses to the scenarios. The children were also asked to give reasons as to why they thought mothers and stepmothers broke their promises, and what the mothers and stepmothers could do to rectify the unfair behaviour. Quantitative ratings of perceptions of fairness and emotional responses were collected, and qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse the children's reasoning. The findings indicated that stepchildren rated their mothers as more fair than non-stepchildren, and their stepmother's ratings were similar to the non-stepchildren's mother's fairness ratings when exhibiting identical unfair behaviour. The findings revealed that the experience of coming from a blended family has an effect on a stepchild's perceptions of fairness of their natural mothers, viewing their mothers' tendency to fairness more favourably than children from intact families. However, if broken promises do occur, both children and stepchildren

believe that reconciliation should be carried out in a similar manner, regardless of whether the relationship to the child is mother or stepmother. One final note of interest to the present investigation: when children in my study were asked why the parent might have behaved in an unfair fashion (typically failing to follow-through on a promised activity), both mothers and stepmothers tended to break promises due to being too busy.

Although this study explored how children perceive fairness from mothers and stepmothers, more research needs to be conducted to confirm these results as well as investigate other stepfamily relationship dynamics, and whether or not other stepfamily relationships have any bearing on perceptions of fairness.

Forgiveness

The topic of forgiveness has a certain religious aspect to it: in the famous words of Alexander Pope, "*to err is human; to forgive, divine*". Forgiveness is a highly complicated psychological process, of great interest to positive psychology as well as to some approaches to psychotherapy. Forgiveness is a deliberate process that can change a vengeful, negative response into one that is more positive. When relationships are marred by transgressions, which is not uncommon in any partner or family interaction, apologies (repentance) and forgiveness can restore harmony (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004).

Maio, Thomas, Fincham, and Carnelly (2008) have shown there are numerous positive consequences of forgiveness within families such as an increase in family cohesiveness and a decrease in family conflicts, even though forgiveness can vary greatly across different patterns of dyad relationships within the family.

Of the many possible contexts in which children may need to exercise forgiveness, dealing with unfairness (for example, unfair disciplinary events or violations of trust) is one of the most common. As already explained, children often encounter

interactions with parents, siblings and peers that they consider to be unfair. Evans, Galyer, and Smith (2001) describes children as being particularly sensitive to unfair treatment, and research by other researchers in the field of fairness and children also support this opinion (Barry, 2006; Falchi, 2008; Yamaguchi & Evans, 2009). The perception of fairness is about personal judgment of whether or not one has received just treatment and the feelings that are associated with such experience (Evans et al., 2001). It is clear that unfairness generates unpleasant, negative feelings (Barry, 2006; Evans et al., 2001; Yamaguchi, 2005) and might also be a possible cause of hostile mood in children (Evans, Heriot, & Friedman, 2002). The emotional and behavioural consequences associated with unfairness and injustice can also include expressions of retaliation and revenge (Miller, 2001). Motivation to express such negativity towards others may increase the possibility of interpersonal conflicts and thus hinder development and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships.

In studies of children's responses to unfairness, mothers were more readily forgiven for perpetrating unfairness than were other children (siblings or friends) (Barry, 2006; Evans, Yamaguchi, Raskauskas, & Harvey, 2007; Yamaguchi & Evans, 2009). From the recent psychotherapeutic literature that encourages forgiveness, some clarity in psychology towards what is widely recognised in society has been gained, namely that forgiveness is not the same as forgetting (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). If you have been wronged by someone it is possible to experience genuine forgiveness but nevertheless to be wary of trusting that individual fully again. Forgiveness is about managing the negative emotion associated with the memory of the wrong. And despite even severe wrong-doing, there is much evidence that individuals can truly resolve the negative feelings (hatred, or resentment, for example) (Knutson, Enright, & Garbers, 2008).

While forgiveness can be granted at a cognitive level, it is clear from everyday experience that the lingering negative feelings associated with the original hurt or offence are not always entirely eliminated. If they are above some experiential threshold, these residual negative feelings are referred to as holding a grudge. But even if negative, grudge-like feelings are well managed, their continued "sub-threshold" presence is evidenced by what happens when the same individual perpetrates a subsequent hurt, insult, or harm. Everyday discourse in web-sites and cartoons about grudge holding are entirely consistent with this simple idea. However there is little empirical work on this phenomenon and even less involving children (Yamaguchi, 2009).

Children in Yamaguchi's (2009) research were less likely to judge a mother's treatment as unfair, in comparison to a friend. They also seemed to express stronger negative feelings toward the friend than toward the mother. When children's total score of willingness to forgive the mother was compared with their total score of willingness to forgive the friend, they were more willing to forgive the mother than the friend. This finding was supported by Barry's study (2006). Children seemed to credit mothers for good things that they do for children in their daily lives rather than to hold grudges for their unfair behaviour. It is possible that within these studies mothers had accumulated what can be described as emotional "credit in the bank". Is it possible therefore, that stepparents having had less opportunity to build up their credit, be less forgiven for perceived transgressions of fairness than biological parents. Further research needs to be conducted to support this theory.

In Evans, Yamaguchi, Raskauskas, and Harvey's report (2007) mothers were generally willing to give their children a second chance when considering a transgression. Parents reported a lower level of anger when their children offered an apology for their behaviour and acknowledged the value of such apologies; however, mothers valued more

the importance of teaching their children about natural consequences of transgressions. From this the majority of parents reported that they would encourage their children to show empathy toward others or to take the perspective of others when transgressions occurred. Empathy or perspective-taking skills have been recognised as important facilitator of forgiveness (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatzis, 2005; McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998). Forgiveness may be more easily expressed towards others when individuals have a better understanding of others' intentions, feelings, and thoughts that may have caused them to behave the way they did.

A number of critical themes of forgiveness were identified from the children's verbatim comments in the Evans et al. report (2007). One of the most noticeable themes was receiving apologies. Other research had found that apologies could mitigate children's negativity toward a perpetuator and increase their willingness to forgive (Darby & Schlenker, 1989; Scobie & Scobie, 2000).

These studies findings raise an interesting question. Are children more likely to forgive based on relationship rather than an event? Is fairness more important than forgiveness, or does one influence the other?

Emotions and How They Influence Family Interactions

Emotions play a central role in how parents and children relate to each other and how this impacts on the development of their relationships (Oatley, Keltner, & Jenkins, 2006). When these emotions are intense, such as when some family members stifle or inhibit their emotions from other family members, conflict is highly likely to occur (Walsh, 2003). Open emotional expression is suggested to be a key process in family resilience especially in regards to healthy communication and problem solving (Walsh, 2013). Realistic expectations of emotions are also important in stepfamily interactions,

especially for stepparents not to expect to instantly love their stepchildren, or even to love them the same as their own biological / adopted children (Visher et al., 2003). However, if all children are not treated equally within a household then resentment and other negative emotions can occur (Amanda Kowal & Laurie Kramer, 1997).

There are several studies that mention or imply emotional reactions of stepparents with parenting their stepchildren (Coltrane et al., 2008; Doodson & Morley, 2006; Robertson, 2008; Weaver & Coleman, 2005):

> *"...we were all ready to go out when he threw a tantrum and I was very irritated by it and I thought, well, don't come here then if you don't want to and I thought I wouldn't have said that if it was my children I'd have said, oh, come here, what's the matter, but I suppose it's natural. I did feel very guilty, I obviously do have a different emotional bond with him, yes, I did feel guilty"* (Doodson & Morley, 2006, p. 118).

The parent in the above quote described their emotions in reaction to their stepchild's behaviour, and how they responded to that. They also compared how they would have responded differently for their own biological child due to a difference of emotion. This study is a good example of how emotions have strongly influenced behaviour in the stepfamily, yet these emotions had not been identified specifically on their own for further analysis.

Other studies have also mentioned or inferred emotional reactions of stepchildren towards their stepparents in regards to the development of their relationships (Coleman & Ganong, 1997; Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; Ganong & Coleman, 2001). Studies such as Colman and Ganong (1997), Ganong and Colman (2001), and Ganong, Coleman, and Jamison (2011), have explained how healthy relationships can develop between stepchildren and their stepparents and their emotional bonding. However, the explicit

investigation of everyday emotional interactions between stepfamily members was not the main focus in this type of research. More specifically in Ganong and Colman's quantitative study the emotions were entwined within the questions about feelings of rejection, love, and closeness. It would have been very interesting to have further information on those underlying emotions and if they influenced how the participants had behaved. Emotional information has often been offered by participants in most qualitative stepfamily research, yet that has not been specifically examined as a variable of interest on its own. Therefore, research regarding the specific emotional reactions of step-relationship interactions is still very limited.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PRESENT STUDY

As the introduction chapter has outlined, there are several significant gaps in the stepfamily literature that remains to be explored. One specific area that more research needs to be conducted is in the field of positive psychology, such as, how it is some stepfamilies succeed where others do not, what are the specific strengths functioning stepfamilies use to help work through conflict in everyday family life. Leading the way with a strengths based approach are studies such as Banker and Gaertner (1998), Coleman et al. (2001), Michaels (2006), Whiting, Smith, Barnett, and Gafsky (2007), Pryor (2008b), and Ganong et al. (2011). These studies focused on components of how stepfamilies developed, and maintained relationships from a strengths based approach.

Another area that is limited is the involvement of child participants. There is not enough research that includes child participants. This is regrettable considering that most stepfamilies consist of children and/or teenagers. There are many studies that use stepchild participants from a retrospective viewpoint, but this type of research has its limitations. There are issues with memory, and more importantly opinions and perspectives do change due to developmental changes from childhood into adulthood (Passer & Smith, 2001). In addition, there is very little research that includes both stepparents and their stepchildren within the same study which would add value with triangulation. This would provide an overall picture of what may be occurring from all relevant parties (Kelle, 2005).

Fairness as discussed in the introduction chapter is known to influence child behaviour in the classroom and in nuclear types of family settings. However, to my knowledge there are no published research into how fairness plays a role in stepfamilies, and how this may influence stepfamily relationships. The benefit of the fairness concept

is that it can be easily understood and recognised by parents and children alike. An ability to forgive momentary lapses of fair treatment (such as breaking a promise, not being available, subtly favouring one member of the family) is present in most children. As Evans et al. (2007) research has shown, children typically recognise that parents do occasionally have their failings like anyone else. The negative emotional effect of these failings, such as resentment, jealousy, and hostility, can be mitigated through simple strategies available to children and parents alike: apology, compensation, restitution, acceptance, and so on. However it is important to gather more explicit data on the frequency of these strategies and their success. To date there is little to no research investigating how fairness, emotions and resolution strategies may play a role in how well a stepfamily functions. Forgiveness is another key variable that research has shown to assist in the harmony of relationships (Fincham et al., 2004), yet there is limited if any published research that explores forgiveness in stepfamilies.

Investigation into these areas is important as it would help to assist stepfamilies to understand the behaviours of other family members, and therefore lead into more resilient relationships. It would aid them into knowing what behaviours can encourage family functioning and strengths, and where to change behaviours that could cause dysfunction and disharmony in the family.

My overall objective for this research was to explore what functioning New Zealand stepfamilies reported as typical issues of fairness that they encountered, and the strategies they used to resolve those issues from a positive psychology epistemology. I planned to achieve this by running a nationwide study that entailed stepfamilies to engage in a task together within a family meeting. The stepfamilies were to consist of at least a stepparent and their stepchild. Each family member was to have come up with a

potentially unfair situation which they had instigated, along with the resolution that occurred (if there was one). From this my specific research questions were as follows:

- What are typical fairness situations that New Zealand stepfamilies encounter within their daily lives?

- What are the resolution strategies they use to resolve those fairness situations?

- How are these situations (both the fairness situation and its resolution) perceived by family members in regards to fairness, emotional reactions, and forgiveness?

- What is more influential towards emotional reactions, fairness, and forgiveness: specific relationships between family members (stepchild, stepparent, biological child, biological parent) or is it actually the situations?

These questions were based on a positive psychology approach where I wanted to explore what strategies could promote stepfamily functioning such as fairness, types of resolution strategies, and forgiveness. I also asked the participating families to provide advice for other stepfamilies that had been helpful for themselves in regards to fairness. The reason behind this was to explore and examine what stepfamilies perceived to be successful fairness strategies that had already helped them to become functioning stepfamilies.

An additional benefit that this study will add to current research is triangulation from a whole stepfamily unit, rather than gathering information from just one type of stepfamily member. By gathering information from different family members on any one specific situation, would provide a more objective and complete picture of what occurs within these situations. More importantly it would provide information on how these

situations affect each of the different types of family members (such as stepchild, stepparent, biological parent etc).

Finally, I wanted to give the child and teenager participants (stepchildren) a voice in research, and gain information from their perspective. This is necessary, for reasons previously stated in this chapter, to gain information from a child's perspective rather than retrospectively from an adult. This would assist in the development of effective strategies for stepfamilies to deal with issues of fairness and general everyday functioning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Design

A mixed methods approach was used to explore how harmonious functioning stepfamilies managed fairness in everyday issues such as rules, discipline, privileges or opportunities, and any other relevant areas of family life. To gather the enriched information required for an investigative study, both qualitative and quantitative tools were used. A family meeting was designed to incorporate these tools using a response booklet with closed and open ended questions, tick box questions, and a psychometric measure. There were no restrictions on participating family numbers other than requiring at least two family members, the stepparent and their stepchild to take part in the research. This allowed for many other household family members to participate. The potential aim of this was to gain valuable information from biological parents, siblings, and any other relative (either step or biological), about how they perceived fairness and then managed this within their household. This gave a 360 degree perspective on what was going on within these families in regards to fairness, conflicts due to fairness issues and the resulting resolutions.

A pilot study was conducted with one family interviewed in person (by me), and were guided through the family meeting task. The aim of the pilot study was to allow an opportunity to address any difficulties with the procedure before the main part of the study was conducted.

Procedure

Initial contact with participants came from interest through research advertisements, and consisted of checking to ensure they met the study's requirements

and answering their questions about the research procedure. The participants were then informed about the aims of the study and what their role would involve. If participants met the criteria for participation and agreed to take part, their contact details were taken and a research pack was posted to them. After receiving the research pack in the post, the families were required to hold a family meeting and engage in the assigned task together. The task was expected to take approximately 45 minutes to an hour for each family. The family meeting was assisted with the aid of an instructional DVD, so that the family could work through the task together step by step. During the task, each family member was asked to come up with a fairness-related scenario and resolution to share. They were then required to write down their responses to each others' scenarios and resolutions in their individual booklets. Following this, each family member was to complete a Brief FAM General Scale questionnaire. At the conclusion of the family meeting, an elected chairperson (chosen at the beginning of the family meeting as instructed by the DVD) was to collect everyone's response booklets, put it in the prepaid envelope and send it back to me. Once I received a research pack back from a family, they were then sent a $100 movie or supermarket voucher of their choice as a koha (a gift in acknowledgement and exchanged for their valuable time given).

Recruitment

Stepfamilies were recruited nationwide via advertisements in school newsletters (see Appendix A), Church newsletters, *Tots n Teens* Magazine, the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, colourful posters in libraries (see Appendix B), Facebook, and word of mouth. The advertisements sought families that perceived themselves to be a harmonious functioning stepfamily ("*or at least considered themselves to be for most of the time*"), and had been together as a family (household unit) for at least two years. Additionally the

stepfamilies needed to have at least one stepparent and their stepchild willing to take part in a family meeting task. The stepchild was required to be between the ages of 9 to 17 years. Stepchild participation was necessary to ensure their perspective was included in the data collection, and children older than 8 years of age were considered to have a reasonable standard of writing comprehension required for the research task. Recruitment using these criteria proved to be very difficult despite the extensive advertising. There is still uncertainty as to why, given the supposedly large numbers of stepfamilies existing in New Zealand. One likely reason with difficulty recruiting may be attributed to New Zealand families that do not necessarily interpret their structure as being a "stepfamily." As one of our adult participants stated: *"Actually, it has just occurred to me that we don't think of ourselves as a stepfamily as such—we are just a family."* Another likely reason is that by requesting harmoniously functioning families (even with the semi-humorous "most of the time" qualifier) many reasonably successful families were reluctant to think of themselves as harmonious. A third possibility is that with the lifestyle demands placed on families in modern New Zealand society, many families might have found it difficult to imagine an hour or more of family time that could be devoted to the required task. Time restraints in a New Zealand stepfamily may be even more restricted compared to other types of family structures due to custody arrangements (child/ren's time is split between households), and potentially less time due to more extracurricular activities in these larger households to attend and organise (with more children typically in a stepfamily generally tends to mean more extracurricular activities). And finally, the fact that there was a task to be performed might have seemed a little more demanding or intimidating than more conventional studies involving merely a questionnaire or an interview. When prospective volunteers did make contact each family recruited were contacted by phone and had the nature of the research explained to them in detail. At this

point if a family met the criteria and still wished to take part they were then sent a

research pack containing the research materials (as described under the heading Materials

and Measurements).

An interesting note for other researchers is that the School Newsletters were the

most successful source of recruitment for the majority of our participant families.

Participants

Eighty four families were initially sent research packs. Of the 84 families,

approximately 50% (n = 44) completed the research, returned their completed research

material, and had data appropriate for analysis. Unfortunately three completed packs were

lost in transit, leaving a total of 41 families to be included in analysis. When each of those

families were followed up and it was discovered that their research may have been lost in

the mail they were still sent a koha[2].

There were a total of 155 individual participants within these 41 families. The

stated ethnicities of the participants were 75% Pākehā / New Zealander, 15% Māori, 3%

Asian, 2% Pacific Islander, and 5% not specified. The role that each family member

played within the household is displayed in Table *1*. This was important information as

one of the aims of this study was to examine if family roles and their interactions

influenced certain emotions and behaviours (see Table *1*). One fully biological child's

data was excluded from the analysis due to not meeting research criteria of requiring a

stepparent. The stepfamilies who took part had been living together between two and 12

years (*M* = 5.58 years). These families consisted of 2 to 8 individuals (*M* = 5.37 family

members per stepfamily). According to Statistics New Zealand (2011) this is higher than

the national average household of *M* = 2.7 The maximum number of individuals from any

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[2] Koha (a Māori term) is a gift given for something received and also represents the esteem held by the giver to the receiver of the gift. It is more commonly known as an example of reciprocity with an important role in marae protocol, where visitors would present a koha to the host.

one household was six (see Figure 1). Four 8-year-olds were included in the study as they were all stepchildren, had taken the time to participate in their family meeting, filled out their own individual booklets, and had parental consent. The cross-tabulated relationship between age of each participant and his or her family role is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1

Participant Numbers in Each Category of Family Role and Gender

Category of Family Role	Gender		
	Female	Male	Total
Parents who are both a Biological and a Stepparent (Mixed parental role)	23	24	47
Stepparent only	2	7	9
Parent	16	5	21
Stepchild	34	44	78
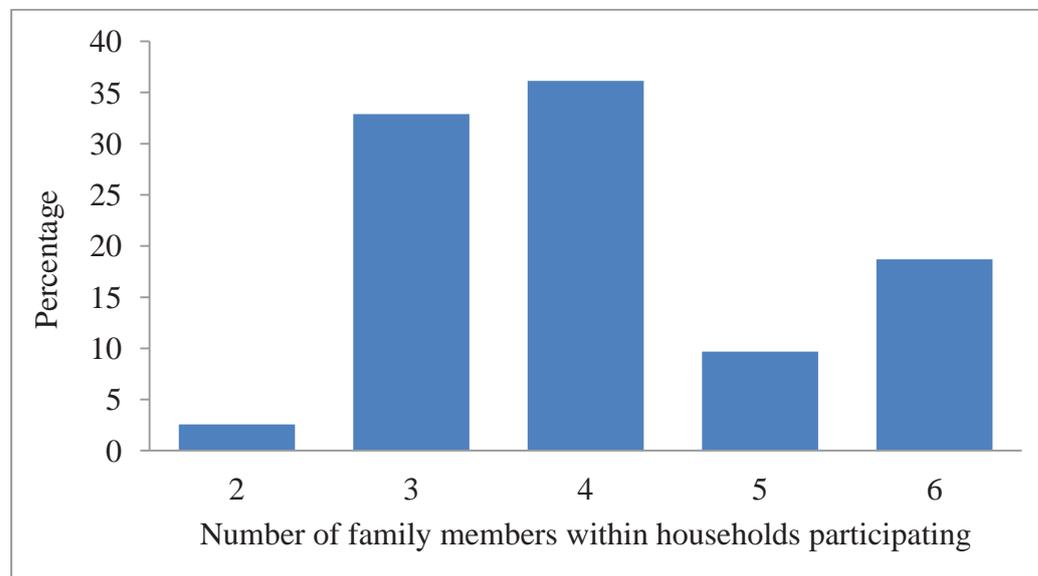
Figure 1. Distribution of different numbers of family members within one household who participated.
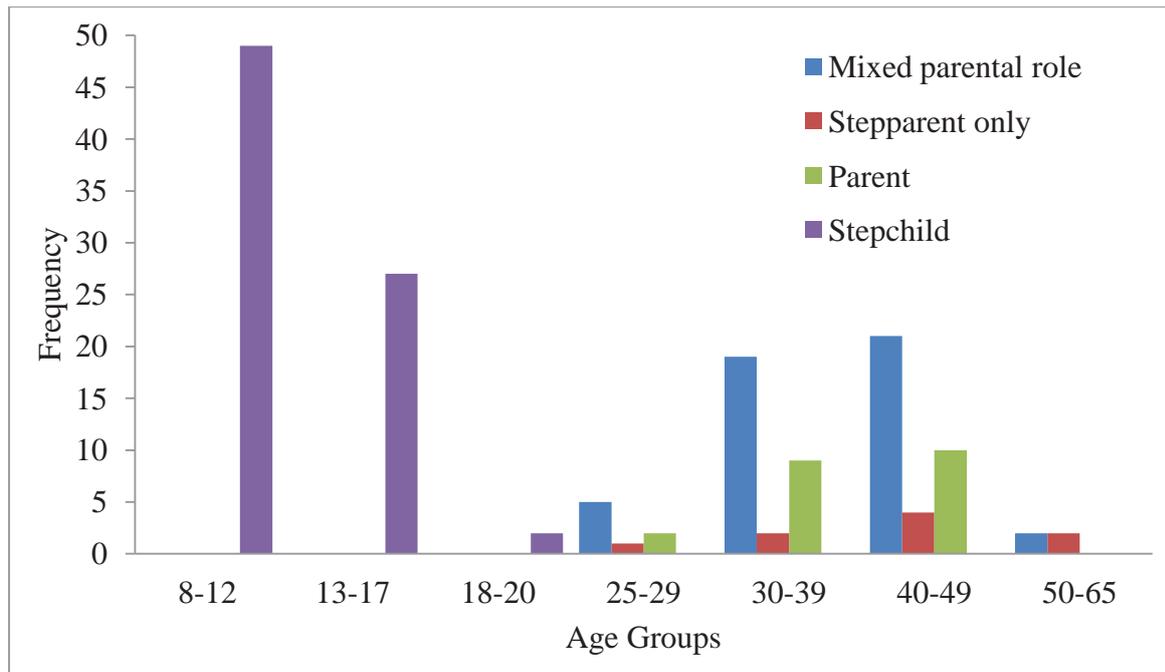
Figure 2. The ages of the family member participants categorised into their family roles and age groups.

Materials and Measurements

A response booklet (see Appendix C) was created for the purpose of this research, and the Brief FAM: General Scale from the Family Assessment Measure Version III (FAM III) was used to help assess family functioning (for copyright reasons this has not been reproduced, but sample items are presented later). To assist the stepfamilies work through the research task, they were each provided an instructional DVD - specifically developed for this research. A research pack was sent to all stepfamilies who agreed to take part in this study. Included in these research packs were: an information sheet (see Appendix D), a pen, a response booklet, and a FAM General Scale for each participant family member; one A4 poster advertisement (to give to another interested stepfamily whom they may know) (see Appendix B); the instructional DVD; and a postage prepaid return envelope.

The task.

Each stepfamily was asked to hold a family meeting. This meeting needed to be attended by at least one stepparent and their stepchild, and any other family member who wished to be included. The stepfamilies were asked to play the DVD, whilst holding their meeting as it would guide them through the research task. The task required the family members to each come up with an issue and its resolution that had occurred within their household, and to then share their example with the rest of the family. Each family member was then asked to record their own emotional responses to those examples into their individual response booklet.

The instructional DVD.

The instructional DVD was designed and created specifically for this research. Its purpose was to help guide the participants through the family meeting as well as keep the task standardised for all stepfamilies taking part in the research nationwide. The DVD was an hour in length and could be paused, rewound, and / or fast-forward at any time if required. It consisted with information about what was involved and what the family members were required to do. It also informed them of their rights as research participants, and contact details of the researcher should they require further assistance or had any questions. At the beginning of the task, the DVD instructed the families to appoint a chairperson to help keep time, and to choose the order each participant would have their turn. The DVD took the stepfamilies through each page of the response booklet, and allowed time for family members to share and write their responses. Stepfamilies were encouraged to pause the DVD at any time if more time was required. At the end of the task the chairperson was requested to collect all the response booklets and the FAM General Scale measures, write the family's choice of koha on the back of a response booklet, and post back the completed forms.

The response booklet.

The purpose of the response booklet was to record participant family member information such as their fairness scenarios, resolutions, emotional responses to other family member selected scenarios, if forgiveness occurred, and advice for other stepfamilies in similar situations. The response booklet contained the following forms and materials:

Consent forms. At the beginning of the response booklet were three types of consent forms for different ages and family roles. Participants chose which consent form was applicable to them to sign. If the individual was under 16-years-old, then the parent / guardian consent form in their booklet needed to be signed as well.

Family description. Next in the response booklet was a sheet titled "*I need to know a bit more about you as a family*". This asked for some basic descriptive demographical information about themselves and their family within that particular household. The demographic information that was requested included:

- gender;

- ethnicity group that they individually affiliated themselves;

- how long they had been together as a stepfamily;

- who lives in the household (for example: mum, stepdad, younger sister, grandma etc);

- their family role description (for example: stepdaughter and daughter);

- which family members were also taking part in this research with them (for example: mum, stepdad, and myself).

Family situations. The family participants were then given 5 minutes within the DVD to write down a list of potentially unfair family situations that they thought they had managed well. On the DVD two examples were given to help families think of their own

ideas. One example was of a parent who had promised to help a younger family member with their homework but had run out of time to do this. The other example was of one family member who was supposed to clean their room but did not do so, requiring another family member to complete the chore instead. No resolution examples were offered. Each participant was then required to select from their own list of already written down situations (along with its resolution) that they would then share with the rest of their family. They were given 3 minutes to do this and were asked to write it down. This was important as when their turn came to share their example of a conflict situation and its resolution, they could read it verbatim to the rest of the family and this data was also recorded. Following on from this, individuals were asked to record the amount of time since the situation had occurred, and in what order they were going to take their turn.

Scenarios and resolutions. The next component of the response booklet had six identical sections. Within each section, the respondent recorded their responses to each of the other family member's scenarios. Depending on the number of individuals within each stepfamily, each person would fill out one section per family member's example. This meant two to six of these sections were filled out relative to the number of participating family members. Family members were also asked to record their responses when it was their turn. In each section they were asked to record:

- *"Which family member is sharing their example"?* Here, the respondent recorded which family member was presenting their scenario and its resolution if there was one.

- *"How did you feel about the situation"*? This open ended question provided the opportunity for the respondent to include additional emotions or understanding to the list of emotions provided (see emotions listed below).

- *"Did you feel that the end result was fair"*? There was a fair / unfair tick box for this question. Participants were also asked to rate their perceived degree of fairness / unfairness on a 1 to 5 scale representing 'somewhat' to 'very'.

- *"How did you feel about the situation **back** when it happened"*? Participants responded to this question by circling a number for each emotion listed. The scale was from 0 to 5, with the description of 0 = 'Not at all', 1 = 'A little', 2 = 'Somewhat', 3 = 'Moderately', 4 = 'Very', and 5 = 'Extremely'. Emotions listed were: happy, fine, annoyed, angry, sad, guilty, nothing, accepting, and an option to include 'other'. Later in this thesis this data is referred to as pre emotions.

- *"How do you feel about the situation **now**"*? The participants were again asked to circle a number for each emotion listed. The same scale and list of emotions above were used again for this question. Later in this thesis these data are called post emotions.

- *"If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person"*? Participants responded to this question by using the yes / no tick box supplied, along with the question *"Why"*. This opened-ended question provided qualitative information about why a participant had or had not forgiven a family member.

- *"What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could have done better"*? This open-ended question provided qualitative information about the individual's perception of how they could have rectified the unfair situation.

Advice for other stepfamilies. The last component of the response booklet was optional. In this section (section G) the participants were asked to write down any advice for other stepfamilies on how to deal with issues of fairness, and what they thought would encourage forgiveness.

The Brief FAM: General Scale.

The *Brief FAM: General Scale* (Skinner, Steinhauer, & Santa-Barbara, 1995) is a shortened version of the Family Assessment Measure Version III (FAM III): General Scale. It is a self-report questionnaire that includes 14 items, and gives a general overview of perceived strengths and weaknesses in family functioning. The items are rated on a 4-point scale with responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Sample items are: "*We feel loved in our family*," "*We take the time to listen to each other*," "*My family tries to run my life*" (negatively scored), and "*If we do something wrong we don't get a chance to explain*" (negatively scored). Ratings on each individual's questionnaire are then summed to give an overall score that reflects their perception of their family functioning. *Lower* scores represent *more adaptive* (more strength-based) functioning, whereas higher scores represent poorer family functioning. The expected norms for family functioning are as follows: a *t*-score of 35 and below is considered to be excellent, a *t*-score of 36 to 44 is considered to be increasing in strengths, a *t*-score between 45 to 55 is considered to be average, a *t*-score between 56 to 64 is considered to be increasing in problems, and a *t*-score of 65 and above is considered to be problematic. The FAM III is considered suitable for the reading age of 10-year-olds and above (Skinner et al., 1995), and so for younger family members, it was suggested that they may need assistance to help read and /or understand the questions. The scale has good internal reliability: for both clinical and non-clinical groups Cronbach alpha coefficients range from .86 to .89 (Skinner et al., 1995). Discriminant analysis was also conducted and this scale was able to distinguish between clinical groups from the non-clinical groups (Skinner et al., 1995).

Ethical Considerations

The research procedure required family members to recall specific situations that could have produced conflict during the research meeting itself. Some minor distress or negative emotions towards other family members may have also been provoked. To help minimise any potential conflicts or emotional upset, participants were asked to include how these situations were or could have been resolved. Conflict resolution information was provided to the families at the end of the DVD which concluded their family meeting task. Also included was the option of contacting me for further debriefing if required. One research safety concern was for the younger family members. Younger participants required assistance from an older family member when filling out the psychometric measure (on how they viewed their family functioning), and at times their response booklet (with their views on other family member situations). This may have meant that their information was not kept confidential from other family members. A minimum age of 9-years-old was included in the research to try and restrict the need for assistance. However, this lower age limit was then lowered to 8-years-old due to some family members wishing to also be included in this research. This only occurred in consultation with their parent and myself. A total of four 8-year-olds chose to take part in this study. In consultation with my supervisors, it was decided that it would have been unethical not to include the 8-year-olds' information, as they had all expressed an explicit wish to join in the activity with their families along with sending in all their data.

Stepfamilies who perceived themselves as well-functioning were recruited as they were considered to be more likely to have developed strategies in resolving potential issues of unfairness amongst themselves. Therefore it was hypothesized that if there was any emotional distress that arose during the research task, this type of stepfamily would be less at risk of emotional harm from engaging in the research task. Also, if there had

been any unresolved situations brought up in the family research task, then the very nature of writing down responses to another family member's potential unfair behaviour be therapeutic. This is a common intervention technique used in therapy for many different types of issues (see Pennebaker, 2004). Ethical approval was granted from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (application 10/31). Consent was collected from every participant, including additional parental consent for those aged under 16-years-old (the consent forms can be found in the Family Fairness Response Booklet, Appendix C). Each participant was given an information sheet, and each family an instructional DVD. The DVD also affirmed that all their information would be kept confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter will initially provide (A) an overview of all the study variables, starting with a summary of descriptive statistics including participants' demographics[3]. (B) Due to the complex nature of the interactions of the analyses required to examine the research questions, a rationale is provided for the main statistical model used for quantitative analysis, Generalised Estimating Equations (GEE). A rationale for the qualitative analysis used for all the open ended questions is also included in this subsection.

Following the analysis rationale, is the analysis of the (C) scenarios and (D) resolutions variables. Categorising the scenarios and resolutions was essential to allow for descriptive statistics to be generated from these two variables. The categories developed from the preliminary analysis for these two variables, provided an important basis for further quantitative analyses that assisted with answering the research questions.

(E) Next, each of the five variables (fairness, emotions, acceptance, forgiveness, family functioning) are examined separately across five different sections. Each section provides descriptive statistics, further quantitative analysis if appropriate, and a short summary of overall results for that variable's results.

(F) Finally, qualitative analysis will then explore why these participants chose forgiveness and what advice they have for other stepfamilies when dealing with issues of fairness and forgiveness.

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[3]Analysis based on ethnicity was not conducted as the sample of participants was too small to compare to the rest of the stepfamily general population. Care needs to be taken when comparing small sample sizes and generalising it to its general population, as this is likely to increase the possibility of Type I or Type II errors from occurring.

A. The Variables

The participants.

There were 155 participants from 41 stepfamilies who took part in this research. There was a mean of M=5.37 family members living in participating stepfamily households (2 to 8 family members per household), with a mean of $M = 3.78$ family members per stepfamily taking part in this research (2 to 6 participants actively involved from each stepfamily). These stepfamilies had been together for an average of M= 5.58 years (range of 2 to 12 years together).

Each participant was categorised by several variables. These were their gender, their role within their family, their age group, and the relationship connection they had with other family members (parent, stepchild, sibling for example).

Gender. The participants consisted of 75 females and 80 males, with a 48.4% to 51.6% ratio of females versus males.

Role. There were four types of family role each participant could belong to. These were: a biological parent role n = 21, a stepparent only role n = 9, a mixed parental role (both a biological and a stepparent to children in the household) = 47, or a stepchild role n = 78. Table *1* in the method section illustrates a cross-tabulated relationship between family role and gender.

Age Group. Participants were divided into seven age groups, which are shown in Table *2*

Table 2

Participants in Each Age Group and Each Group's Mean Age

Age Group	Frequency of Participants	Age Group Mean
8-12	49	10.14
13-17	27	14.26
18-20	2	19
25-29	8	27.50
30-39	30	35.10
40-49	35	43.63
50-65	4	55.25

Relationship. Participants were categorised as having one of eight possible relationships with their other family members. These were: child, stepchild, sibling, stepsibling, parent, stepparent, partner, including an eighth option as themselves called 'myself'. Table *3* illustrates each possible relationship, and the observation counts with that relationship.

Each scenario and its resolution presented were counted as observations in the quantitative analysis rather than a typical one observation per participant analysis. This was due to each participant having to record their responses towards every other family member's presented scenario and its resolution, and the potential of differing responses depending on the presented variables (see analysis rationale and explanation of GEE for further explanation of the quantitative analysis chosen). The descriptive statistics of the observational counts of relationship interactions were as shown in Table *3*.

Table 3

Possible Family Member Relationship and Observation Counts of Relationship Occurrences When Presenting Scenario and Resolution Examples

Family Member Relationship	Observation Count
Child	68
Stepchild	71
Sibling	47
Stepsibling	51
Parent	69
Stepparent	74
Parent	66
Myself	142

Scenarios and resolutions.

Descriptive analysis for scenarios and resolutions follows after their preliminary analysis that develops categories for both of these variables. The preliminary analysis to categorise the scenarios and resolutions was essential to allow further analysis to ascertain whether they significantly affected or had a relationship with emotions, family functioning (measured by the FAM *t*-scores) fairness, acceptance, and forgiveness.

Fairness.

Each scenario and its resolution was judged as either Fair or Unfair, and then rated on a 0 to 5 point scale.

Emotions.

There were six types of emotions (fine, happy, annoyed, angry, sad, and guilty), rated on a 0 to 5 point scale in response to each scenario and resolution presented.

Acceptance.

A state of mind rather than an emotion, the participant's self-reported degree of acceptance was rated on a 0 to 5 point scale in response to each scenario and resolution presented.

Forgiveness.

Each scenario and resolution presented was rated as forgiven, not forgiven, or not applicable.

Family functioning.

Each participant's total score on the Brief FAM scale was used to measure their perception of their family functioning.

B. Rationale for Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses Methods

The family task was constructed as an opportunity for all family members to generate quantitative and qualitative data. Family composition as with any stepfamily composition was variable, which meant that sometimes any family member could have several possible roles within a stepfamily. It is also likely that family members within the same household, even the step-relatives, would share certain characteristics by virtue of all living in that same household. Thus, the quantitative data collected came from clusters of family members, and each family member had repeated observations in the form of rating different family members' scenarios. This created the potential for autocorrelations within the data collected, as one would expect the evaluations from persons within the same family to be more similar than those from different families.

Where necessary this problem was avoided by using Generalised Estimating Equations (GEE). This is a semiparametric method of modelling data which deals with the situation where observations are autocorrelated, similar to classical repeated measures analysis of variance (Norton, Bieler, Ennett, & Zarkin, 1996). GEE have two advantages over standard repeated measures techniques, however. First, each case (scenario) can have a different number of observations. In this case, different families have different numbers of members, and hence the scenarios have between 2 and 6 evaluations (or

observations) each. Also, if one or more family members did not evaluate a scenario (therefore considered as missing data), then GEE can still be performed on the non-missing data for that scenario. Secondly, classical repeated measures analysis requires that the dependent variables follow a multivariate normal distribution (Field, 2009). GEE is not restricted to any given distributional assumptions (Norton et al., 1996). A univariate normality assumption was used for continuous dependent variables, and binary logistic regression for yes/no dependent variables (such as "fair" vs. "unfair"). Further statistical information about GEE and how it was applied to the continuous and categorical variables can be found in Appendix E.

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for windows, version 19.0 (IBM Corp, 2010).

In order to convert open-ended responses from the participants into categories of scenarios and resolutions, preliminary qualitative analysis was necessary. For this procedure, thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Howitt & Cramer, 2011) were utilised. All 155 response booklets were read thoroughly before coding commenced. Each potentially unfair situation and resolution participants was then coded into categories. Ten families' response booklets were randomly chosen (32 booklets) and used as a basis to begin the coding process. This initial coding was used as a guide for the coding of the rest of the response booklets. When a new theme arose from the following response booklets all previously coded booklets were re-examined. Therefore, every scenario description and resolution in the response booklet was read in detail at least twice for coding. This was a time–consuming process over months with a space of two to three weeks between the first and the final review coding. The gap of two to three weeks allowed me the chance to try and review the data again with a more refreshed approach, which assisted the categorising process with either clarification that scenarios /

resolutions were in the correct categories or that variations of those categories to new categories were required.

Categories of the open ended response booklet questions were finalised and examples of the verbatim remarks by the participants are provided in the second part of the results section. Thematic analysis techniques were again used to categorise and analyse the answers to the following open ended questions:

- Why did you forgive?

- Why did you not forgive?

- What would you have preferred to have happened or could have done better?

- Do you have any advice for other stepfamilies on how to deal with issues of fairness?

C. Categorisation of the Scenarios

A total of 535 scenarios were provided by all 155 participants, with an average of 3.45 per participant. Results of the thematic analysis highlighted fifteen scenario categories of fairness/unfairness situations identified by participants, however only 14 categories were analysed. The fifteenth category was coded as "lying" and was recorded only twice in all possible 535 scenarios, and therefore excluded from further consideration.

Below are descriptions of each of the 14 scenario categories along with verbatim quotes.

1. *Differential treatment of children.*

This refers to specific differential treatment of children within the household. An incident of differential treatment could occur between children in a household due to age, gender and/or relationship type (biological versus step).

> *I asked to use the computer and I got told 'no', and then soon after my brother asked and he was allowed (693[4], stepchild, female, 12-years-old).*
>
> *'…' does more chores, because she's older and more capable (532, parent, female, 42-years-old).*
>
> *It is unfair how sometimes my parents won't let me go out because my room is messy but will let my brother go out (355, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).*

2. *Fighting amongst children.*

This situation was identified when there was conflict (from arguing and bickering to physical aggression) between the children of the household. This theme was presented as an issue by all the "family role" groups.

> *Getting called 'the worst stepbrother ever' by my stepsister (233, stepchild, male, 11-years-old).*
>
> *Kids fighting over front seat in car daily on way to school (651, mixed parental role, female, 44-years-old).*
>
> *When the kids tee-tales, there are many versions of the same event. taking sides could be seen as unfair (541, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).*

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[4] Participant code.

3. *Lack of a specific support from other family members.*

This occurred when a family member perceived that other members within their own household did not support them over a specific problem. (Note, however, none of these participants presented a *general* absence of support from their household as an issue).

> *I would like to grow my beard a lot longer than it already is. I get nagged at to get it cut as most of the family prefer it to be really short (142, mixed parental role, male, 52-years-old).*

> *I think it unfair with my fractured elbow I still have to do jobs (family did not help, 651, mixed parental role, female, 44-years-old).*

> *Trying to get out of the house on a Saturday morning for sport, the kids are not doing their bit to get ready. We are getting there late (681, parent, female, 41-years-old).*

4. *Household chores.*

This theme represented any issues regarding household chores, always around their completion or non-completion and how they were assigned. Household chores was the fifth most frequently identified fairness issue overall in stepfamily households; however it was close to the second most frequently identified issue by all participants.

> *It can be hard to find someone to mow the lawn (talking about all household members, 462, mixed parental role, male, 43-years-old).*

> *The children leave everything on the bench for me to clean up (141, parent, female, 48-years-old).*

> *I never tidy my room (543, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).*

5. *Same rule for all.*

The "same rule for all" concern was when there was an issue presented where children regardless of age or relationship type were treated according to the same rules and standards. Bedtime was an example of this, when older children felt unfairly treated if they had the same bedtime as the younger members of the household.

> *Not showing favouritism towards my son i.e. When tidying the house, everyone's involved, although he is a small part (young) he still helps (502, mixed parental role, male, 27-years-old).*

> *Shower-time, everyone is given their own time and spot (182, mixed parental role, female, 43-years-old).*

> *Nine-year-old felt it was unfair that he had to go to bed at same time as 3 and 7-year-old (391, mixed parental role, female, 39-years-old).*

6. *Discipline.*

This theme occurred when a child perceived that they were disciplined unfairly, or a parent considered that their partner was too harsh or too lenient when punishing a child within the household.

> *When we got home she still expected to attend practice that day. As punishment she was not allowed to go to practice and think about the effort that others put in to get her to practises (about daughter's bad attitude, 501, parent, female, 28-years-old).*

> *After failing to return at agreed time, her punishment was to walk the dog. This is unfair towards me in not returning at the agreed time (502, mixed parental role, male, 28-years-old).*

> *Told off stepson for something that he didn't do (542, mixed parental role, male, 47-years-old).*

7. *Missing out.*

This category included all incidents in which children missed out on relationships, holidays, or gifts, due to either living between two households, or their other parent not having financial resources or sufficient emotional engagement or contact with them.

> *When '...' is not with us, there is potential for her to feel left out when we do things without her (692, mixed parental role, female, 38-years-old).*

> *'...' dad lives overseas and when he is with '...', she gets anything she wants, and it's unfair for her brothers that her father showers her with gifts (531, mixed parental role, male, 41-years-old).*

> *My stepbrother and stepsister got extra presents from their mother and when I was old enough (6-7ish) I realised this. I asked mum, and she said I would get another large present from her and my stepdad. When my younger half brother was born, he was given the same thing (354, stepchild, male, 14-years-old).*

8. *Expectations.*

Scenarios were coded as "expectations" when an expectation was not met. It occurred when promises were broken, or when a family member responsible for specific tasks did not carry them out. This category also included when family members expected more than what other family members could or were willing to deliver on, be it their time or resources.

> *My son was not staying on tasks with his homework and was goofing around. My husband and I felt frustrated by this behaviour. This was potentially unfair as we could have reacted with our frustration and*

sent him to his room and told him not to come out til completion (431, parent, female, 32-years-old).

Not doing things that we are told, for example not bringing home my homework (544, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).

Wife doing all the home running due to me working very long hours (612, parent, male, 37-years-old).

9. Disagreements.

Scenarios were categorised as disagreements when they involved a disagreement or argument between a child and a parent.

I wanted to go with my friend shopping and at first it was alright but then we had a discussion on whether I should go but then we talked it over – with a few disagreements (143, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

Not letting me buy what I want (144, stepchild, male 13-years-old).

When we couldn't get movies that exaggerate their rating or were "M" (over our age) dad had to watch it first then we got to watch it but it took ages (193, stepchild, male, 13-years-old).

10. Disrespect.

Disrespect was coded when a family member denigrated a relationship as being a "step" or a biological relationship. The term "disrespect" often appeared in the scenario, and thus exemplars represent a judgment by a family member rather than a judgment by me. This broad category included instances of insolence or contempt towards a stepparent or a stepchild, or when a child or a parent undermined the parenting of the other parent in the household.

'...' yells at me when I'm talking to mum and says mean stuff (683, stepchild, female, 10-years-old).

How my daughter sometimes doesn't show '...' the same respect that
she shows me (501, parent, female, 28-years-old).

Stepdaughter asking me for something – not getting the right response
and she goes running to her father. (351, mixed parental role, female,
42-years-old).

11. Finance.

Any issue related to finances in the household such as money, or expenditure, was included under this category, including when a child had an issue with pocket money.

Argued on split of household and children's costs that each person pays
(722, stepparent, male, 65-years-old).

The amount of pocket money I get is one dad paid me too little, but at
the start of the week there is dollars up for grabs (for jobs). I lose
money if I don't do any jobs I have to pay them the two dollars that I
lost (583, stepchild, male, 8-years-old).

12. Bad mood.

This theme represented any incident in which a participant had taken their bad mood out on other family members, either self-perceived or reported by another family member.

When my parents are in bad moods and get mad at us for no reason
(613,stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

I have come home from work tired and as soon as I have walked into
the house stepdaughter is asking me to help her do things, I got annoyed
and yelled at her (791, mixed parental role, male, 46-years-old).

Being grumpy when I have had a bad day at work, and telling people
off, or take it out on people at home (701, parent, male, 31-years-old).

13. Issue between households

Although the participants had been instructed *not* to raise issues of fairness occurring *between* households, a few did so and such incidents were included in this category.

> *Having to put up with wife's ex-husband and his non-existent child support (232, mixed parental role, male, 39-years-old).*
>
> *Stepdaughter not being supported at sports by her mother and feeling it is not fair that 'only' her stepmother comes to watch (351, mixed parental role, female, 42-years-old).*

14. No scenario

A few participants were not able to generate any situations. When this happened, other family members complained about it and presented it in the response booklet as a grievance, and was thus categorised as "no scenario".

D. Categorisation of the Resolutions

Using thematic analysis, eight *resolution* categories emerged from all the participants' examples of solutions the families had used effectively. There was a total of 222 resolutions recorded by the 155 participants, with a mean of 1.4 per participant. The eight major resolution categories are described below.

1. Compromise

A compromise occurred between family members in the household in trying to resolve an issue or situation.

> *Even though me and my brother hate the dishes we get by knowing there's ice-cream in the freezer (724, stepchild, female, 13-years-old).*

It was resolved by suggesting they choose something together that they would both enjoy (children fighting over what to watch, 432, mixed parental role, male, 31-years-old).

I just listen to my ipod or change it to a song from his collection that I like, or we turn the music off. But lately has had let me listen to mine in the car (about differences in taste of music and what to play in the car (613, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

2. Communication

Better communication was deliberately attempted in order to try to resolve an issue or a situation.

We talked and then let the situation cool down before making a decision (143, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

He got talked to by '...' and he stopped (fighting amongst siblings, 643, stepchild, female, 13-years-old).

I resolved this issue by giving him a time break and explained the importance of completing his homework and explaining how proud of him I am for achieving and trying his best (431, parent, female, 32-years-old).

3. Sharing and turn-taking

This resolution category included all instances in which participants identified practical solutions to problematic situations involving limited resources, such as allocating time to each family member for computer use, turn taking at who was going to choose the next movie, and rosters for housework.

Brought in a rota, so that they [the household children] only had to do the job twice in a six week period (talking about household children

fighting over whose turn it was to do the rubbish, 261, Mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

Marking sure that time and attention is shared (sharing time with own children and stepchildren, 541, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

Big ticket items i.e. playstation, trampoline, quadbike are 'family gift' everyone is encouraged to share. Even the big items that belonged to our families separately prior to blending are now shared and considered everybody's (231, mixed parental role).

4. Justification

When a participant provided an explanatory rationale for the occurrence of the problematic situation without further resolution methods identified, it was coded as justification.

I just put up with it (disagreement with parent about not buying what they wanted, 144, stepchild, male, 13-years-old).

I don't think '...' feels that though [about missing out when at the other household]. Maybe because we do a lot of things together when she is here, and she also enjoys time spent at her mother's house (692, mixed parental role, female, 38-years-old).

I thought that my stepmum was taking my dad away from me. I realised it was just my dad wanting somebody around all the time and that she made him happy (183, stepchild, female, 10-years-old).

5. Apology

This category included any time an apology was offered in order to resolve a situation or conflict.

Saying sorry after accidently hitting (521, stepson, 11-years-old).

When I approached him he apologised (about deleting their TV programmes, 642, stepchild, female 16-years-old).

I managed these regrettable unfair situations by returning to the kids once things have simmered down, apologising for my outburst (yelling at children, 611, mixed parental role, female, 34-years-old).

6. ***Equal treatment (Equality)***

Equal treatment was coded when the same rules and consequences for all household family members (as well as equal treatment itself) were used as a resolution method.

It could have been unfair to my children to have different rules for the stepchildren and would cause a difference and friction between the two groups. Sticking to the rules was difficult but in the end we all won (551, mixed parental role, female, 35-years-old, talking about family meals).

It was resolved by me not doing it and eventually we all had to get wood (oldest stepchild was the only one getting wood from outside for the fire, 356, stepchild, male, 16-years-old).

Conflict over husband allowing his daughter (aged 10 at the time) to go on Facebook, when the rules state you must be 14. This was unfair for my son who wasn't allowed to go on Facebook. Managed by disallowing stepdaughter to go on Facebook while with us (291, mixed parental role, female, 32-years-old).

7. *Penance*

Penance was coded when disciplinary penalties or some form of required restitution were used to resolve a transgression against another family member. Disciplinary tools included reprimands from a parent, or loss of privileges.

> *This was resolved by stopping pocket money and telling them that other things would be taken away until they learnt to listen and contribute (children not doing their chores, 191, mixed parental role, female, 42-years-old).*

> *We introduced 'the ladder' system of earlier bedtimes at half hour measurements with a buyback of 15 minute slots (192, mixed parental role, male, 45-years-old).*

> *If my rooms not clean I get punished, fairly (186, stepchild, male, 12-years-old).*

8. *No resolution*

This theme was coded when a participant did not provide a resolution for a situation.

E. Quantitative Analysis of Five Key Variables: Fairness, Emotions, Acceptance, Forgiveness, and Family Functioning

Scenario themes and descriptive analysis.

Figure 3 illustrates the scenario frequencies chosen by the participants in total, then Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6 defines these categories further, that is, how they were distributed between each family role and age group. Both frequency and percentage graphs are shown below. Frequency graphs provide descriptive information to ensure an accurate impression of information in regards to the differences between the 'family role'

group sizes, and the age group sizes. The percentage graphs provide a quick and straight forward visual image of how each scenario / resolution has been made across the different roles, age groups, and genders.

A series of chi-square analyses were performed to test for associations between scenarios and the participant characteristics (family role, age group, gender), as well as between resolutions and these variables. However, due to the very small numbers in many of the cells (<5) as there were a large number of variables versus observations, most of the chi-square analyses were found to be inconclusive due to the violation of the 'minimum expected cell frequency' assumption. Where there is no violation of the 'minimum expected cell frequency', results of a chi-square analysis are provided.
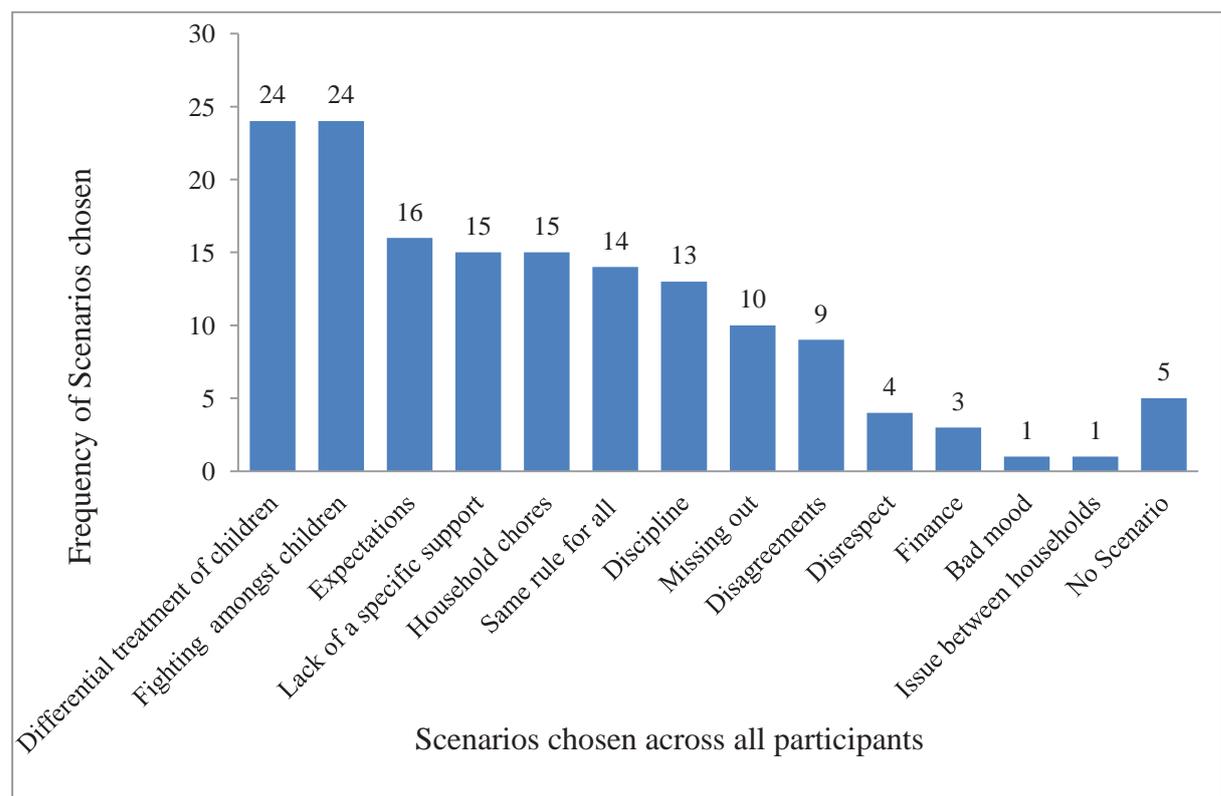
Figure 3. Frequencies of participant scenarios chosen for the research task.

As shown in Figure 3, participants chose *differential treatment*, and *fighting* amongst children more frequently than other situations of fairness to discuss with their family out of all possible chosen situations of fairness. These two categories made up for 31% of all scenarios discussed by the participants in the research task.
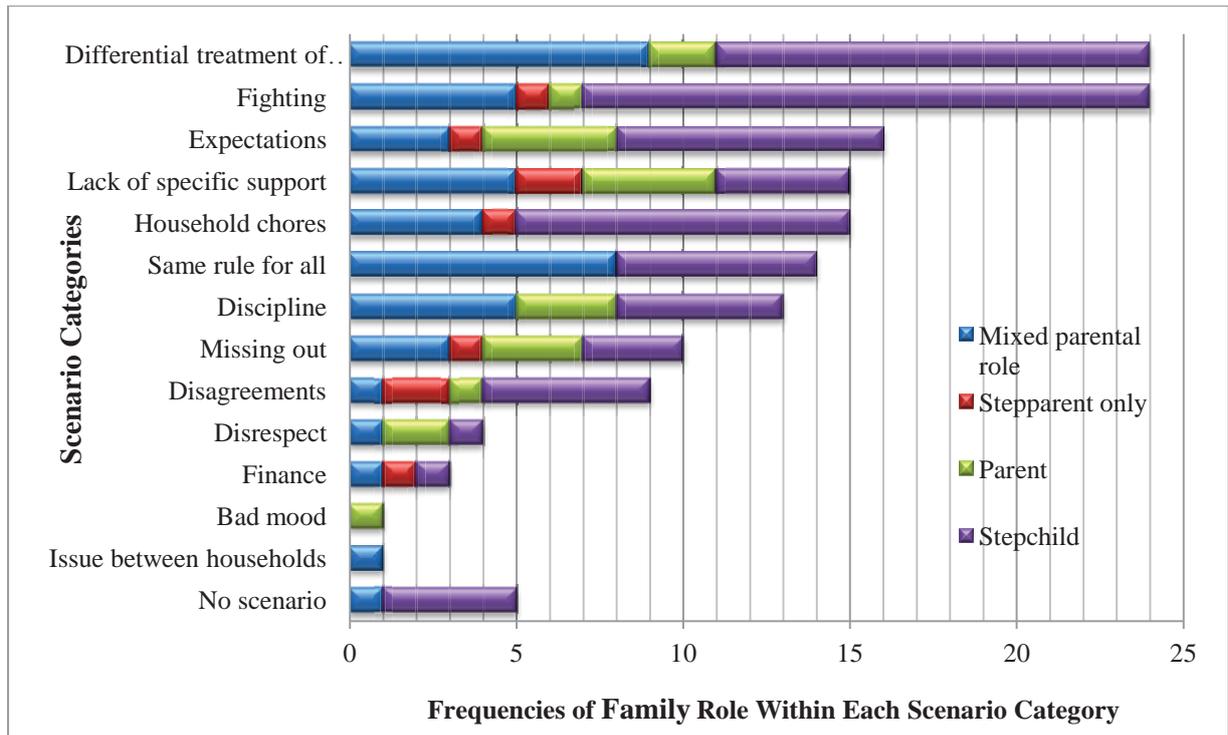
Figure 4. Frequencies of scenarios and the groupings of the family roles.

Figure 4 and Figure 5 illustrate how each scenario was represented by the family role. They also illustrate that despite some scenarios having the same frequency of choice, they are very different in the representation of percentages for each of the family roles. *Fighting*, for example, had a higher percentage of stepchild representation than differential treatment of children. *Household chores* were also more highly represented by stepchildren than other roles.
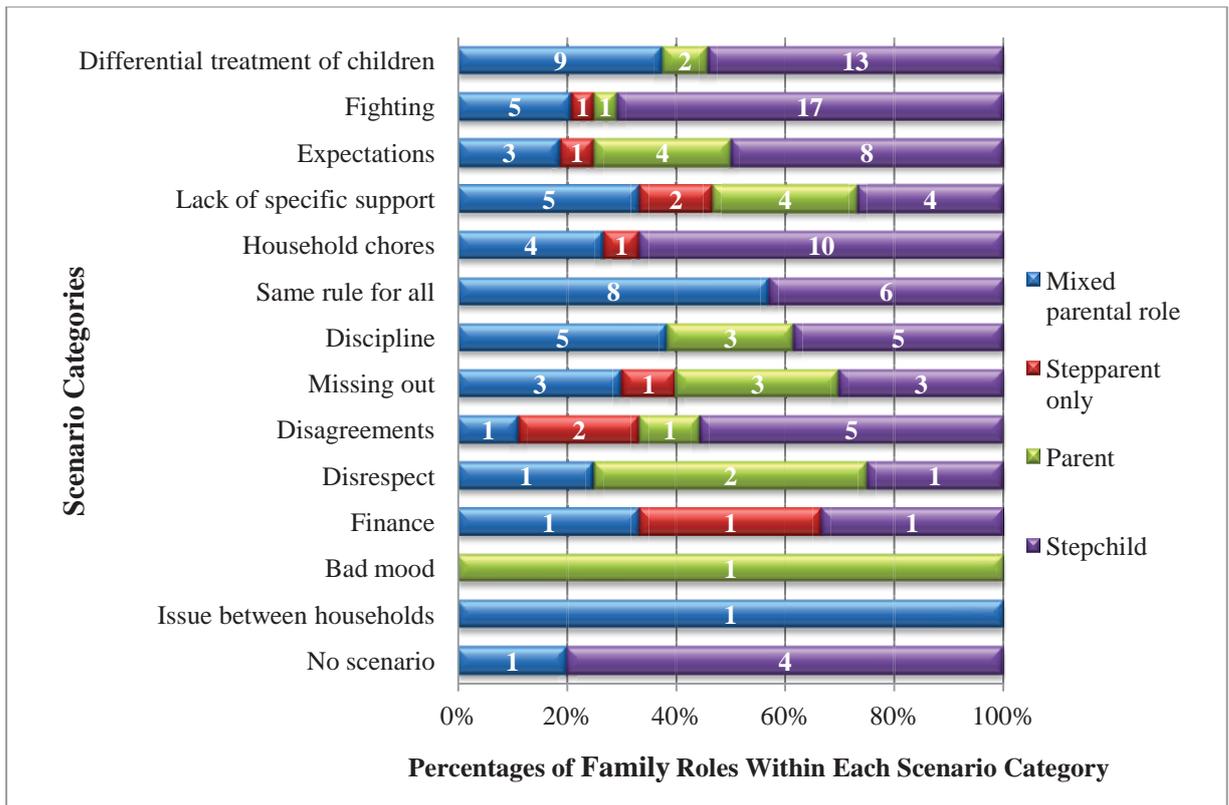
Figure 5. Percentages of the family roles within each scenario category.
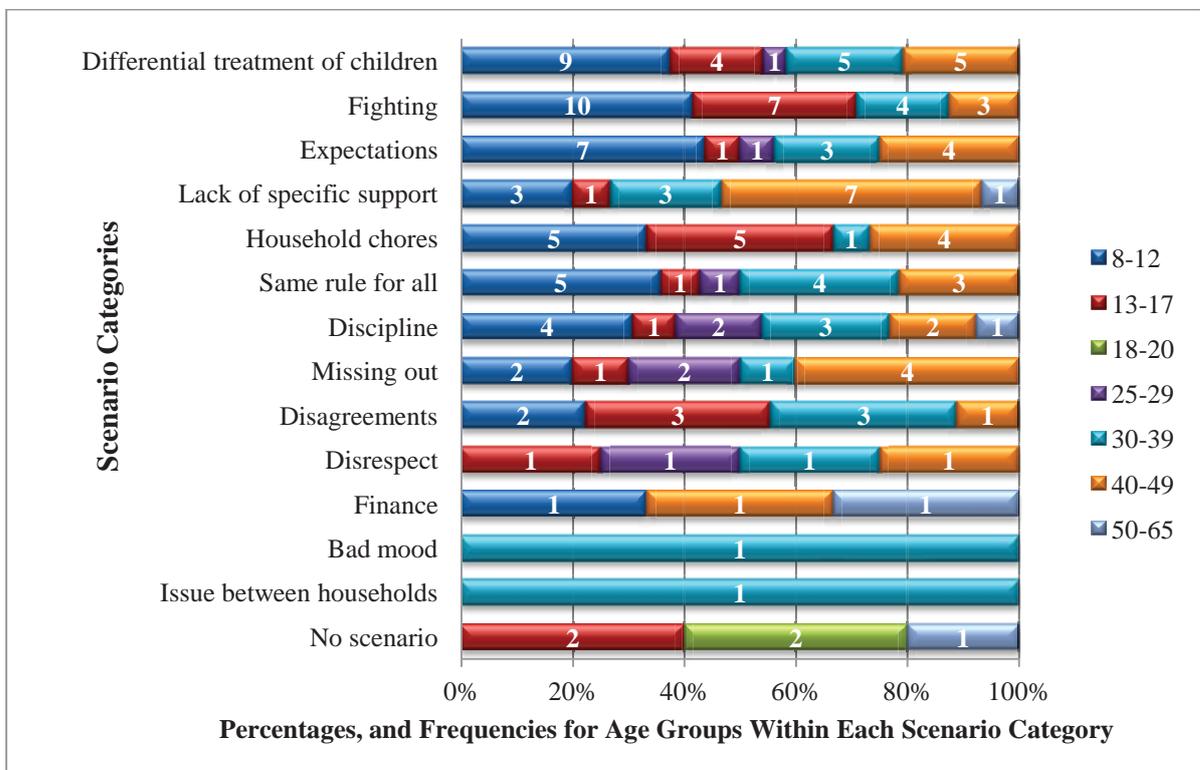
Figure 6. Percentages and frequencies of age groups within each scenario category.

Figure 6 demonstrates how age group varied widely and could be considered as evenly distributed across scenario categories.

Figure 7 demonstrates how gender seems to be more or less evenly distributed within the scenario categories. This was supported statistically with no significance found with associations between scenarios and the gender of participants, χ^2 (13, n=154) = 14.98, p = .31, phi = .31. The lowest frequency scenario categories of *Disrespect, Finance, Bad mood, Issue between households,* and *No scenario* were removed for this analysis due to those categories having 5 or less participant observations (number of scenarios presented by participants).
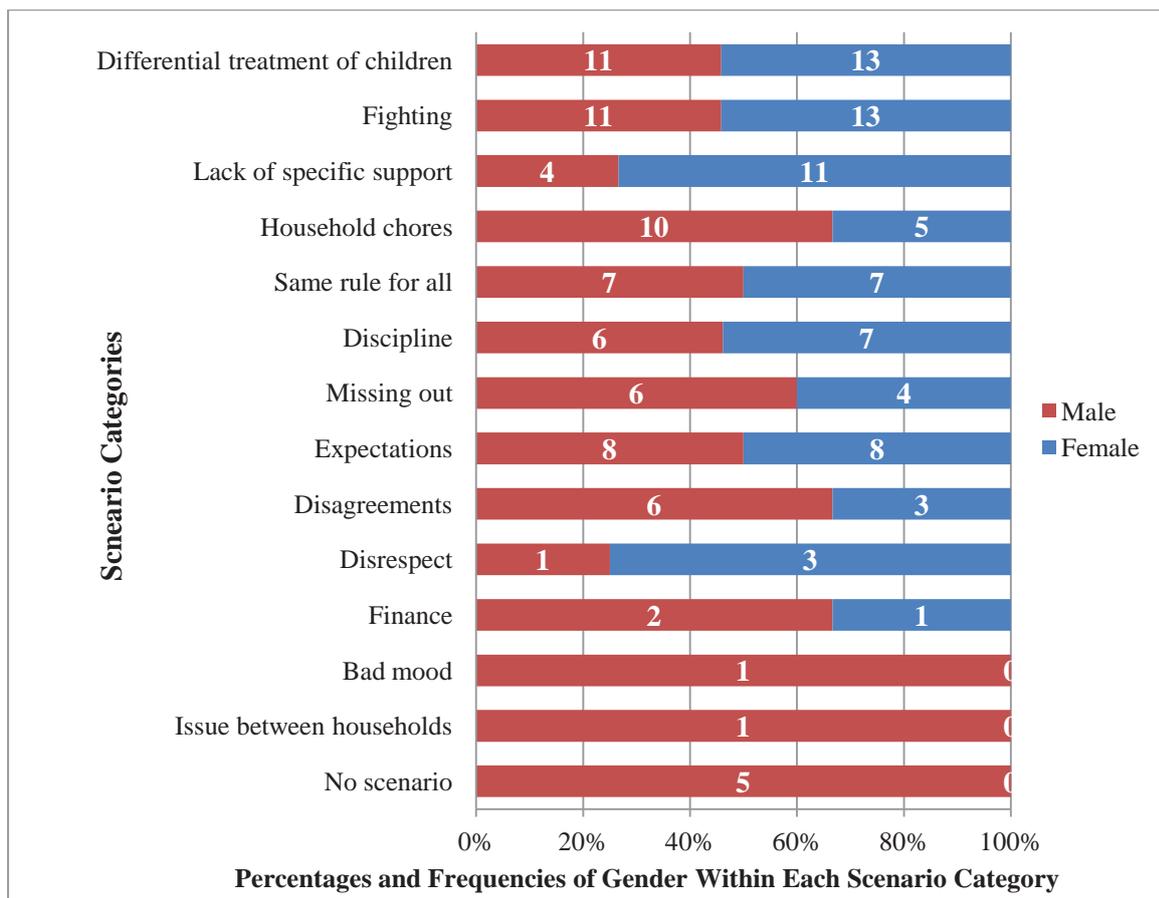
Figure 7. *Percentages and frequencies of gender within each scenario category.*

It is important to note that the task was explained in an information sheet and then more thoroughly in the instructional DVD for participants to come up with scenarios that they themselves had instigated. However, 50% of all participants came up with a scenario that other family members had instigated rather than they themselves had. Over two thirds of the stepchildren identified fairness issues that another family member had instigated, whereas the majority of mixed parental role parents (that is, a parent who is both a stepparent and a biological parent to children within the household) came up with scenarios in which they had had an influential role.

The majority of the scenarios selected by participants had occurred over the space of a week to a year before the families completed the research task, as shown in Figure 8. Over 50% of the situations had occurred within the last six months, and of that percentage the majority of those situations had occurred within the current month. Twenty percent did not record when the scenario occurred, mainly stepchildren.
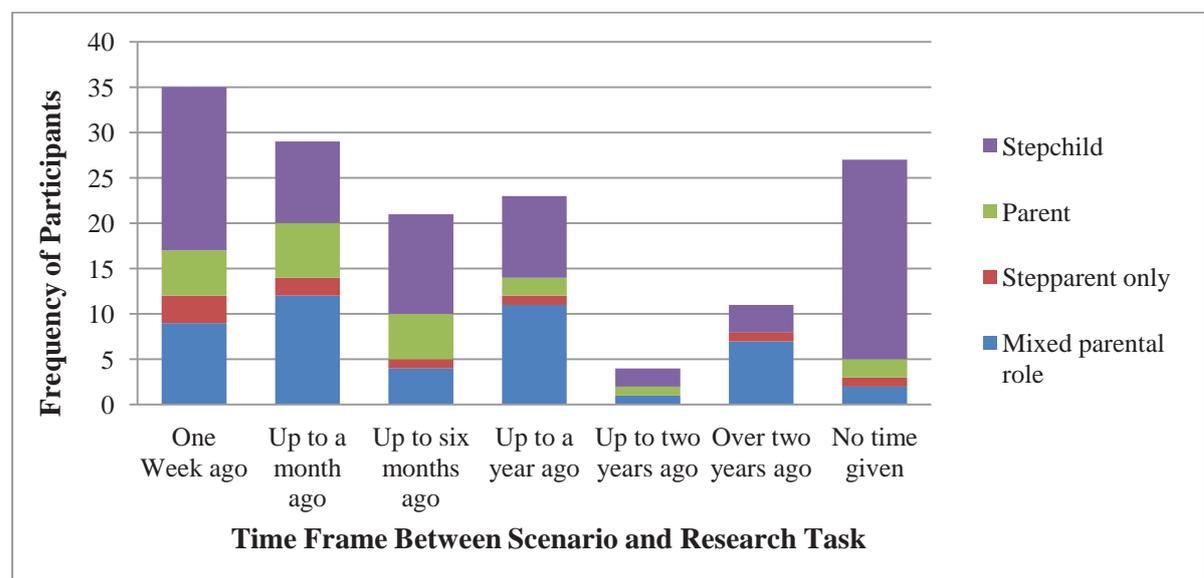
Figure 8. Time span between when the scenario had occurred and when the research task had taken place.

Resolution themes and descriptive analysis.

Figure 9 illustrates the resolutions chosen by the participants to try and resolve fairness issues within the scenarios that had occurred. *Compromise* was the most used resolution strategy at 33%, with *communication* at 20%, followed by sharing at 13%.
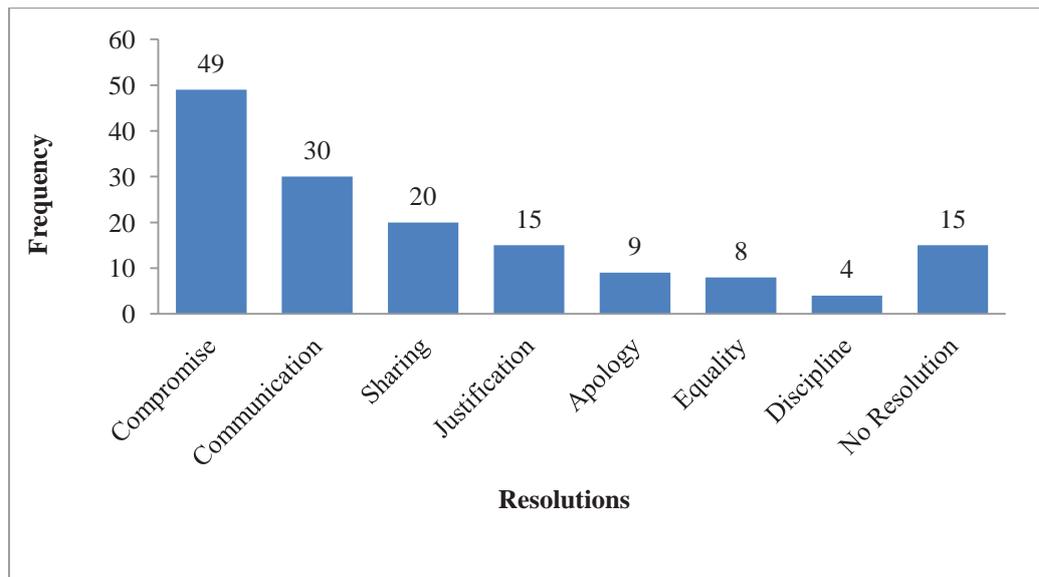
Figure 9. Participant's chosen resolutions and their frequencies.

As with scenarios, a series of chi-square analyses were performed to test for associations between resolutions and the participant characteristics (family role, age group, gender), and associations between resolution categories and scenario categories. However, due to the very small numbers in many of the cells (<5) as there were a large number of variables versus observations, most of the chi-square analyses were found to be inconclusive due to the violation of the 'minimum expected cell frequency' assumption. Where there is no violation of the 'minimum expected cell frequency', results of a chi-square analysis are provided.
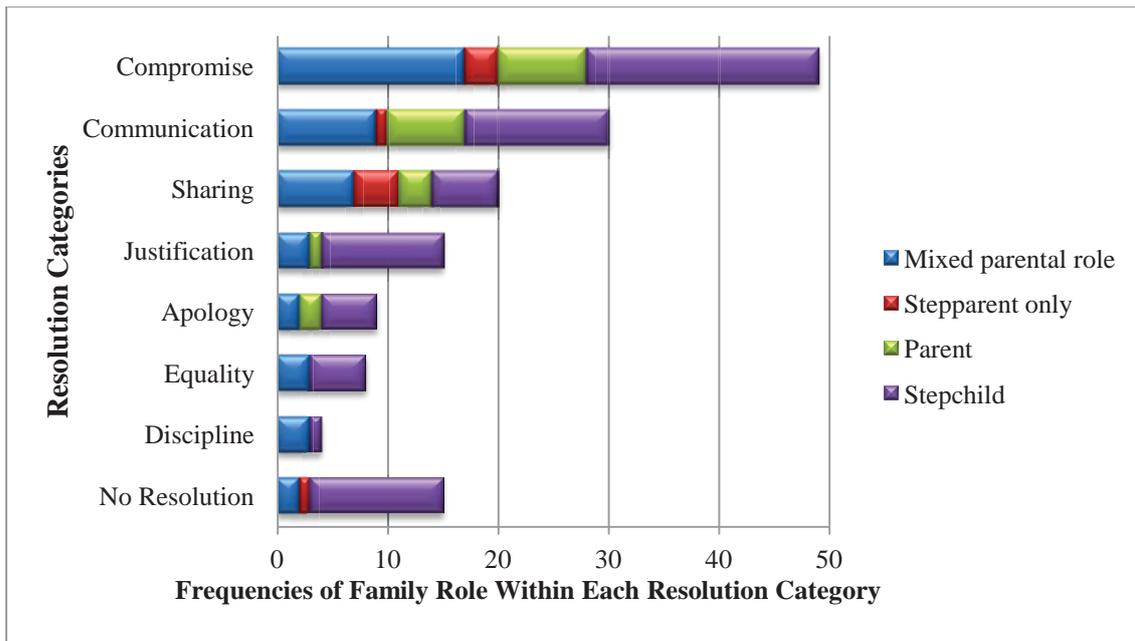
Figure 10. Frequency of family role within each resolution category.

Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12 define the resolution categories further by illustrating how they were distributed within each family role and age group. Like scenarios, both frequency and percentage graphs are used to present the resolution category information.
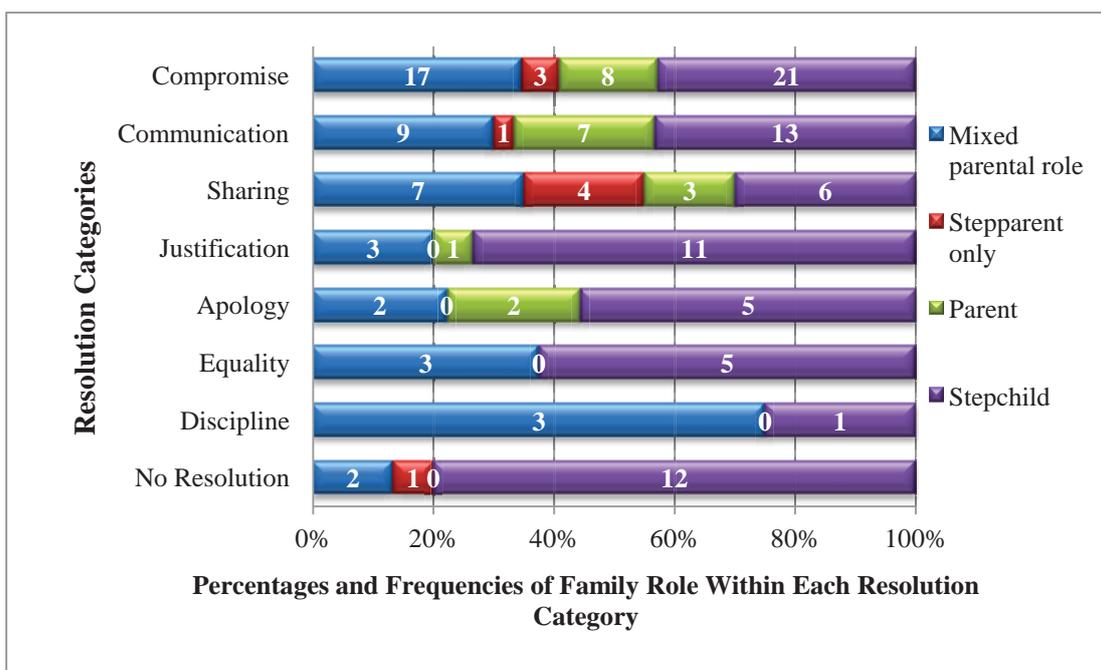
Figure 11. Percentage and frequency of family role within each resolution category.
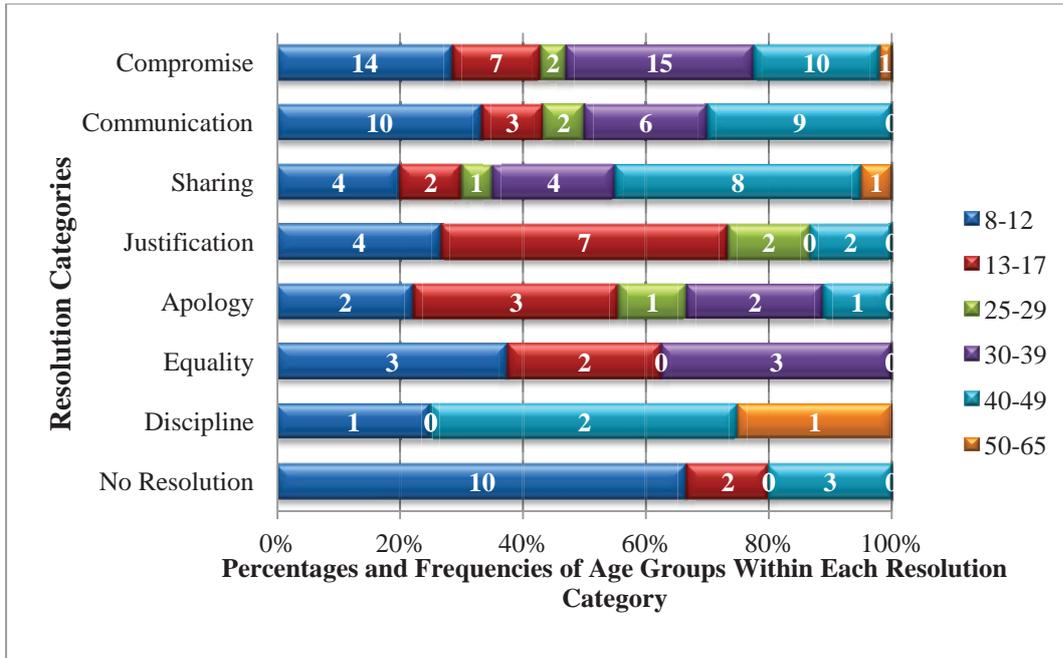
Figure 12. Percentages and frequencies of age groups within each resolution category.

Figure 13 illustrates that gender was more or less evenly distributed within the resolution categories. This was supported statistically with no significance found with associations between resolutions and the gender of participants using a chi-square analysis, χ^2 (7, n=150) = 4.41, $p = .73$, *phi* = .17.
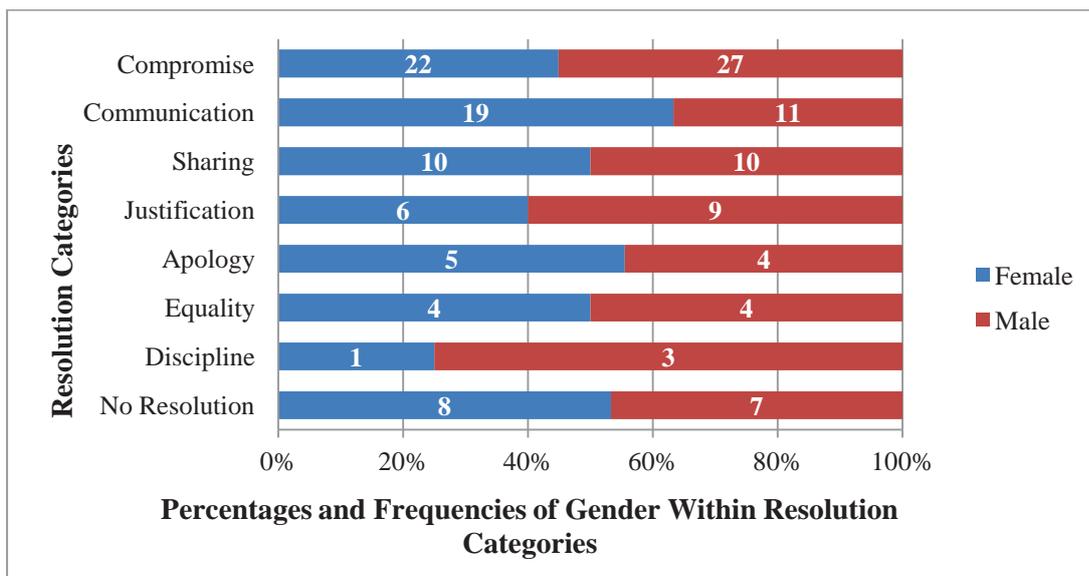
Figure 13. Percentages and frequencies of gender within resolution categories.

Figure 14 and Figure 15 illustrate the resolutions that were used within each scenario category in frequency and in percentages respectively. Each of these figures represents 80% of the scenarios and their resolutions chosen for the research task. The resolutions seemed to be evenly distributed amongst the scenarios, with no particular resolution category dominating any specific scenario.
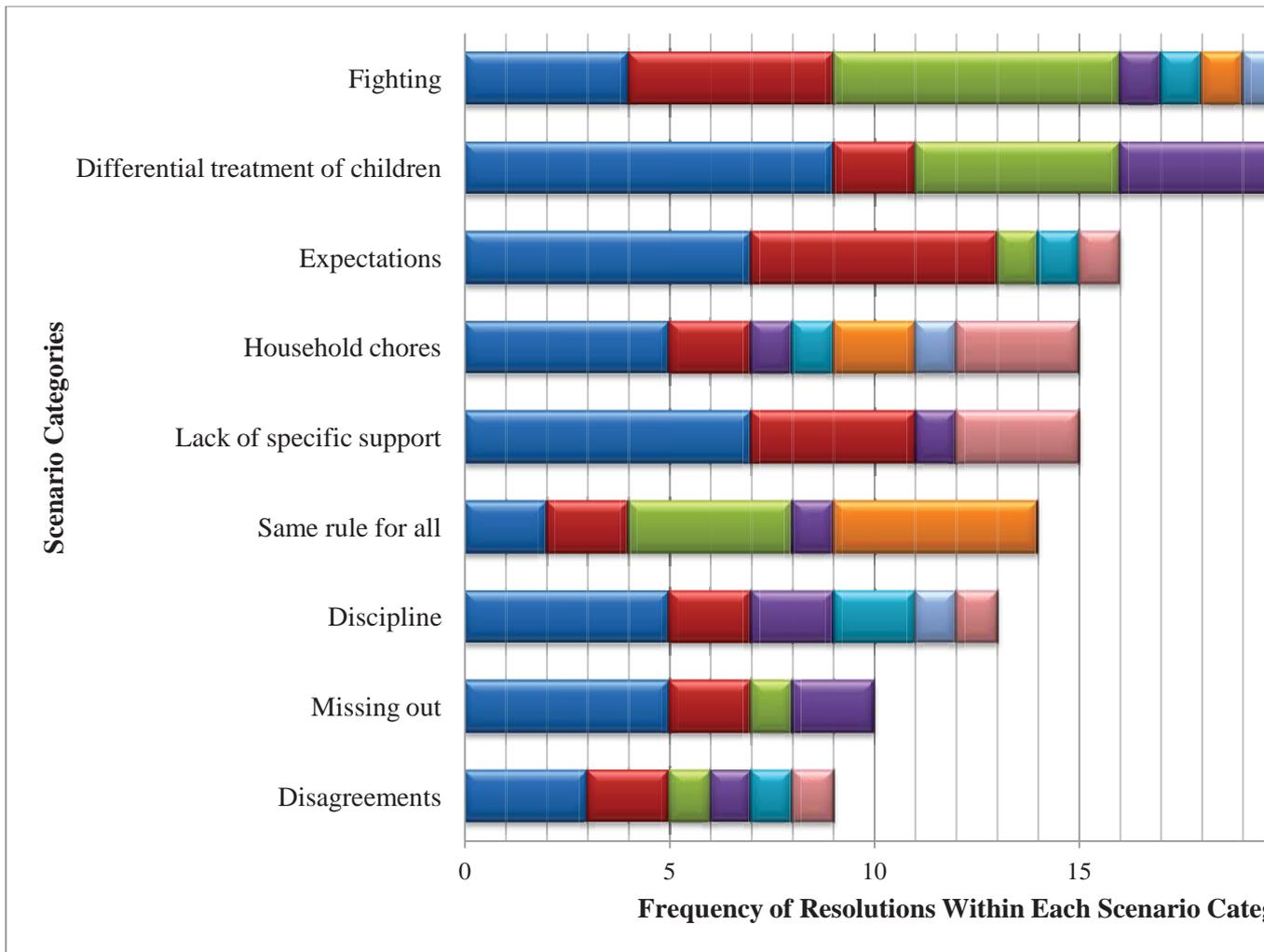
Figure 14. Frequencies of each resolution used within each scenario category.
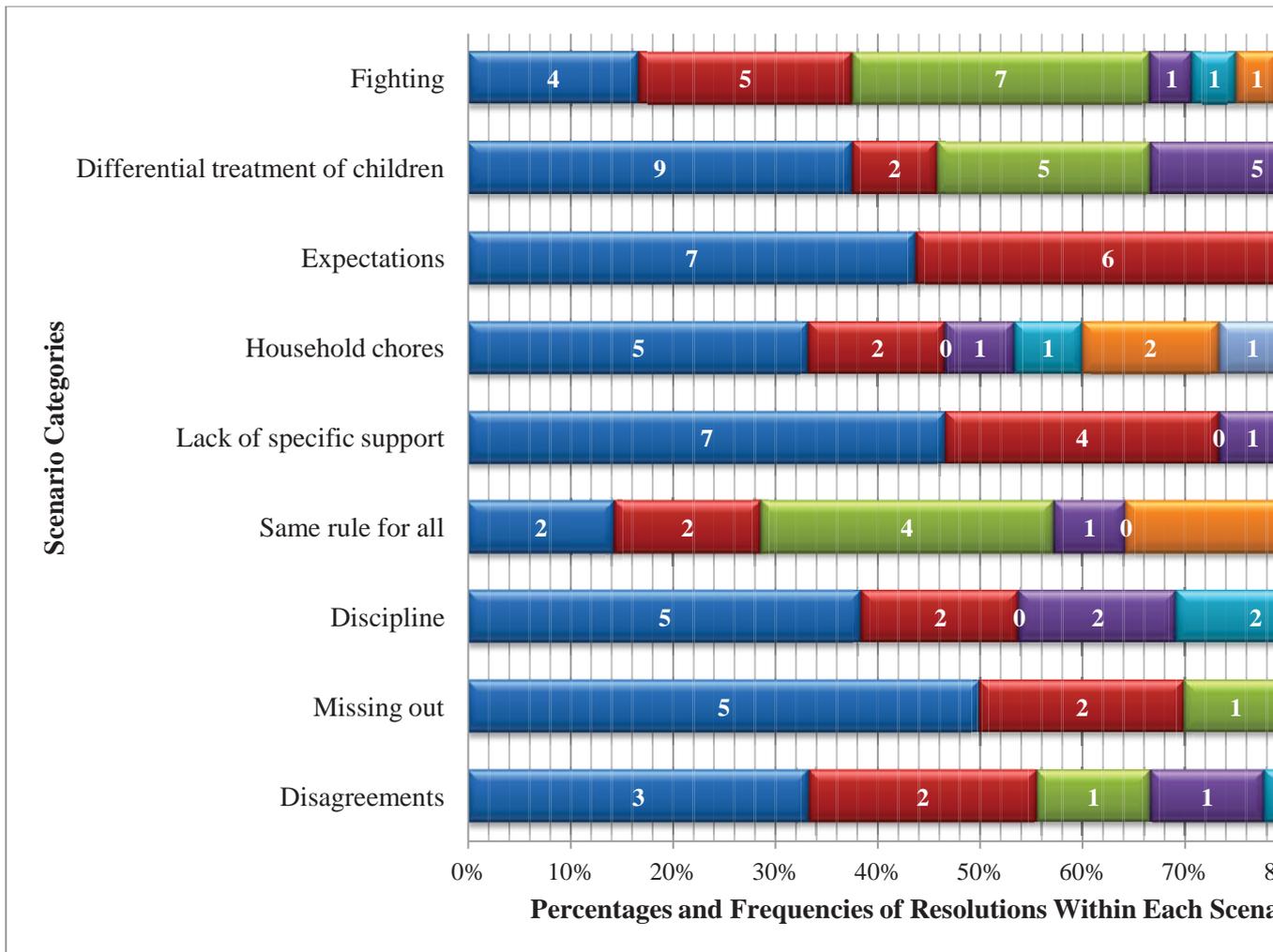
Figure 15. Percentages and frequencies of the resolutions used within each scenario category.

Fairness.

One scenario per family member was discussed in depth by each family unit, with a total of 149 scenarios presented. Each scenario was rated for fairness (fair/unfair) by all members within their family group, including the participant who provided that scenario. This meant that these scenarios were rated as many times as there were family members, with a grand total of 589 observations. In regards to judgments of fairness of the scenarios and their resolutions ("*How fair was the end result?*"), 82% were rated as fair and 18% were rated as unfair. On a 5 point scale (5 meaning *"very"*) the average rating of fairness was $M = 3.90$ ($SD = 1.14$), and the average rating of unfairness was $M = 3.42$ ($SD = 1.38$).

Figure 16 depicts the percentages of fair and unfair judgment according to the type of scenario. Note that these data are for the yes/no response to the question "*Did you feel the end result was fair*?" Also note that the absolute number of scenarios in the categories *finance*, *bad mood*, and *issue between households* was so small that little attention should be paid to the fair/unfair judgment in those categories. Of all the remaining scenario categories, *disrespect*, *missing out*, *lack of specific suppor*t, and *household chores* - respectively - had the highest percentages of unfair judgments, but these percentages were still quite small.

Figure 17 displays the degree to which the different resolutions were judged simply as fair or unfair. (note, however, that there is an inevitable confound with scenario type, since different scenarios attracted different solutions and the fairness judgment was asked with respect to the end result). All types of resolution - except *no resolution at all -* tended to be judged as fair, with only *apology* being seen as unfair by more than 20% of those rating this kind of resolution.

To investigate whether role, gender, age group, family relationship, presented scenario, presented resolution, and the participant's perception of family functioning (as measured by their FAM t-score) could predict the dichotomous variable of fairness, a Generalised Estimating Equation was used to assess these variables individually and then as a multivariate level for any effects they may have had on potentially predicting fairness (see Table *4*). All variables were significant at an individual level using an exchangeable working correlation matrix (see Table *4*), which included the role a person had in their family, their age group and gender, the relationship to the person presenting their situation, the presented scenario and resolution, and the participant's perception of their family functioning (represented by the FAM t-score). Family member resolutions and the participants' perceptions of their family functioning were significant in predicting fairness in both an individual level and at a group level. An exchangeable working correlation matrix was chosen to analyse all the independent variables grouped together and their effects on fairness using the GEE model. This was due to the sample size (total amount of participants) not being large enough to run an unstructured working correlation matrix. Where possible an unstructured correlation matrix was used for analysing single independent variables and their effects on fairness. The grouped variables Corrected Quasi Likelihood under Independence Model Criterion (QICC) was 512.13.

The variable 'presented scenario' could not be analysed using GEE due to the large number of factors involved and an insufficient sample size to allow for this. Therefore a chi-square analysis was used to test for any associations between scenarios and fairness χ^2 (10) = 31.42, *p <0.001, phi = .23*, with the results confirming a significant association between these two variables. It is important to note that this analysis removed the scenario categories of *bad mood, issue between households,* and *no scenario* due to the observations being less than 5 (less than 5 participants per presented scenario).

Below *Figure 16* and *Figure 17* show the percentage level of fairness and unfairness ratings for scenarios and resolutions respectively.
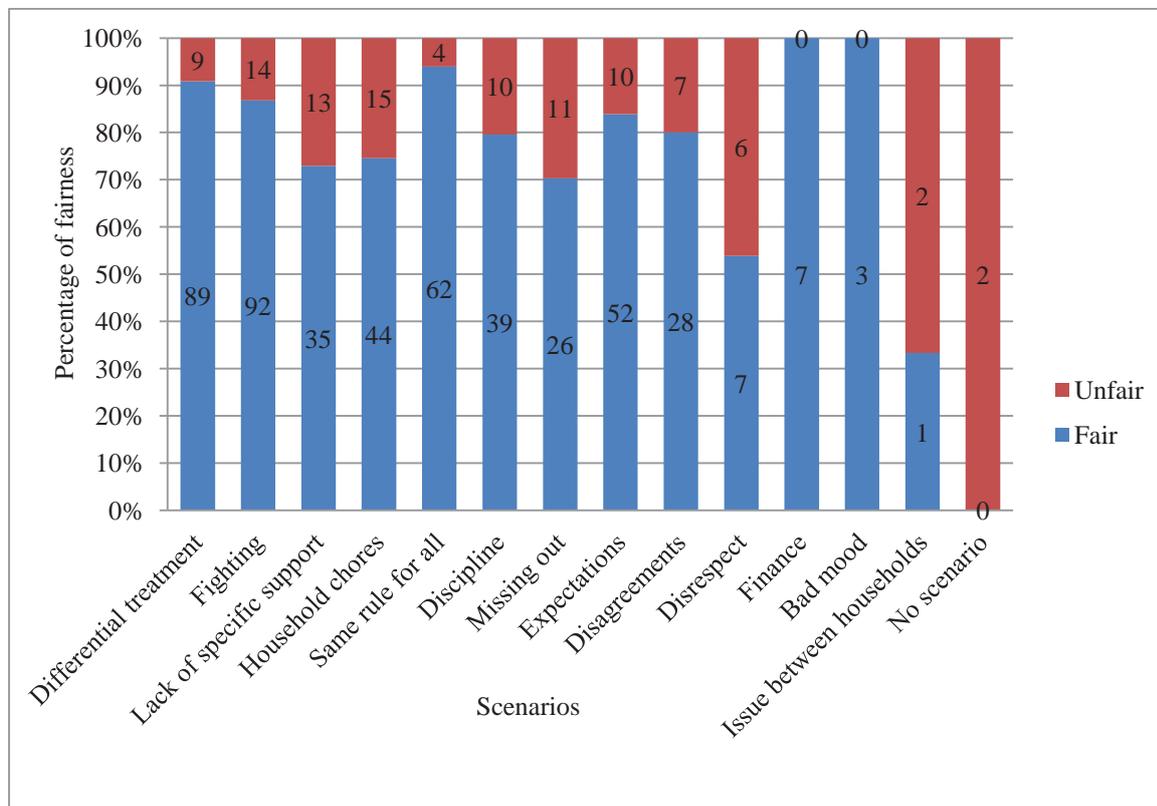
Figure 16. Fairness percentages and frequencies for scenarios.

The highest ratio percentages of unfairness within scenario categories were *disrespect* with a 46% unfair ratio, and *missing out* with a 30% unfair ratio. This was closely followed by *lack of specific support* which had a 27% unfair ratio and *household chores* with a 25% unfair ratio.
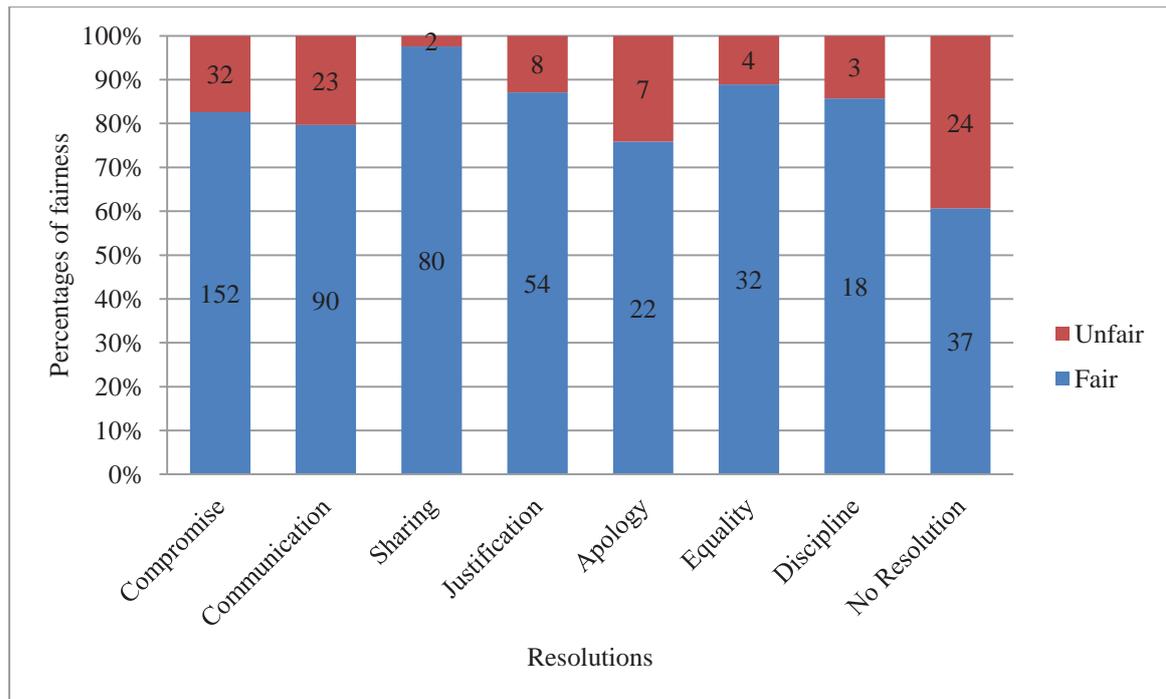
Figure 17. Fairness percentages and frequencies for resolutions.

No resolution, a category of resolutions, was considered as moderately unfair with a 39% ratio of unfairness. *Apology* had the second highest unfair ratio with 24% unfair rating.

Table *4* presents the results of potential predictive variables of fairness using GEE. At a multivariate level presented resolution and FAM *t*-score (participant's perception of family functioning), were significantly predictive of perceiving a situation (scenario and its resolution) as fair. When the option of 'fair' was chosen as an outcome from scenarios and resolutions presented, the FAM *t*-scores average was *M = 43.29, SD = 9.80*. Unfairness however, obtained an average FAM *t*-score of *M = 49.51, SD = 10.27*. Note that the lower the *t*-score, the higher (or more positive) the family functioning.

In summary, scenarios, resolutions, and a participant's perception of their family functioning were significantly predictive of whether or not a situation would be perceived as fair.

Table 4

Potential Predictive Variables of Fairness and Their Results on an Individual and a Multivariate Analysi

	Individual Analysis Level				
Independent Variable	Working Correlation Matrix for Individual Variables in GEE	Individual Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC
Role	Unstructured	164.22	4	0.0005	666.1(
Gender	Exchangeable	119.24	2	0.0005	549.5:
Age Groups	Unstructured	75.01	6	0.0005	565.48
Family Relationship	Exchangeable	120.95	8	0.0005	556.3:
Presented Scenario	N/A				
Presented Resolution	Exchangeable	138.38	8	0.0005	523.1:
FAM *t*-score	Exchangeable	83.52	1	0.0005	592.9(

Note. The multivariate analysis QICC was 512.13, and used an exchangeable working correlation matrix.

Emotions.

This section reports the participants' judgments about how they felt emotionally at the time of the situation described in the scenario offered (pre emotion), and again how they feel about it now (post emotion). The participants were asked to rate on a 6-point scale each of the six emotions (happy, fine, annoyed, angry, sad, and guilty), from not feeling them at all (0) to feeling them extremely (5).

The purpose of the analysis of the emotions in this section was to detect which variables potentially predicted and / or influenced them. Also due to the difference in the emotion pre and post mean ratings (see Table *5*), analysis of the pre emotion was included in the GEE analysis to see if emotions changed significantly over time.

Each emotion was directly examined in relation to each presented scenario and resolution (with a possible total of 589 observations depending on the emotion), rather than averaging each emotion by participant (with a possible total of 155 observations), for two important reasons. Firstly, participant's emotional ratings were likely to change depending on the scenario and resolution present, whether they thought the end result was fair or not, the relationship they had with the family member presenting the scenario, and the gender, role and age of the participant. Secondly, the means significantly changed when averaging out each emotion by participant rather than by observation (emotional rating for each presented scenario and resolution, as show in Appendix F). Even though averaging out the emotion category means by each participant would have corrected for possible autocorrelations, the GEE model makes adjustments when those autocorrelations occur. Therefore each of the emotions were tested using GEE analysis to help predict which variables influenced them (see Table *6*, Table *7*, Table *8*, Table *9*, Table *10*, and Table *11*).

Table *5* provides a summary of emotions by observations (each scenario x family participants rating the scenario), along with their mean and standard deviation, from both points in time: *pre* - before the research was conducted, that is, at the time the scenario occurred, and *post* – looking back on the scenario at the time the research was conducted.

Table 5
Pre and Post Emotions from Total Observations

Emotion and Time Frame	*N*	Mean	*SD*
Pre-Happy	520	1.68	1.79
Post-Happy	541	2.90	1.74
Pre-Fine	512	1.88	1.76
Post-Fine	538	2.95	1.68
Pre-Annoyed	537	2.23	1.86
Post-Annoyed	512	0.83	1.38
Pre-Angry	529	1.51	1.71
Post-Angry	509	0.62	1.25
Pre-Sad	525	1.28	1.57
Post-Sad	504	0.55	1.17
Pre-Guilty	514	.72	1.32
Post-Guilty	506	.39	0.95
Pre-Acceptance	495	2.03	1.85
Post-Acceptance	505	2.64	1.91

Note. N = number of observations.

The means are also provided in Figure 18 to provide a visual perspective of how the participants' emotions improved over time with positive mean emotions increasing, and the negative mean emotions decreasing.
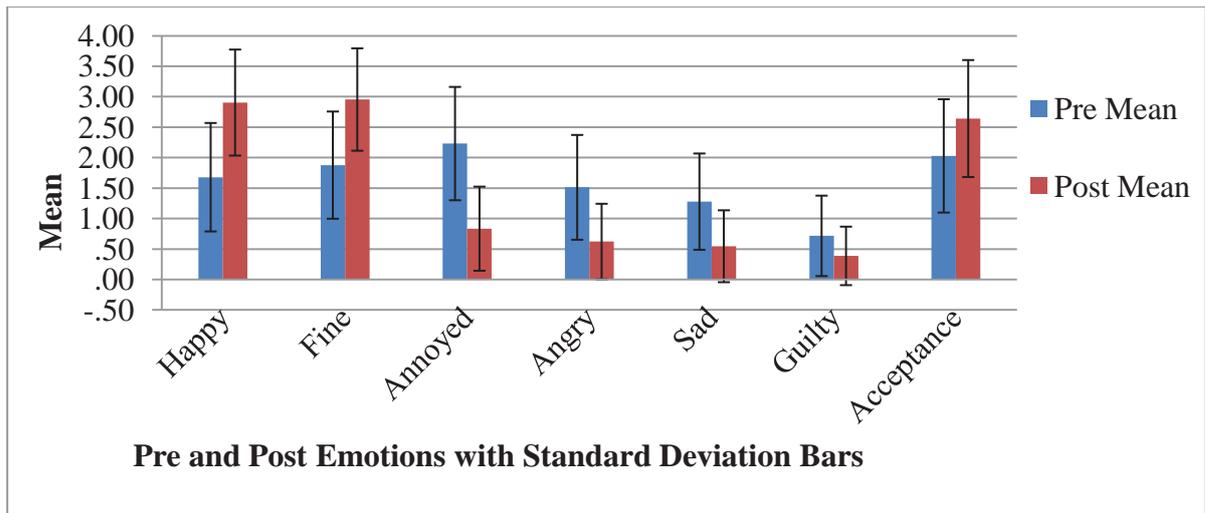
Figure 18. Pre and Post mean emotions and standard deviation bars from the total of participant observations with the research task.

The subsections below focus on each emotion and its GEE analysis, along with a table to help illustrate the findings. Table *6*, Table *7*, Table *8*, Table *9*, Table *10*, and Table *11* present the variables which have the potential to predict and/or influence the outcomes of these emotions.

GEE assessed which variables were significantly predictive of these emotions. The variables used in each GEE model to assess for prediction of each emotion in order of analysis were:

1. the role a participant had in their family unit,

2. their gender,

3. age group,

4. relationship with the relative presenting their scenario,

5. their relative's scenario,

6. their relative's resolution to that scenario,

7. the participant's perception of fairness for the situation presented,

8. the participant's pre emotion of the emotion being analysed,

9. the participant's FAM t-score which represented how they perceived their family functioning in general.

These factors were assessed for prediction both individually (bivariate) and then at a group level (multivariate level).

Happiness.

All factors provided for the GEE analysis effected happiness on a bivariate level except the FAM t-score for family functioning, $\chi^2 (1) = 2.52$, $p = 0.11$. The multivariate level QICC was 994.04 where variables: role, age group, relative's scenario and resolution, fairness, family functioning (FAM t-score), and pre happy score (time lapse factor) all contributed towards predicting happiness (see Table 6).

Table 6
Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Happy Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	df	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	df	Significance
Role	49.08	3	0.0005	1547.23	8.05	2	0.02
Gender	6.03	1	0.01	1611.87	1.78	1	0.18
Age Group	55.34	5	0.0005	1464.97	28.76	4	0.0005
Family Relationship	30.90	7	0.0005	1702.22	6.10	7	0.53
Relative's Scenario	1014797	11	0.0005	1627.30	489.58	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	79.41	7	0.0005	1509.83	15.74	7	0.03
Fairness	25.78	1	0.0005	1304.22	28.71	1	0.0005
Pre-Happy	125.59	1	0.0005	1258.82	66.33	1	0.0005
FAM t-score	2.52	1	0.11	1521.20	7.62	1	0.006

Note: Multivariate level QICC was 994.04, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Fine.

Using GEE a participant's role, age group, their relative's choice of scenario and resolution, their fairness choice, and pre fine rating (time lapse factor) all contributed to significantly predicting the post emotion of fine on the multivariate grouped level (see Table 7).

Table 7

Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Fine Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariable Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	29.17	3	0.0005	1507.84	16.38	2	0.0005
Gender	2.59	1	0.11	1459.00	2.63	1	0.11
Age Group	54.80	5	0.0005	1556.80	26.80	4	0.0005
Family Relationship	15.53	7	0.05	1492.21	9.50	7	0.22
Relative's Scenario	21.10	11	0.05	1692.45	352.78	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	51.01	7	0.0005	1501.77	18.21	7	0.01
Fairness	29.62	1	0.0005	1322.38	32.11	1	0.0005
Pre-Fine	27.58	1	0.0005	1140.20	68.09	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	2.40	1	0.12	1391.07	0.15	1	0.70

Note: Multivariate QICC was 1046.69, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Annoyed.

All factors were significant when predicting annoyance independently from each other using the GEE model. However, when the analysis was run at the multivariate level then only the role a participant had in their family, and the relationship that they had with the family member presenting their scenario did not significantly predict annoyance (see Table 8).

Table 8

Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Annoyed Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	df	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	df	Significance
Role	165.91	4	0.0005	982.39	3.59	2	0.17
Gender	64.63	2	0.0005	957.21	3.90	1	0.048
Age Group	137.62	6	0.0005	976.63	17.33	4	0.002
Family Relationship	183.22	8	0.0005	1036.42	11.98	7	0.10
Relative's Scenario	1380537.32	11	0.0005	953.94	150.34	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	372.18	8	0.0005	910.63	58.69	7	0.0005
Fairness	126.00	2	0.0005	765.78	24.46	1	0.0005
Pre-Annoyed	59.44	1	0.0005	754.01	79.87	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	145.23	1	0.0005	917.87	25.34	1	0.0005

Note: Multivariate QICC was 653.88, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Angry.

GEE analyses were run for individual variables (bivariate level), and then at a multivariate level for predicting anger. These analyses produced similar results to the emotion annoyance. All the variables had significantly influenced scores on the angry scale when analysed at a bivariate level, but the role a participant had in their family group, and what age group they belonged were no longer significant at the multivariate level (see Table *9*). When analysed at a multivariate level, the rest of the variables were significant for predicting anger.

Table 9

Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Angry Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	85.73	4	0.0005	762.94	1.65	2	0.44
Gender	73.86	2	0.0005	768.76	5.96	1	0.01
Age Group	80.39	6	0.0005	907.96	1.02	4	0.91
Family Relationship	71.46	8	0.0005	1043.50	43.59	7	0.0005
Relative's Scenario	182.81	11	0.0005	2231.05	281.24	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	104.41	8	0.0005	1274.79	834.63	7	0.0005
Fairness	93.86	2	0.0005	601.32	54.89	1	0.0005
Pre-Angry	22.09	1	0.0005	522.16	142.65	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	4.00	1	0.045	726.51	23.43	1	0.0005

Note: Multivariate QICC was 509.62, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Sadness.

Again all individual variables predicted an emotional response of sadness when run independently from each other (on a bivariate level) using GEE analysis. However, when analysed at a multivariate level, only the role a participant had in their family was no longer significantly related to sadness (see Table *10*).

Table 10

Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Sadness Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	34.01	4	0.0005	674.27	1.16	2	0.56
Gender	17.75	2	0.0005	672.53	7.64	1	0.006
Age Group	53.98	6	0.0005	682.39	16.23	4	0.003
Family Relationship	86.50	8	0.0005	705.56	36.97	7	0.0005
Relative's Scenario	179.76	10	0.0005	653.90	301.84	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	132.22	8	0.0005	674.24	614.98	7	0.0005
Fairness	172.61	2	0.0005	591.46	17.55	1	0.0005
Pre-Sad	102.89	1	0.0005	427.19	204.52	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	10.96	1	0.001	641.56	36.93	1	0.0005

Note: Multivariate QICC was 485.28, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Guilt.

All factors were significant when analysed independently (at a bivariate level) from each other running GEE analyses for predicting a guilt emotion. However, when run at a multivariate level, the role a participant had in their family and family functioning (measured by the FAM *t*-score) were not significant in predicting guilt.

Table 11

Predictive Variables of the Emotion Post Guilt Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	37.35	4	0.0005	593.19	2.19	2	0.34
Gender	172.78	2	0.0005	560.13	24.67	1	0.0005
Age Group	68.10	6	0.0005	664.05	14.75	4	0.005
Family Relationship	128.68	8	0.0005	616.06	20.44	7	0.005
Relative's Scenario	7654.74	11	0.0005	726.77	40.47	12	0.0001
Relative's Resolution	143.44	8	0.0005	517.14	32.85	7	0.0005
Fairness	60.36	2	0.0005	520.96	6.78	1	0.01
Pre-Guilty	185.60	1	0.0005	277	143.28	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	65.09	1	0.0005	708.13	0.49	1	0.49

Note: Multivariate QICC was 340.98, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

Emotional summary.

Overall, there was a significant increase in ratings for post-happiness and post-fine, and a decrease in ratings for post emotions annoyance, anger, sadness, and guilt when assessed on a multivariate level (when all other possible predictive variables were also taken into consideration). The role a participant had did not significantly affect their overall emotional ratings. However, there were significant differences between males' and females' ratings of the post emotions annoyed, anger, guilt and sadness. Females rated higher than males on these emotions with a mean difference of 0.05 for annoyed (*M* = 0.86, *SD* = 1.42), 0.1 for anger (*M* = 0.67, *SD* = 1.34), 0.13 for sadness (*M* = 0.61, *SD* = 1.28), and 0.19 for guilt (*M* = 0.48, *SD* = 1.11). Each age group rated their post emotions differently from the other age groups (note that there was no significant difference between the different age groups for post anger). As shown in Table *12*, teenagers

reported the highest annoyance ratings. The 40-year-old group reported the highest ratings for sadness ($M = 0.66$, $SD = 1.16$) and guilt ($M = 0.58$, $SD = 1.18$). The 25-29 year-olds reported the highest post happy mean rating, closely followed by the youngest age group which also reported the highest post-fine mean ratings (see Table *12*). Table *12* represents all the post emotions means and standard deviations for each age-group.

Table 12
Post Emotions and Age Group Means and Standard Deviations

Post Emotions	Age Merged Into Groups Means					
	8-12(*SD*)	13-17(*SD*)	25-29(*SD*)	30-39(*SD*)	40-49(*SD*)	50-65(*SD*)
Post-Happy	3.26(*1.77*)	1.99(*1.72*)	3.52(*1.54*)	3.13(1.54)	2.78(*1.64*)	3.00(*1.32*)
Post-Fine	3.19(*1.72*)	2.45(*1.72*)	3.14(*1.64*)	3.17(1.58)	2.83(*1.58*)	2.29(*1.70*)
Post-Annoyed	0.77(*1.35*)	1.21(*1.64*)	0.75(*1.53*)	0.69(1.12)	0.74(*1.35*)	0.89(*1.45*)
Post-Sad	0.52(*1.17*)	0.58(*1.40*)	0.50(*0.92*)	0.43(0.98)	0.66(*1.16*)	0.63(*1.19*)
Post-Guilty	0.30(*0.89*)	0.24(*0.70*)	0.56(*1.34*)	0.45(0.92)	0.58(*1.18*)	0.29(*0.49*)

Note: SD = Standard Deviation.

Family relationship had significant influence over the post emotions anger, sadness, and guilt when scenarios and resolutions were presented. Participants reported the highest ratings of anger ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 1.38$), sadness ($M = 0.71$, $SD = 1.23$) and guilt ($M = 0.60$, $SD = 1.14$) in reaction to their own scenarios and resolutions. The second highest ratings of emotions were in reaction towards stepparents when they presented their scenarios and resolutions with a mean rating of $M = 0.81$ ($SD = 1.50$) for post anger, and $M = 0.64$ ($SD = 1.49$) for post sadness. The relationship a participant had to another family member reported no significance with the positive emotions (happy and fine), see Appendix F in reaction to the scenarios and resolutions presented.

The scenarios with the highest mean ratings for both post-happy and post-fine emotions were *same rule for all* and *expectations* (see Table *13*). *Missing out* evoked the highest mean ratings for post-annoyed, post-angry, post-sad, and the second highest mean

rating for post-guilt. *Household chores* had the highest mean rating for post-guilt, and the second highest mean rating for post-annoyed. *Discipline* was the third highest negatively emotionally rated scenario overall. The resolution categories of s*haring*, e*qual treatment* and fair j*ustification* had the highest mean ratings for post-happy and post-fine (see Table *13*). *No resolution* received the highest mean ratings for post-annoyed, post-angry, post-sad, and the second highest mean rating for post-guilt. *Apology* had the second highest mean negative ratings for post-annoyed, post-sad, and post-guilty. The highest rating mean for post-angry was the resolution of e*qual treatment*. Table *13* further illustrates the mean and standard deviations of the post emotion ratings for scenarios and resolutions presented. Note that the scenarios included only represent the highest 95% of overall observations recorded. The scenarios d*isrespect, finance, bad mood, issue between households,* and n*o scenario* were not included in Table *13* due to much lower observations recorded with a count of 10 or less.

Fairness was shown to be significant in influencing all post emotions. Figure 19 illustrates that fairness had higher mean ratings with the positive post emotions (happy and fine) than unfairness, and unfairness had higher mean ratings with the negative post emotions (annoyed, angry, sad, and guilt).
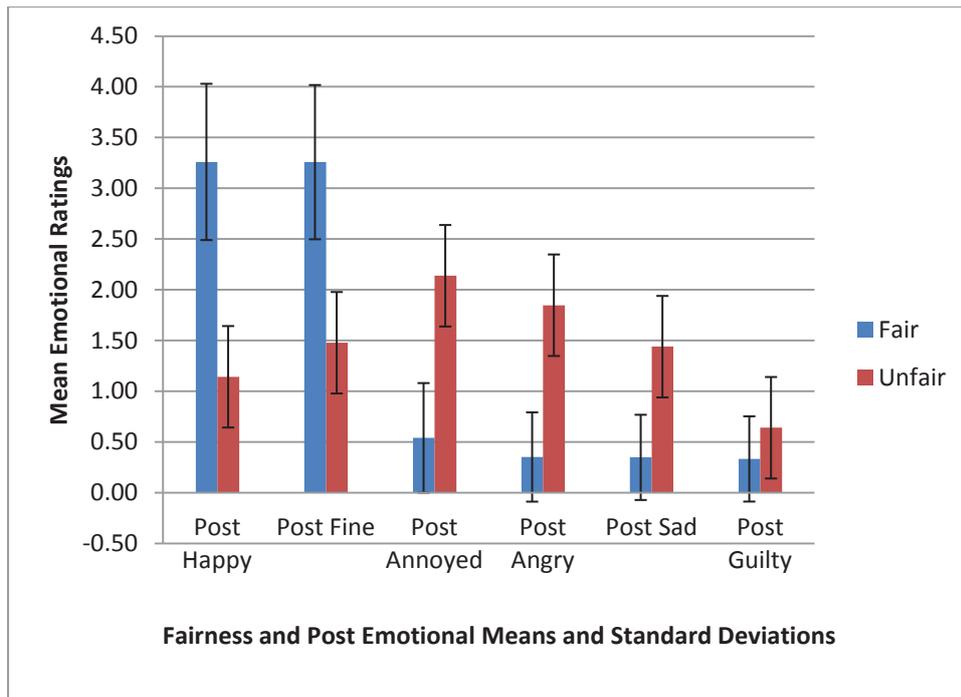
Figure 19. Graph of the mean ratings for all the post emotions in regards to fairness.

Table 13

Mean, Standard Deviations and Number of Cases of Post Emotions and of Scenarios and Resolutions.

	Post-Happy			Post-Fine			Post-Annoyed			Post-Angry			N
Relatives Choice of Scenario	No. Of Cases	Mean	SD	No. Of Cases	Mean	SD	No. Of Cases	Mean	SD	No. Of Cases	Mean	SD	O Ca
Differential treatment	94	2.99	1.62	89	2.98	1.48	86	0.45	0.92	87	0.40	0.98	8
Fighting	101	2.89	1.80	100	3.00	1.71	102	1.07	1.56	99	0.70	1.28	9
Lack of specific support	45	2.67	1.73	41	3.05	1.55	40	0.68	1.02	40	0.53	1.13	4
Household chores	51	2.57	1.76	53	2.72	1.69	51	**1.12****	1.52	51	0.84	1.36	4
Same rule for all	65	**3.82***	1.53	61	**3.59***	1.62	62	0.42	1.05	62	0.37	1.04	6
Discipline	43	2.72	1.45	44	2.89	1.69	37	1.05	1.22	37	**0.86****	1.25	3
Missing out	33	2.27	1.74	35	2.31	1.66	32	**1.75***	2.03	31	**1.32***	1.81	3
Expectations	54	**3.19****	1.77	57	**3.18****	1.78	49	0.59	1.27	49	0.39	1.11	4
Disagreements	31	2.39	1.75	32	2.41	1.74	30	1.03	1.63	31	0.94	1.61	3
Relatives Choice of Resolution													
Compromise	177	2.88	1.65	175	2.93	1.63	170	0.70	1.25	170	0.55	1.19	1
Communication	102	2.91	1.76	100	2.78	1.73	92	0.96	1.40	91	0.66	1.17	9
Sharing	78	**3.58***	1.52	78	**3.62****	1.39	75	0.47	1.09	75	0.25	0.77	7
Justification	57	3.14	1.64	62	**3.24***	1.64	56	0.36	0.96	57	0.33	0.99	5
Apology	23	1.96	1.87	25	2.56	2.02	23	**1.17****	1.70	22	0.73	1.32	2
Equal Treatment	33	**3.15****	1.97	31	3.23	1.84	32	1.16	1.59	30	**0.87****	1.46	2
Discipline	21	3.33	1.28	20	3.05	1.15	20	0.95	1.19	20	0.65	1.04	2
No Resolution	50	1.76	1.70	47	1.91	1.65	44	**1.86***	1.84	44	**1.59***	1.87	4

Note.*Highest mean in each emotional category for scenarios, and then for resolutions. **Second highest mean in each emoti
resolutions.The scenarios above only represent the highest 95% of overall cases recorded.

Acceptance.

Acceptance was also rated on a 0 to 5 point scale. All variables introduced in the GEE analysis of the emotions were also included in a GEE analysis of acceptance (post category, *"how much do you accept the end result now?"*). Forgiveness and all the pre and post emotions were also included in the GEE analysis of post-acceptance. All included variables were tested for significance for their bivariate relationships with acceptance as well as their relationships within a multivariate context. All individual variables (run each at a bivariate level) and again at a multivariate level were run under an unstructured working correlation matrix. Table *14* illustrates which factors are significant in influencing post-acceptance in situations of fairness when all these possible influences are taken into account. Post-happiness and pre-acceptance were both significantly associated to post-acceptance, as were ratings (judgments) of forgiveness and fairness.

Table 14

Predictive Variables of Post Acceptance Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	1079.28	4	0.0005	1266.77	24.82	2	0.0005
Gender	831.10	2	0.0005	1245.56	18.98	1	0.0005
Age Group	894.33	6	0.0005	1234.85	5.85	4	0.21
Family Relationship	1088.17	8	0.0005	1273.25	22.91	7	0.002
Relative's Scenario	1101.41	11	0.0005	1221.88	113.15	12	0.0005
Relative's Resolution	4536.12	8	0.0005	1235.36	14.88	7	0.04
Fairness	1620.73	2	0.0005	1141.24	5.24	1	0.02
Forgiveness	1385.72	3	0.0005	1090.35	12.30	2	0.002
Pre-Acceptance	56.46	1	0.0005	1343.10	185.18	1	0.0005
FAM *t*-score	681.03	1	0.0005	1545.24	0.63	1	0.43
Pre-Happy	324.69	1	0.0005	1944.28	5.03	1	0.02
Pre-Fine	108.34	1	0.0005	2074.55	0.00	1	0.97
Pre-Annoyed	172.16	1	0.0005	2733.58	0.41	1	0.52
Pre-Angry	89.43	1	0.0005	3144.41	0.01	1	0.94
Pre-Sad	33.26	1	0.0005	3116.90	0.08	1	0.78
Pre-Guilty	19.63	1	0.0005	3312.99	1.95	1	0.16
Post-Happy	758.84	1	0.0005	1085.04	10.74	1	0.001
Post-Fine	1541.89	1	0.0005	1139.06	2.06	1	0.15
Post-Annoyed	20.26	1	0.0005	3580.97	0.00	1	1.00
Post-Angry	16.41	1	0.0005	3689.83	1.56	1	0.21
Post-Sad	18.53	1	0.0005	3678.24	0.05	1	0.82
Post-Guilty	19.03	1	0.0005	3681.24	0.19	1	0.66

Note: Multivariate level QICC was 698.37, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

The participant's family role, their gender and age group were all also significantly related to post-acceptance ratings. Parents that had a *mixed parental role* as both a biological and a step parent within their household had the highest mean post acceptance rating ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.83$), whereas parents who had a purely *stepparent*

role within their household had the lowest mean post-acceptance rating ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.92$). Females ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.85$) were more likely to rate higher post-acceptance than males ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.93$).

A participant's post-acceptance rating was significantly associated to his or her relationship with the family member presenting the scenario. Relationships to parents ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.85$) and partners ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.80$) were rated with the highest post-acceptance means, whereas relationships to stepchildren ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 2.02$) closely followed to biological children ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.84$) received the lowest post-acceptance means (see Figure 20). Figure 20 depicts participant post-acceptance mean ratings towards the family member who has presented their scenario.
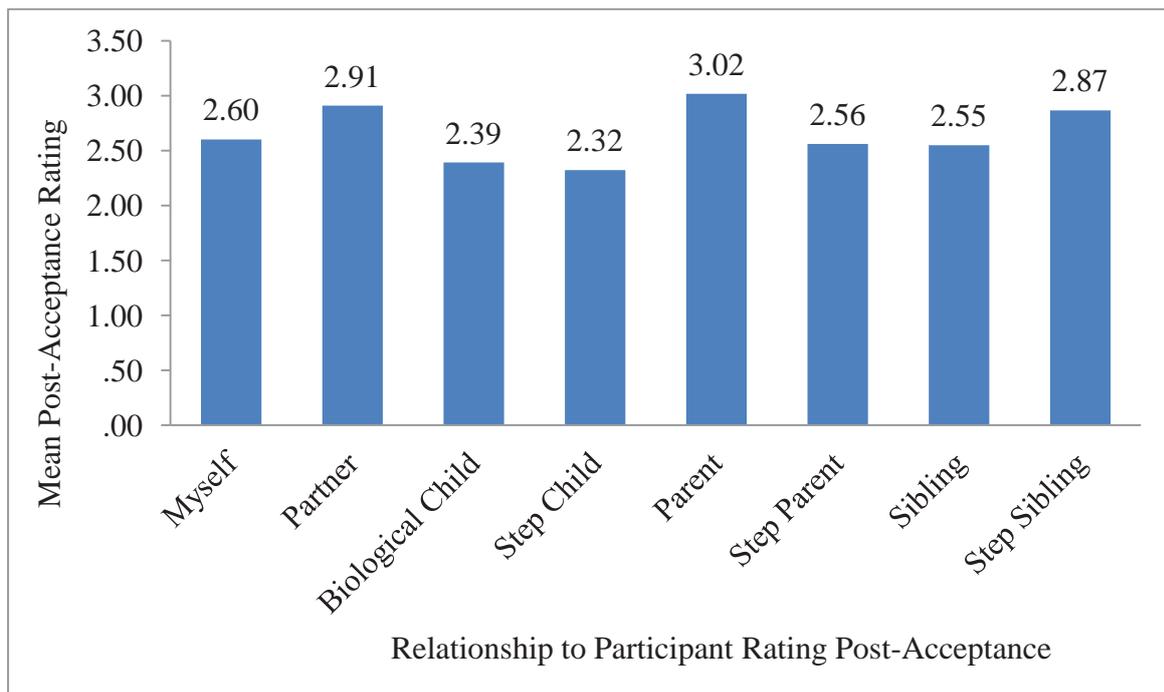
Figure 20. Participant post-acceptance mean ratings towards the family member who is presenting their scenario and resolution.

Scenarios and resolutions were also influential variables for post acceptance. The scenarios *same rule for all* received the highest post-acceptance mean rating for relatives' scenarios, with the *disagreements* scenario receiving the lowest post-acceptance mean

rating (see Table 15). *Sharing* and *justification* received the highest post-acceptance means for relatives' resolutions, where *no resolution* received the lowest post-acceptance mean rating. Table 15 illustrates the post-acceptance mean ratings, standard deviations, and number of observations that participants rated the scenarios and resolutions presented by other family members.

Table 15
Post-Acceptance Mean Ratings, Standard Deviations, and Number of Observations
(Cases) for Relatives Scenarios and Resolutions

Relatives scenario choice	No. of Cases	Mean	SD
Same rule for all	58	3.66	1.70
Differential treatment	88	2.80	1.70
Fighting	96	2.72	2.02
Expectations	49	2.65	2.00
Household chores	49	2.49	1.91
Lack of specific support	38	2.45	1.98
Discipline	38	2.39	1.88
Missing out	33	2.30	1.65
Disrespect	12	1.92	1.93
Disagreements	31	1.42	1.67
Relatives choice of resolution			
Sharing	73	3.29	1.73
Justification	56	3.07	1.68
Equality	28	2.71	2.16
Compromise	166	2.67	1.86
Communication	95	2.45	2.00
Apology	25	2.24	2.07
Discipline	20	2.10	2.13
No Resolution	42	1.71	1.70

Forgiveness.

Forgiveness occurred 64% of the time for presented scenarios and the resolutions, with 12% of situations not being forgiven, and 24% of situations considered not applicable forgiveness response.

A GEE analysis was conducted to assess which variables (individually and at a multivariate level) significantly influenced forgiveness (see Table 16). Those variables were the participant's family role, gender, age group, whether or not they rated the situation as fair, their post-acceptance rating, their relationship with the situation presenter, and their perceived family functioning (as measured by their FAM *t*-score). All variables were first run individually (at a bivariate level) under an unstructured working correlation matrix. Then at a multivariate level under an exchangeable working correlation matrix. There were not enough observations for the model to be run as an unstructured working correlation matrix. All variables apart from fairness were significantly associated with forgiveness at an individual (bivariate) level. However, when all variables were analysed together at a multivariate level fairness and post-acceptance were the only variables significantly associated with forgiveness.

Scenarios and resolutions presented by other family members could not be analysed using GEE as there were not enough observations for the model to run. Therefore, Pearson Chi-squared analysis was undertaken to see if situations and resolutions presented by other family members influenced a participant's willingness to forgive. Table 16 illustrates the predictive variables of forgiveness using GEE and their results on a bivariate and a multivariate level.

Table 16

Predictive Variables of Forgiveness Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Mulitvariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	21.23	4	0.0005	282.58	0.06	2	0.97
Gender	22.30	2	0.0005	285.26	0.99	1	0.32
Age Group	36.45	6	0.0005	289.31	6.35	4	0.17
Family Relationship	57.61	8	0.0005	284.12	13.72	7	0.06
Fairness	5.73	2	0.06	268.39	14.22	1	0.0005
Post-Acceptance	27.26	1	0.0005	214.87	10.32	1	0.001
FAM *t*-score	22.19	1	0.0005	274.32	2.51	1	0.11

Note: Multivariate level QICC was 204.52, and was run under an exchangeable working correlation matrix.

The chi-square analysis revealed that family member scenarios had significant associations with forgiveness χ^2 (8, n= 300) = 42.17, $p < 0.0005$, *phi* = 0.32, a moderate effect size. *Disrespect*, *finance*, *bad mood*, i*ssue between households*, and *no scenario* were left out of this analysis due to less than 5 participants presenting them in the research task. Family member resolutions were also significantly associated with forgiveness χ^2 (7, n= 316) = 17.96, $p < 0.01$, *phi* = 0.24. However as the 'minimum expected cell frequency' had been violated with 25% of cells having less than a count of 5, caution was required when extrapolating meaning from this analysis. The minimum expected count for this analysis is 1.94. One reason why this violation is an issue may not be due to enough observations (with 25% of cells having less than a count of 5), rather an overwhelming response to forgive rather than not to forgive for most of the resolution categories (see Figure 22).

Both the chi-square analyses were conducted with scenarios as cases rather than participants as cases, allowing for all possible combinations of family interaction.

Therefore caution is advised against generalising these results to the rest of the general stepfamily population due to chi analysis not adjusting for potential autocorrelations.

The participant's family role, gender, and age group did not significantly influence forgiveness occurrences.

The more participants rated situations and their resolutions as fair, the more likely they were to report forgiveness. Similarly if post-acceptance was recorded then forgiveness was significantly more likely to occur.

The scenario s*ame rule for all* had the highest percentage of forgiveness at 100%, followed by *lack of support* at 94% forgiveness. *Missing out* received the lowest percentage of forgiveness at 41%, with the rest of the scenarios obtaining 80% to 85%.

The resolutions *discipline* with 100% and *sharing* received 97.64% forgiveness, closely followed by *justification* at a 96.4% had the highest levels of forgiveness. The lowest forgiveness resolution rate was *no resolution* with 73% (see Figure 22 and Appendix G). Figure 21 illustrates the percentages and frequencies of forgiveness for the scenario categories. *Yes* represents that forgiveness has been given, whereas *No* represents when forgiveness has not been given. Note that the scenarios *disrespect, finance, bad mood, issue between households,* and *no scenario* have been included in the figure even though they were not included in the chi analysis
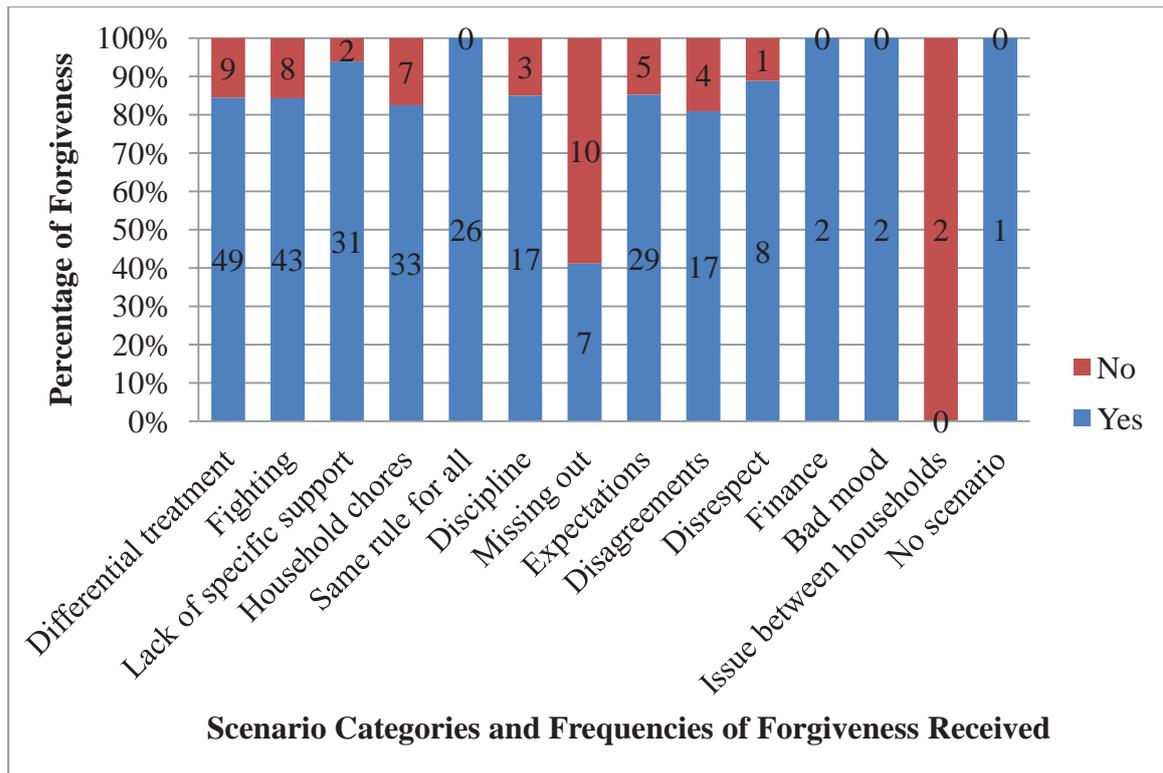
Figure 21. Scenario categories and frequencies of forgiveness received.

Figure 22 illustrates the percentages and frequencies of forgiveness for the resolution categories. *Yes* represents that forgiveness has been given, whereas *No* represents when forgiveness has not been given.
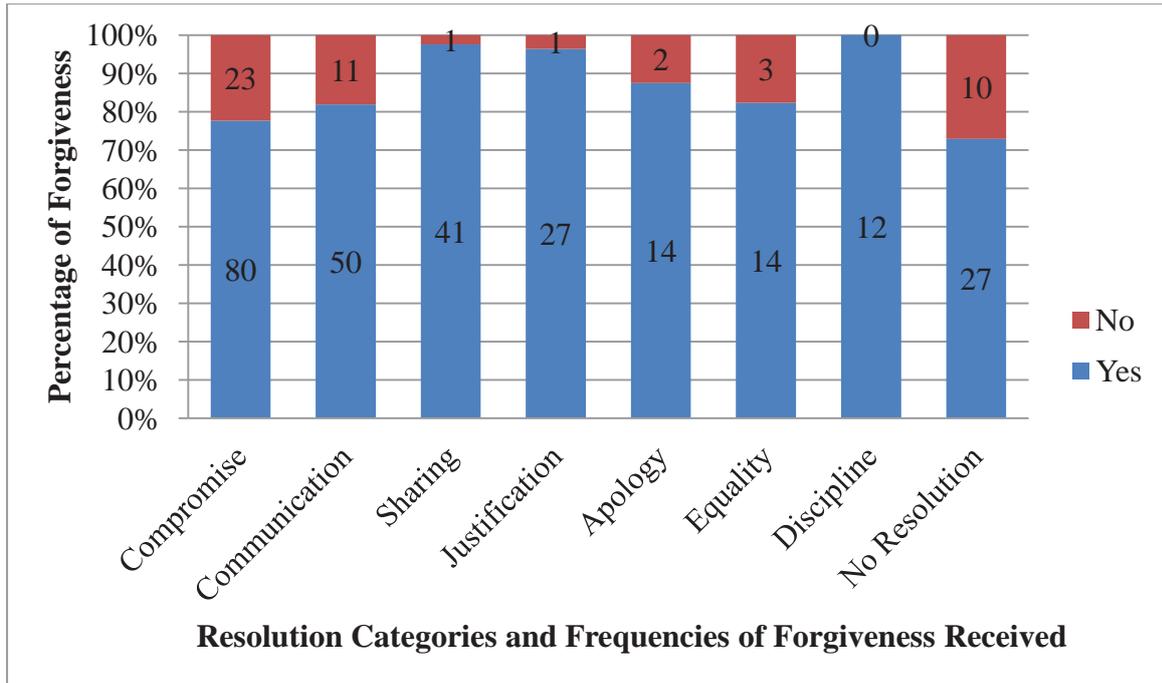
Figure 22. Resolution categories and frequencies of forgiveness received.

Family functioning.

Family functioning was measured using the participant's *t*-scores from the Brief FAM III: General Scale. Skewness (0.18) and kurtosis (-0.29) in the sample of 155 participants reassures us that the scores were normally distributed. The mean Brief FAM *t*-score was 44.13 (*SD*=10.12), which means that the average *t*-score was within the 'Increasing Strengths' range for assessment of family functioning. Eighty three percent of all participants scored as average or above, with 36% of all participants scoring above average to excellent for perception of their family functioning.

A GEE analysis was conducted to assess which variables individually (at a bivariate level) and together (multivariate level) had any significance of association with perception of family functioning (see Table *17*). The variables were both run individually and then at a multivariate group level under an unstructured working correlation matrix. Those variables were:

1. the role a person had in their family,

2. their gender and age group,

3. length of time together as a family unit,

4. number of family members in the household,

5. the participant's chosen scenario and resolution for the research task,

6. the overall percentage of fairness the participant rated other family members scenarios and resolutions,

7. the overall percentage of acceptance the participant rated in other family members scenarios and resolutions,

8. and the overall percentage of forgiveness rated for other family members scenarios and resolutions.

Table 17 illustrates possible predictive variables of perceived family functioning as measured by the Brief FAM: General Scale t-scores using GEE, and showing the results on both a bivariate and a multivariate level. All variables at a bivariate level were found to be significantly associated with perceived family functioning. However, only the variables of the participant's role, age-group, scenario, resolution, and overall percentage of forgiveness were found to be significantly associated with perceived family functioning at a multivariate level.

Table 17

Predictive Variables of Perceived Family Functioning As Measured by the Brief FAM: General Scale t-Scores Using GEE and Their Results on a Bivariate and a Multivariate Level

Independent Variable	Bivariate Level				Multivariate Level		
	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance	QICC	Wald Chi Square	*df*	Significance
Role	3296.85	4	0.0005	13854.71	7.75	2	0.02
Gender	3207.30	2	0.0005	14702.67	0.47	1	0.49
Age Group	5227.88	6	0.0005	13875.28	14.87	4	0.005
Length of Time as a Family	554.28	1	0.0005	70109.51	2.43	1	0.12
No. Of Family Household Residents	1395.02	1	0.0005	29935.28	0.06	1	0.81
Scenario Chosen	4252.32	11	0.0005	13309.38	50.33	13	0.0005
Resolution Chosen	3389.28	8	0.0005	13792.51	14.81	7	0.04
Fairness Percentage	1460.10	1	0.0005	53297.50	2.88	1	0.09
Post-Acceptance Percentage	529.72	1	0.0005	122029.49	0.00	1	0.98
Forgiveness Percentage	613.87	1	0.0005	140150.55	6.21	1	0.01

Note: Multivariate level QICC was 9541.80, and was run under an unstructured working correlation matrix.

The role a family member had in their family was significantly associated with how they perceived their family functioning. Parents generally perceived higher functioning of their family than any other role (lower mean scores infer greater strengths in family functioning), whereas stepchildren significantly rated far more weaknesses than their parents (see Table *18*). Table *18* illustrates family role and their perceived family functioning (Brief FAM *t*-scores) means and standard deviations.

Table 18

Family Roles and Their Mean and Standard Deviations of Their Family Functioning as Measured by the Brief FAM t-score

Family member role	*N*	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mixed	47	43.91	11.05
Stepparent	9	40.89	8.95
Parent	21	37.71	7.65
Stepchild	78	46.36	9.53

The 25 to 29-year-old age group significantly perceived their family functioning to be higher ($M = 38.00$, $SD = 7.33$), followed by the 40 to 49-year-olds age group ($M = 41.31$, $SD = 10.69$). The teenagers (13 to 17-year-olds) significantly perceived the highest weaknesses in their family functioning than any other age group ($M = 48.67$, $SD = 8.86$), followed by the 50 to 65-year-olds age group ($M = 46.50$, $SD = 5.97$) (see Figure 23). Figure 23 describes the brief FAM *T*-score means for each of the age groups.
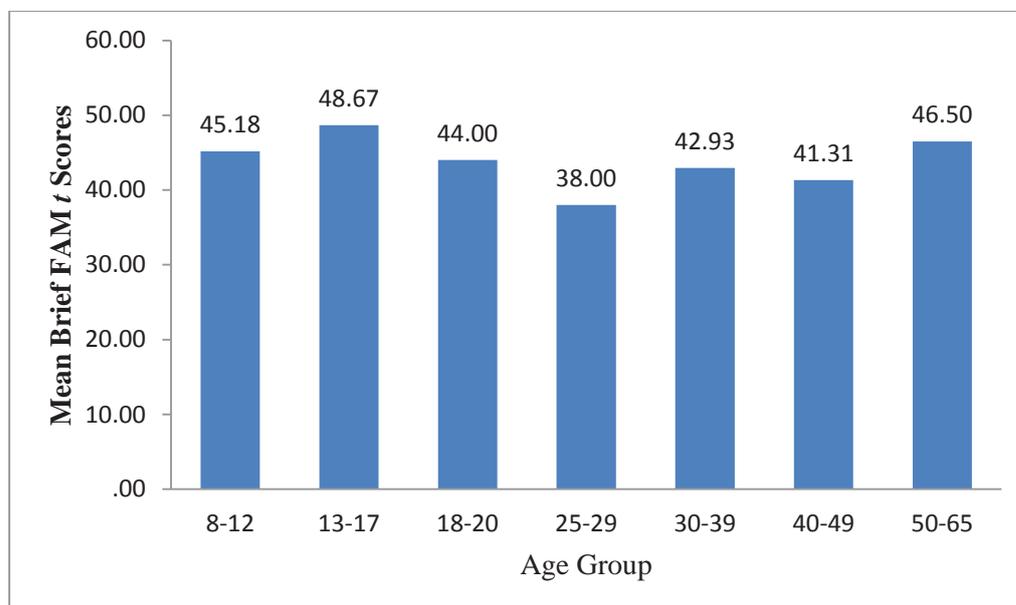
Figure 23. Mean Brief FAM *t*-scores from each age group.

Participants who chose lack of specific support (M = 37.73, SD = 8.00) and expectations (M = 40.50, SD = 10.44) as their scenarios rated their family functioning more positively than other participants with other scenario choices (see Figure 24). Whereas, those who chose household chores (M =48.67, SD = 10.95) and discipline (M = 48.31, SD = 6.56) as their scenarios had the significantly highest perceived weaknesses in family functioning (see Figure 24).

Participants who chose *sharing* (*M* = 39.40, *SD* =9.97) and *apolog*y (*M* = 40.22, *SD* = 7.84) as their choices of resolution significantly perceived their family functioning (as measured by their Brief FAM *t-score*) with higher strengths than other participants who chose different resolutions (see Figure 25). Those who had *no resolution* (*M* = 48.93, *SD* = 11.21) and *discipline* (*M* = 47.50, *SD* = 6.81) as their choice of resolutions rated higher weaknesses in their family functioning than other participants with different resolutions (see Figure 25).

Participants who had a higher percentage rate of forgiveness were also significantly more likely to rate higher functioning within their family, as indicated by their Brief FAM *t*-score. Figure 24 illustrates 90% of total participant's choices of scenarios and their overall mean rating of their family functioning as measured by the Brief FAM *t*-score. Figure 25 depicts participant's choices of resolutions to their scenarios, with their mean rating of family functioning as measured by the Brief FAM *t*-score.
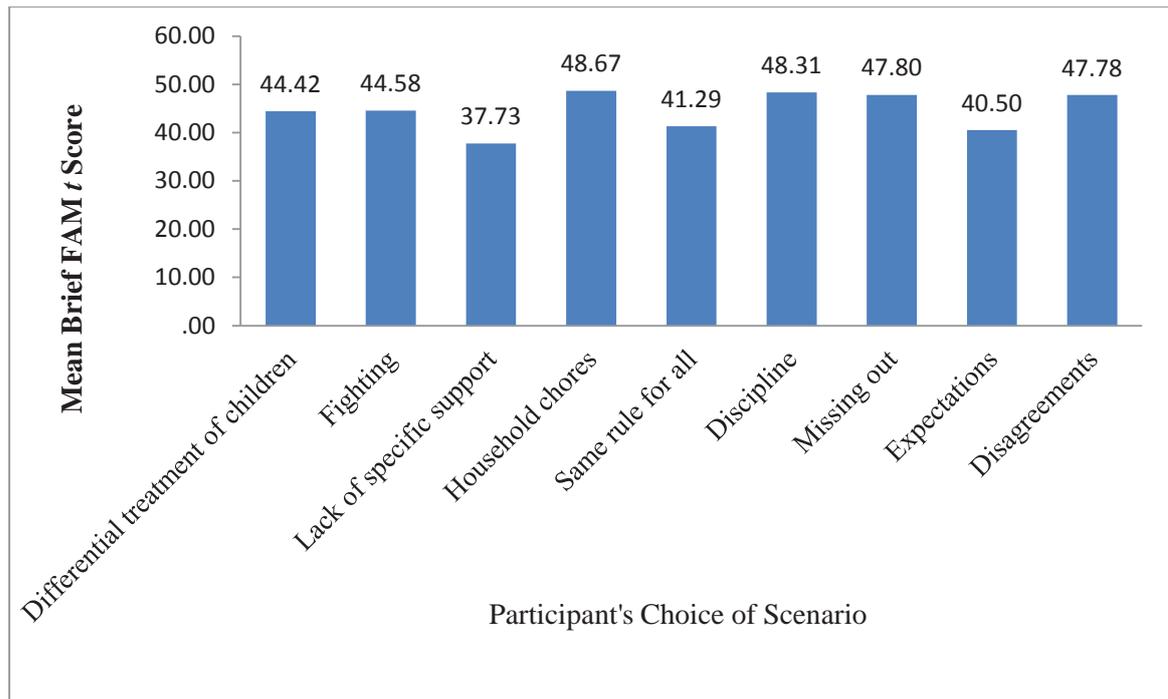
Figure 24. Participants' choice of scenario and their mean Brief FAM *t*-scores.
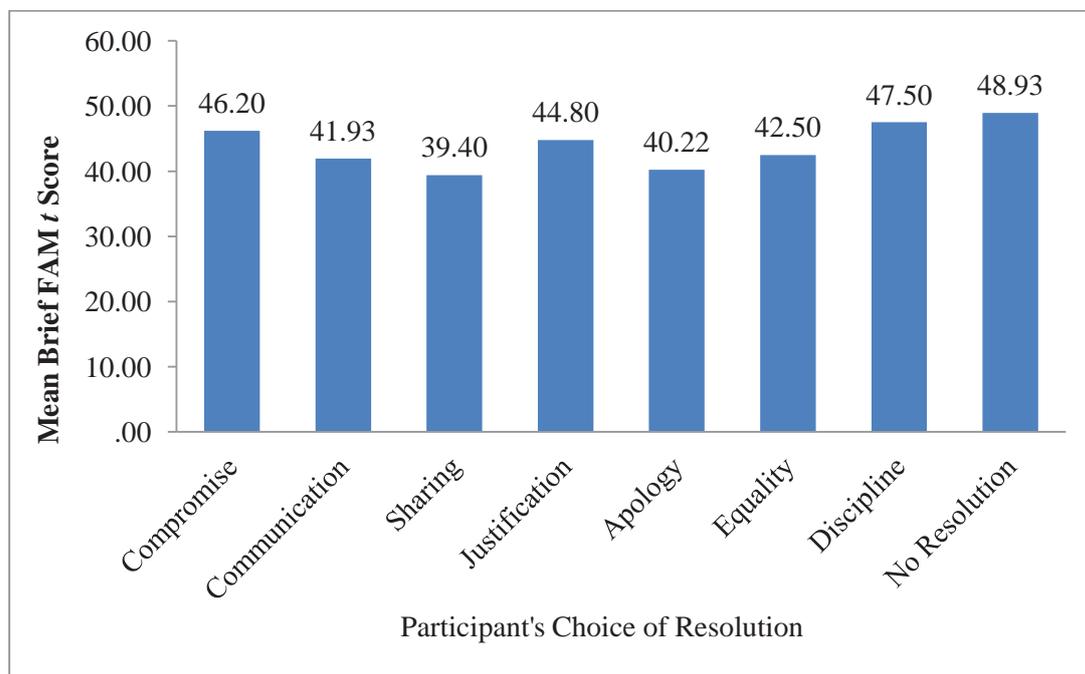
Figure 25. Participants' choices of resolutions to their scenarios and their mean rating of family functioning as measured by the Brief FAM *t*-score.

Participant family role, age group, scenario and resolution presented, and a participants overall likeliness to forgive were all significantly predictive of perceiving a more positively functioning family.

F. Qualitative Analyses

In this section thematic analysis was used to identify and generate the major categories from the participants' responses to the open ended questions:

- Why did you forgive?

- Why did you not forgive?

- What should have occurred?

- Do you have any advice for other stepfamilies?

The categories were extracted using standard processes in thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clark (2006): intensive reading and re-reading of all verbatim statements, identifying an initial selection of categories or codes, searching and then reviewing themes, defining and naming these themes, and finally, providing examples for these themes. In addition to this, an independent rater went through all the qualitative data for the above questions. This process was used to provide some degree of 'accuracy' in representation of the data, a technique of triangulation used by some qualitative researchers (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997). The categories were initially developed independently by myself and another rater. There was 90% agreement on categories. Differences that arose were resolved by discussion and consensus where possible, and if this was not possible the category was redefined or a new category was identified. Where there were sufficient numbers of exemplars, category differences or unique categories according to family member's role are also provided.

Why did you forgive?

One hundred and sixteen verbatim statements were extracted in answer to this question (across all family members and scenarios). These were grouped into seven categories which are each described briefly below using quotes as examples.

Someone apologised.

An apology was made.

Mum said sorry (683, stepchild, female, 10-years-old).

Because he apologised (642, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

Remorse.

Remorse was perceived.

...realised how serious it all was and really regretted it (641, mixed parental role, female, 47-years-old).

I think he feels guilty and regrets it...(642, stepchild, female, 16-years-old).

Situation / behaviours have changed and / or improved.

Forgiveness was given when a situation or issue that was antagonistic had changed / improved.

I have since forgiven their actions because they have changed the way they treat me (733, stepchild, male, 15-years-old).

Because we all now work together to do dishes and not fight (193, stepchild, male, 13-years-old).

Because [now] she lets me use her stuff (413, stepchild, female, 10-years-old).

It's over; it's in the past.

This theme occurred when a participant wanted to move on from the scenario, and forgiveness was more preferable than holding an ongoing grudge.

> *Because there is no point staying angry (163, stepchild, female, 13-years-old).*

> *Because it was a while ago (233, stepchild, male, 11-years-old).*

> *Because it is behind me and I don't care (164, stepchild, male, 10-years-old).*

Empathy.

This theme arose from participants acknowledging that a behaviour or situation was unintentional, and / or may have empathised with the behaviour of another family member.

> *Because he doesn't mean to be grumpy (703, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).*

> *Because we all understand we want to use the same things (162, stepparent, male, 43-years-old)*

> *Because when I think about it 'stepdad' did make sense (163, stepchild, female, 13-years-old).*

Acceptance.

Nothing has changed but the person's perspective on a situation. They have come to accept what has occurred and move on from it.

> *Because I have realised that it is not a big deal to give up my seat to someone in need (about giving up the front seat for a sibling that gets carsick) (455, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).*

Because it happens a lot of times and we forgive each other (about

fighting with other siblings) (413, stepchild, female, 10-years-old).

Because it is life (561, parent, male, 45-years-old).

Family love and connection.

Love and family connection was a strong theme in reasons for forgiveness, and it occurred often towards step-relations as well as biological relations. Interestingly many of these statements included everyone in their household as *family,* implying unity, bonding, and love.

Because they are my family and I love them (763, stepchild, female, 9-years-old).

Because he's my dad (466, stepchild, male, 10 years-old).

We are family (461, mixed parental role, female, 41-years-old).

Why did you not forgive?

The answers to this open ended question were mostly sparse and short, and thus not detailed nor as rich as the comments offered in response to the other three open-ended questions. Twenty seven statements were made towards 27 different situations explaining reasons for a lack of forgiveness from 21 participants. Essentially the comments related to three basic themes. The most common theme (17/27 statements) was simply that the problem had *not been resolved* and the perceived unfairness was being perpetuated: "*Because they still do it*," complained one 10-year-old girl; and "*I told him it was annoying but he didn't listen*," wrote another 11-year-old girl about her sibling.

Missing out, was the second most common theme for reasons why forgiveness was not applied to a situation. In fact, the reason for lack of forgiveness was most often expressed towards the ex-partners and biological parents living outside the newly formed

household, even though participants were encouraged not to raise situations outside of their own household. In these situations it was generally due to the parents witnessing their child/rens pain missing out due to the other biological parent's lack of interest in their child/ren. "*Because the situation is silly and still not being sorted out by the father*" said one stepfather (572, mixed parental role, male, 29-years-old) about the biological father of two of the children in the household; and "*Because [my] son's father continues not to have contact with him or acknowledge him during important events.*" states another parent (291, mixed parental role, female, 32-years-old).

The third theme developed from a few statements was *continued resentment* - in other words the negative affect associated with the perceived transgression was still dominant and grudges were still held. As one 14-year-old stepchild said about his stepfather: "*I still believe he is biased towards his [own] children and he never [attends] any of my things. He continues to segregate me and treat me worse than the others.*" Another parent commented that she had "*not forgiven the ex-partner, but I have to put it to rest as grudges do not help the matter*" (101, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

What would you have preferred to happen?

Forty four participants made 76 statements about what they preferred to have happened in response to the presented scenarios and the resolutions.

Not done it.

This was a common theme that developed from just under half of the participants who responded to this question. They generally described what should not have happened without providing an example of what they would have wanted to occur.

Would have preferred they didn't fight (children) at all, and stopped immediately when told to (542, mixed parental role, male, 47-years-old).

I could have simply done what I was asked, when I was asked (asked to do household chores) (733, stepchild, male, 15-years-old).

That none of them wear makeup till they're 21 (about the younger girls in the family wanting to wear makeup) (262, mixed parental role, male, 41-years-old).

Communication.

This theme was developed from 21 statements regarding communication. Communication arose as an important alternative that the participants felt should have occurred, such as listening and calmly talking things through. It also included needing to have engaged in communication before a situation became an issue.

To have been consulted and asked first (101, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

It's hard to know how you're going to react before things happen, but trying to listen to both or more sides before making hasty decisions (541, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

(stepbrother) could try to talk calmly to dad, because dad (his stepdad) talks calmly to him (355, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

Done something different

Surprisingly this theme was not as dominant as some of the other themes developed from this question. There were 10 comments made that were categorised in this theme. These statements provided actual behavioural examples (apart from other

themes mentioned: communication and turn taking) of what either they or their family member should have done instead.

> *Walk away and tell an adult (about fighting with stepsibling) (544, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).*
>
> *Stop and think about what was happening and calm down (792, parent, female, 38-years-old).*
>
> *Maybe (stepbrother) could be punished harder for it (teasing stepsister) because he constantly does it and it angers me, and as for the dog whistle (part of the teasing) that is just rude. He should be sent to his room or something for it (356, stepchild, male, 16-years-old).*

Done it sooner.

Nine participants stated that what had actually occurred should have been implemented sooner than it had.

> *It would have been good if (..husband) had taken up cooking sooner but he has now and because he works less than me has more time to do things around the house to help things run smoothly (721, parent, female, 46-years-old).*
>
> *Given us one on one time sooner (573, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).*
>
> *I would have preferred that she would have planed buying shorts better. She (...stepdaughter) knew about the beach day for about 2 weeks (142, stepparent, male, 52-years-old).*

Taking turns.

Taking turns was suggested as a more preferable result from six statements as an alternative to situations that had occurred.

We should take turns (choosing movies in the family) (461, mixed parental role, female, 41-years-old).

Put up a roster (to have turns to play playstation) (465, stepchild, male, 10-years-old).

I could have managed it better to begin with, taking turns, instead of what was easier for myself (children taking turns at choosing what to watch on TV) (571, parent, female, 28-years-old).

Happy with the result.

Five participants explained that they were happy with what had occurred and therefore an alternative was not necessary.

I think we resolved the situation well (681, parent, female, 41-years-old).

Nothing really different. It just takes time to make it all work and you have to keep working at it (721, parent, female, 46-years-old).

I think my expectations were realistic and the children's response was acceptable (722, stepparent, male, 65-years-old).

What advice do you have for other stepfamilies?

In some ways this question lies at the heart of the practical implications of the research: how to function well in a stepfamily. Like the answers to the other questions, advice varied in terms of its specificity and in some cases it related more closely to the type of scenario that the family was discussing. The importance of fairness was a value that was consistently implicitly as well as explicitly expressed, and which might well have been a priming effect as a result of fairness being the theme of the research. An almost universal idea, expressed in many different ways, was the importance of managing

one's own feelings, not over-reacting or "*Don't sweat the small stuff*" as one parent said (181, mixed parental role, male, 46-years-old). "*Step back, take five...Nothing is worth a major argument*" was useful advice (732, mixed parental role, male, 39-years-old). At a more practical level there were variations of the theme that doing activities together as a family was a valuable method of encouraging bonding, and other practical suggestions were being respectful of all household family members and ex-partner; not getting dragged into your partner's past conflicts; disciplining a child in private; and always be willing to apologise. All the themes generated from the participants' advice are described below. Definitions and examples are also included after each theme's heading. Given the similarity (and the quality of information provided) of how stepchildren and parents responded to this question, quoted examples of each theme are provided from both parents and by stepchildren.

Hold family meetings.

Many of the participants perceived family meetings important in assisting stepfamily functioning. Participants reported that these provided the opportunity for family members to air their concerns and to try and resolve them fairly through communication and negotiation. More importantly they provided a platform for the individual to understand another family member's point of view when issues occurred, thus assisting further with reconciliations and bonding.

<u>Parents</u>

> *Our family works by having family meetings when serious incidents occur and talking about them and resolving the conflict* (651, mixed parental role, female, 44-years-old).

> *Hold formal and informal family meetings* (142, stepparent, male, 52-years-old).

<u>Children</u>

Talk things over and talk with family and not ignore each other (143, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

Try having family conference, they are enlightening and give an insight into the feelings of those around you...(103, stepchild, male, 15-years-old).

Family time.

This theme arose often in statements made by the participants. In particular many mentioned the importance of having dinner together as a family. The participants reported that this gave family members the opportunity to talk to each other, work out issues, and spend quality time together. Many other comments were made about making sure that stepfamilies do activities together as a family such as going to the beach, sports games, and playing games. Comments also reflected that family members needed to be treated as family, and to provide everyone with a sense of belonging.

<u>Parents</u>

*Have family dinners and talk each week (*182, mixed parental role, female, 43-years-old)

Talk openly and honestly in the family and involve the kids in rules and decisions (552, mixed parental role, male, 35-years-old).

Go to all kids schools and sport together as parents support all. Make the kids feel special...(182, mixed parental role, female, 43-years-old)

<u>Children</u>

Sit down and have dinner together instead of everywhere because then you can talk about things that have come up (143, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

Do things as a family altogether and respect [everyone's] differences

(184, stepchild, female, 12-years-old).

Listening.

Communication was an important theme that arose within the participants' advice,

with 'listening' mentioned often as an effective tool in helping create a sense of fairness.

Parents

I'm constantly amazed at what I learn when I listen to the children (162,

stepparent, male, 43-years-old).

Finding time to listen to the child is most important, especially if you

are the stepparent (581, stepparent, female, 44-years-old)

Children

The key part of a functioning family is to listen to the explanation before

you jump to conclusions (354, stepchild, male, 14-years-old).

Always look at all sides for everyone's opinion (103, stepchild, male,

15-years-old).

Compromising and negotiating.

Compromising and negotiation were suggested as very useful methods to resolve

fairness issues.

Parents

If people in my house are not happy with something we communicate,

negotiate and compromise (431, parent, female, 32-years-old).

Pick a role [you can play] in the family, rather than competing with

someone else (732, mixed parental role, male, 39-years-old).

Children

Compromise and don't threaten (433, stepchild, male, 11-years-old).

A fair and equal compromise needs to happen (263, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

Show respect.

Participants advised that showing respect to other family members would help maintain harmony within the household and assist with building a foundation to a healthy caring family relationship.

<u>Parents</u>

Respect each other and their own views on situations (702, mixed parental role, female, 28-years-old).

Be respectful of others' feelings and wishes (362, mixed parental role, male, 37-years-old).

<u>Children</u>

Respect your family and trust them (183, stepchild, male, 10-years-old).

Be polite to your family. Care about everyone in your family and when you move in together make them feel welcome and do comfort them (184, stepchild, female, 12-years-old).

Treat people equally.

This theme of advice is self explanatory. In particular, participants stressed the importance of treating all children in a household equally.

<u>Parents</u>

I think the main thing is to treat everyone as an equal, this can be hard sometimes but it is important (462, mixed parental role, male, 43-years-old).

Treat <u>all</u> the same (182, mixed parental role, female, 43-years-old).

<u>Children</u>

Make sure all chores around the house aren't only to one person; share them amongst everyone (614, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

A fair and equal compromise needs to happen (263, stepchild, female, 15-years-old).

Expressing love.

Unsurprisingly, expressing love was a theme that many of the participants raised as an important concept that would facilitate forgiveness. Participants stated that the expression of love is important to develop healthy relationships, and to reassure other members that they are considered and important.

Parents

Tell them you love them (231, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

It is important to make each family member feel loved and wanted (141, mixed parental role, female, 48-years-old).

I was brought up by my mum and stepfather. My stepfather treated me as if I was his own. This reflects in my relationship with '...' I love my stepfather and '...'as much as my own father and son (562, mixed parental role, female, 43-years-old).

Children

Just know that you are loved and to trust one another (763, stepchild, female, 9-years-old).

You need to accept that it's no one's fault that you are dealt this set of cards, and to just love and accept each other (733, stepchild, male, 15-years-old).

The ex-partner.

One participant gave advice when dealing with an ex-partner, which could arguably be categorised under the themes '*Listening*' or '*Show respect*'. However, it expressed such a healthy and respectful manner in which to manage ex-partner relationships that it was selected as its own theme.

> *If things ever get bad, <u>never</u> drag your children into your war zone. If you need to have an outlet offload onto a friend. If you need to sit down with an ex-partner to discuss some issues, do so but make sure the focus is on the children's welfare i.e. their goals, achievements. This I have found is a good ice-breaker and calms both parents down. Just remember NEVER bring your children into a disagreement, argument and things are never as bad as what they first seem. Take one step back, breathe and continue (102, mixed parental role, male, 32-years-old).*

In summary.

There were many other valuable sentiments and uplifting words of advice expressed. The children were particularly keen to recommend fair treatment and equitable chores and responsibilities, and parents wanted to communicate to treat all family members equally with respect, and love will follow. Seeing other people's points of view came across very strongly along with many recommendations around problem solving, communicating, being open and honest, being good role models and learning from each other.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

How stepfamilies manage issues of fairness is a complex and varied process. The family process of everyday functioning with how to negotiate fairness and conflict, emotions, and relationships depends on several different factors. Families also find themselves needing to be flexible on how to respond to situations depending on the circumstances presented. This chapter discusses the main findings of this research from the reported typical issues of everyday stepfamily fairness, the strategies used to resolve those issues, and the characteristics of the participating stepfamilies. Emotions, acceptance, and forgiveness are then examined within their own sections in regards to the situations presented, the factors influencing them, and what they may imply. The main findings from the advice that participants provided is then addressed along with an explanation of what those findings mean for other stepfamilies and practitioners. The task itself, and the methodology used will also be discussed. Implications of the main findings including those for methodology are provided within each relevant section. Finally the research limitations are discussed, followed by the conclusion.

The Scenarios and Fairness

Many of the situations that the families raised as unfair scenarios in the present study are not necessarily unique to stepfamilies. At least a third of the scenarios were reported to be differential *treatment between children* and *fighting amongst children.* This is consistent with findings from other family research. For example, Kowal and Kramer's (1997) research on differential treatment of children discovered that it was common in intact families. A third of the child participants could identify differential treatment within their own households, yet the majority of these children tended to justify that these

occurrences were not unfair. These children were able to rationalise and justify why differential treatment occurred due to differences between themselves and their siblings. In my study, a much smaller portion of the stepchildren identified differential treatment between siblings / stepsiblings as a potential fairness issue. This difference was probably due to Kowal and Kramer's research specifically studying differential treatment where the children identified whether it occurred or not, and in my research the stepchildren had the option of presenting any fairness issue. However, considering that *differential treatment* was substantially reported as an issue far more often than most other scenarios in my study, it may imply that this is still a very important issue for children in stepfamilies. *Differential treatment* along with its resolutions was rated as fair by the stepchildren almost all of the time. The results from my research support Kowal and Kramer's findings of parental differential treatment, therefore my functional stepfamilies have been found to have similar results to their intact families. Unlike Kowal and Kramer's research my research also included stepparents and parents with a mixed parental role. These types of parents managed to achieve fairness in their families' equivalent to the way intact families did when managing *differential treatment* issues. This suggests that stepparents from functioning stepfamilies manage differential issues with as much fairness as biological parents from intact families.

Sillars, Canary, and Tafoya's (2004) review in family communication and conflict describes how sibling conflict is extremely common in families. So much so that siblings can be in conflict (fighting) on average six times per hour regardless of age. With this in mind it came as no surprise that '*fighting amongst children*' was first equal in the highest frequency of fairness scenarios chosen to discuss with family members. However, it is a common issue that seemed to be resolved with the result considered to be almost always as fair by the stepchildren. Resolution strategies were again inconclusive as to which

strategy was more effective than others. However, the families in this study reported that *compromise, communication*, and *sharing* were used more often and found effective than other strategies. It would be reasonable to suggest that with more siblings within a household as found in typical stepfamilies, that there would be more occurrences of fighting amongst the children. This is because developmentally children are still learning to understand, compromise, and manage their feelings, therefore conflicts between siblings / stepsiblings is likely to occur more often and intensely than between stepchildren and their parents / stepparents. An example of this was represented by the many statements from stepchildren having issues with fighting with other siblings rather than fighting with their stepparents. Also, a far larger percentage of children rather than parents used this as their scenario example. Therefore, with the common frequency of in-house fighting between siblings, care needs to be taken when resolving disputes amongst children so that no one particular child (or family member) is targeted as a 'scapegoat'.

Household chores was the third equal most chosen issue that family members presented in their family research task, however it was also the second highest issue recorded in all the participant response booklets. This finding corroborates with the literature reviews by Coltrane (2000), and Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, and Goldberg (2004) that household chores are a source of complaint and discontentment within family units. It also adds to the current family research literature that household chores are a common issue in stepfamilies too. Perry-Jenkins et al. also argue that issues around household chores generally arise not from a lack of equal distribution but rather from a perception of unfair distribution. This was evident within this research, because family members (both children and parents) perceived unfair distribution of chores as one of the greatest source of annoyance within their household (as shown in the emotional ratings). Along with the previous situation issues discussed above, household chores are a common issue that

many other families come across regardless of whether they are an intact family or a stepfamily.

Other scenarios of fairness discussed by family members are also very similar to those common in intact families such as contentions with *finance, discipline, expectations,* and *disagreements*. There are some scenarios of fairness that are specific to the nature of being in a stepfamily, such as *missing out*, and sometimes with the *same rule for all*. *Missing out* can commonly occur for the children in a stepfamily and create a strain on the family when there is disharmony between the children's two biological parents, or one biological parent showing no interest in their children's upbringing, or one or both of the biological parent's competing for their children's attention / loyalty / love with material substance. Evident in both the parents' and stepchildren's examples of missing out, the children are usually very aware of what is happening in these circumstances. It is even more unfortunate that in these situations one if not all the children in a stepfamily end up being emotionally hurt, and are unforgiving when this does occur.

The scenario *same rule for all* was evidentially an issue with stepfamilies when two different families with their histories and traditions (rules and way of doing things), have to join together and create new traditions and new relationships, and each individual has to find a new role in the newly developed family. The *one rule for all* approach may be difficult for children when it is imposed irrespective of their differences in age and development to other siblings, such as the same bedtime, or having to change eating habits. It also can be a problem for children who live between two different households to have to abide by different rules in each household. This may occur when a younger (and sometimes older) stepsibling may be allowed to wear makeup or use Facebook in one

household, but not in the other household due to other stepsiblings not being allowed (other examples in this study have included curfews, clothes, and dietary choices).

When household rules treat different age groups of children the same as when they all have the same bedtime, children can generally feel disgruntled. Although this can be perceived as a potential issue, the *same rule for all* had the highest fairness rating from all family members along with the highest forgiveness rating. This implies that family members can perceive fairness and are happy with the resulting situation even if it means that they are put at a disadvantage.

The role a person had in their family, gender, and their age did not influence perceived fairness towards scenarios. Neither did the relationship between family members influence how fairness was perceived when the scenarios were presented. The significant factor influencing whether or not a situation (scenario and its resolution) was fair or not was primarily influenced by the situation itself. However, it is important to note that even though fairness may have been perceived, there were still heightened negative emotional responses depending on the situation (as discussed below with resolutions). Therefore, perceptions of fairness are influenced by the situation itself rather than who instigated it. This is a positive finding for new stepparents because it suggests that children would not be biased towards them if they treat them fairly. It is also potentially a good start towards building a positive relationship with their stepchildren.

Resolutions and Fairness

Participants were given the opportunity to explain how they resolved their own issues of fairness (scenarios) in their own words rather than being provided with a list of examples to chose from. This provided greater ecological validity in participant responses as they were not constrained by external influences.

There were seven distinct resolution strategies that participants utilised when scenarios were discussed; *compromise*, better *communication*, taking turns and *sharing*, providing a reasonable rationale or *justification* for an unavoidable situation, *apologising* to the family member who was aggrieved, *treating everyone equally*, and providing disciplinary consequences (*penance*) for transgressions against another family member. *Compromise* and *communication* accounted for the majority of the reported resolution strategies. Children from the younger age group were the main family members who were represented in the *no resolution* category. This may be due to developmental capacity as it would take a certain amount of skill, and advanced emotional ability to implement resolutions to suit any given conflict situation. This would mean that parents and stepparents would usually need to be the main promoter of resolution strategies. They would also need to be understanding and accepting that a younger stepchild may not always be able to resolve fairness issues, and may require parental guidance.

When a resolution strategy was implemented, family members would be far more accepting of a fairness issue and report the outcome as fair. Apologising received the lowest fairness ratings out of the resolution strategies reported. This is probably because receiving an apology might help one forgive, but it does not necessary take away the cause of the perceived injustice or hurt.

No one particular resolution stood out as more effective than any other when fairness was achieved. This means that each family may have to be flexible with resolution strategies when trying to achieve fairness. In some circumstances compromise may work, as will communication, sharing, or justification depending on family dynamics. It would still be beneficial for families when dealing with potential unfair situations to encourage everyone to talk about their feelings openly, which would allow children to feel respected and listened to, even if unfair circumstances could not always

be corrected. This strategy came across strongly from the advice given and the feedback by the participating families.

Emotions

There was evidence that families with the lowest FAM III scores (i.e., self-reported *most positive* family functioning) tended to have higher positive emotional scores, which is logical and either helps establish that the FAM III is a valid measure of family functioning, or that there was a certain degree of positive halo effect operating in all the ratings. When a resolution was judged as fair, it had the largest divergence between its pre and post rated emotions (increases with positive emotions, and decreases with negative emotions). This converges with other fairness studies where the experience of fairness (regardless of the actual outcome) strongly influences emotions (Barry, 2006; Evans et al., 2001; Evans et al., 1998; Mikula et al., 1998). The present study adds to the growing research that investigates fairness and emotional responses by using a different cohort with stepfamily participants, and using a positive psychology perspective with rating positive emotional responses as well as negative.

Additionally it should be noted that no matter how harmonious these families were and how hard they worked on resolving negative situations, feelings of annoyance, anger, sadness and guilt were not unknown. Although not fully explored in the present research, it seems likely from the insights provided by family members of all ages that such feelings are not inherently destructive to family functioning and need not be avoided. Emotions are all part of living in a complex social system that provides opportunities for growth and self-awareness.

After fairness, scenarios had one of the greater influences over emotional responses. The scenario that created the highest negative emotion than any other was

when children missed out. This occurred when the other biological parent did not keep in contact, or when children who lived between two households would either gain or miss out on extra gifts compared to their stepsiblings, or miss out on family holidays and special outings. *Missing out* created the highest negative emotions than any other issue presented by family participants. Along with its high negative ratings, unfair ratings, and lack of forgiveness, *missing out* can undermine a child's mental wellbeing within a household when it occurs. Evident from the qualitative information gathered and participant feedback, *missing out* had the potential to influence feelings of resentment towards more fortunate siblings and their parents. More seriously, when missing out occurred a child was left feeling not as valued as their other siblings, or neglected, unwanted and unloved. It is important for new stepfamilies and practitioners to be aware of this type of scenario as it can create high levels of tension and conflict if not resolved or attempts made to balance out the unfairness of the situation. This is demonstrated in other fairness research where unfairness creates negative emotions, and hostility in children and therefore tension within the whole family (Barry, 2006; Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2007; Mikula et al., 1998).

Household chores were also an issue that created higher negative emotions than other scenarios. This is not surprising considering that previous research presents household chores as one of the leading issues of contention within any family household (Coltrane, 2000). One parent summed up this issue with their quote "...*has created most of our arguments between my partner and I, because (stepson) doesn't do anything to help around the house"* (102, mixed parental role, male, 32-years-old).

Resolutions were also highly influential of emotional outcomes. Unsurprisingly, along with the highest percentage ratings of fairness, sharing, equal treatment, and justification all had the highest positive emotional ratings. This is possibly due to these

categories involving family members actively making amends or trying to resolve an issue as opposed to an apology which could be taken as mere words rather than actions. According to Yamaguchi's (2009) research, mothers would still punish their children's misbehaviour even when an apology was offered. However, the mothers' emotional ratings improved after an apology was received. My study found that apologies as a resolution did not improve emotional responses to unfair situations as much as other resolution strategies. However, it was still more effective than having no resolution. When resolutions were absent from an unfair situation, it understandably created not only high ratings of unfairness, but also the highest levels of negative emotional responses.

Timeframes were another important factor with improving positive emotional ratings. All positive emotions increased and negative emotions decreased in ratings between the times a scenario and its resolution occurred and when the research took place. It was clear that time alone was useful for family members to be able to move on from an issue with another family member. Therefore, some of the adults' recommendations that stepfamilies need time to come together and that patience is required were valid suggestions.

In summary, when issues do occur in stepfamilies the best resolution strategies to assist with emotional reactions and acceptance seemed to occur with the sharing out of resources and time, and being able to justify an unfair situation to other family members when inequality cannot be avoided.

Achieving Acceptance

Family members were more likely to accept a situation and forgive (fairness scenario and its resolution), when they also perceived the situation as fair. Gender, the

role you had in the family, and the type of relationship you had with another family member also significantly whether or not you accepted a situation and by how much.

Parents with a mixed parental role were significantly more accepting (rated higher acceptance levels) than other parental roles, even though they rated family functioning more negatively. This may be due to their experience in parenting both their biological children and their stepchildren. It is possibly more challenging and stressful having a dual parental role with meeting the needs of each child in a practical, mental, and emotional way. Also this type of parental experience may offer a more realistic than an optimistic viewpoint in regards to family functioning. They may have to be more accepting of family issues when they arise to help maintain harmony within the household, or it is possible that the experience of being in this parental role enables them to perceive situations from different perspectives and therefore are able to be more accepting of situations. Further research will help to clarify why parents with mixed parental roles are more accepting even though they have a more pessimistic perception of family functioning than biological parents or stepparents.

Females had higher acceptance ratings than males, along with higher negative emotional ratings. The discrepancy between the female and male ratings may be attributed to cultural influence where it is more acceptable for females to display more emotional expression in our society (Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). However, females in this study tended to also have higher anger ratings than males which differs from other research findings (Plant et al., 2000; Simon & Nath, 2004).

Relationships to parents and partners were rated with the highest acceptance ratings, whereas relationships to stepchildren and biological children received the lowest acceptance ratings. Having similar acceptance ratings towards stepchildren and biological children can imply that within these families all children have an equal chance of the

household parents moving on from an issue and not holding a grudge due to the step-relationship. However, with higher acceptance ratings towards partners rather than towards the children within the household (along with higher rates of anger), parents may be more biased towards their partners than their children when issues arise. This finding suggests that it would be helpful for parents to be careful when assessing a fairness situation within the household and try and behave as fairly as possible when conflict occurs between their partner and their children. It is interesting that acceptance ratings towards stepparents were on par with acceptance ratings towards how participants rated themselves and other siblings. Furthermore although parents have a higher acceptance rating than stepparents, the bias is a positive one towards parents rather than a negative bias towards stepparents – an important difference. This means that a grudge or attitude may not be necessarily be held just because a family member is a stepparent, rather that biological parents are more positively accepted than any other family member.

Scenario and resolution ratings also predicted acceptance and fairness.. For instance, the scenario *same rule for all* receiving the highest fairness percentage also obtained the highest acceptance ratings. The resolutions *sharing* and *justification* were a good example of this too. The lowest acceptance ratings for scenarios were for *disrespect*, *disagreements* and *no resolution* for resolutions. Interestingly *disrespect* and *disagreements* held the lowest acceptance ratings. It was evident that these issues of fairness would not be accepted well in these families as they also came across strongly within the themes that emerged from the advice provided by the participants: *listening*, *compromising and negotiating*, and *show respect* (these themes are discussed in more detail under the heading: Advice for Stepfamilies below).

Asking the participants what should have occurred resulted in an interesting variety of interpretations of the question, as well as providing qualitative information

towards gaining acceptance if a situation occurs again. Children and teenagers tended to propose that the transgression should not have happened in the first place: "*Not broken [my] elbow*" (652, stepchild, male, 15-years-old), and *"[should have] just said yes"* (683, stepchild, female, 10-years-old). As one 16-year-old girl stated: "*Handled his anger and thought about his actions before he made them*" (642). Quite often this same theme when presented by the children seemed to recognise that it was their own behaviour that could have been different from the start: "*We should do the jobs instead of just laying around*" (654, stepchild, male, 9-years-old). Parents also took responsibility: "*We could have changed the room sooner*" (721, parent, female, 46-years-old). But sometimes even parents wished that the problem had not happened: "*I would prefer the children not to have physical fights; I'd prefer my stepson to be more honest in his role in the fights/arguments, which he mostly instigates*" (541, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old).

Generally, however, adults identified the solutions to the problem and these tended to be quite specific because they were in response to the specific scenario under discussion. Instead of arguing, a child could "*come to us and talk about how he was feeling*" (191, mixed parental role, female, 42-years-old), "*I could have managed it better to begin with—taking turns instead of what was easier for myself*" (571, parent, female, 28-years-old) in response to conflict over watching TV.

Children too sometimes had specific suggested solutions. A 9-year-old boy said "*walk away and tell an adult* [fighting with sibling]" (544); and an 8-year-old girl proposed "*they could've sorted it out by taking turns more evenly*" (454); "*My [stepbrother] could try to talk calmly to dad, because dad [his stepfather] talks calmly to him*" (355) was recommended by a 14-year-old girl. This last statement although seemingly a wise suggestion, does, like a few of the other suggestions, imply taking sides.

Statements such as *"My husband should have listened first"* (411, mixed parental role, female, 33-years-old) ; and another when a mother thought her new partner should have *"accepted my son from the offset"* although *"[my] son was aggressive in [his] manner at the beginning, so it made it difficult for [my] partner to connect with him"* (101, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old); do imply bias against a stepfamily member. These statements show that bias can occur in some of these families. However, the opposite also occurs in other stepfamilies where support is shown for their stepfamily member for example: *"[He] could have seen my point of view that I am being protective of my stepdaughter rather than being mean"* (291, mixed parental role, female, 32-years-old) and from a teenage girl: *"I think my father could've taken more responsibility around the household instead of just offering emotional support to his wife"* (614, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

One of the most striking features of the responses to *"what should have occurred"* was that just under half of the respondents suggested what they themselves could have done better. As expected they were more likely to identify what someone else could have done to improve the situation next time. However, this was underrepresented due to the much higher ratio of other family members sharing their scenarios and each family member commenting on those.

Acceptance of the stepfamily situation was an important component when perceiving conflict situations as resolvable rather than as an inevitable and permanent consequence of being a stepfamily. One quote from a 15-year-old stepson summarised this quite well: *"Being a child, having a stepparent is difficult. Especially when you do not completely get along. You just need to accept that it's no one's fault that you are dealt this set of cards, and to just love and accept each other for their roles in the family"* (733). Belonging to a stepfamily is something which most children would have had little

control over, and are thus more likely to find integrating into a new family difficult. The importance of acceptance emerged in a number of ways, especially in response to the open-ended question enquiring about what would participants have preferred to have happened or how those involved could have done better. Children were particularly open to recognising that they played a part in instigating the situation and that they should not have done so "*We should do the jobs instead of just laying around*" (654, stepchild, male, 9-years-old).

This research demonstrates that acceptance is an important mindset for stepfamilies (and perhaps even any other type of family) for family members to be able to move on from issues of conflict and fairness, and towards forgiveness even if emotions take more time to adjust.

Achieving Forgiveness

There is no doubt that the importance of forgiveness was recognised as a way of allowing family conflicts to fade into the background and for the family to be able to move on after some hurtful or negative event had occurred. Generally, however, there was a sense that forgiveness resulted because some sort of restitution had occurred. Talking rather than fighting was often mentioned in response to why forgiveness was offered; suggesting that for many families forgiveness was related to putting things to right. On the whole, the children's explanations for forgiveness tended to be very specifically related to the unique situation presented in the scenario, such as finally getting paid to do the lawn, or now being allowed to select the movie. In one or two cases the forgiveness was far from absolute and was conditional upon no further transgressions "*I have forgiven my brother but I feel that what he did was extremely immature and selfish and I'm not forgetting it in the future*" (614, stepchild, female, 14-years-old).

For parents, very similar themes emerged. *Apologies* were important, especially if it seemed the child now understood the issues or if matters were put right, meaning the situation has changed *"They promised to return items in future and I trust them to do that"* (161, parent, female, 42-years-old). Some parents did not see the point in holding grudges *"It is in the past and it has been resolved"* (101, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old), where they especially saw that matters in the past were best left alone. Forgiveness was more likely to be based on positive feelings for the person involved, rather than due to perceptions of restitution. From these positive feelings, one of the strongest reasons offered for forgiving someone was that they loved them: *"Because I love him" (611, mixed parental role), "Because he's my husband; I love and respect him..."(411, mixed parental role) "We are family"* (461, mixed parental role).

When *no resolution* occurred after an unfair scenario, then this situation resulted in the lowest levels of forgiveness along the highest levels of negative emotions. This was evident with the verbatim responses from the participants when asked why forgiveness was not offered: *"Because she's always annoying"* (193, stepchild, male, 13-years-old); *"cause they still do it"* (553, stepchild, female, 10-years-old). Therefore, when unfair situations are either perpetuating or not resolved they can create high levels of emotional tension which then can contribute towards conflict within families.

Forgiveness in these families was given most of the time, and was more likely to occur from a family member who had high levels of acceptance. Family relationship had no significance in influencing forgiveness; rather it was more likely to occur due to the scenario and resolution used. Therefore, this means that if reconciliation is genuinely attempted for one of the typical scenarios researched in this study, then stepfamily members have a very good chance at being forgiven.

It seems that the more responsive a person is towards fairness and forgiveness the more likely they are to perceive higher functioning in their families. This could influence the manner in which they behave therefore having a positive cycle effect within their families. Further studies could beneficially be undertaken to explore this more directly.

Stepfamily Member Differences

It can be assumed that by asking participants to come up with potential issues of fairness that they themselves had instigated along with the resolution strategy that they used (which was shared in their family meeting), that these situations could be the most pressing issue of fairness for them at that point in time. However, the results from this research did not reveal any significant influences of stepfamily role, gender, age group, and relationship type on perceptions of fairness or choices of scenarios and resolutions. Further research would be useful to confirm this finding. It is important to note that some of the participants may not have shared situations that could have been a cause of conflict during the family meeting, and chosen a mild situation to share in the family meeting instead. Whatever reason was behind a participant's choice of situation, they were meaningful enough to evoke strong emotion and fairness ratings amongst the participating family members.

When it came to predicting emotion in unfair situations, different participant traits were predictive of ratings of emotion. There were significant differences of emotional ratings between genders as females were more likely than males to rate the negative emotions (annoyed, anger, guilt, and sadness) highly. However, the individual differences for each emotion are small and so caution should be taken when extrapolating practical significance from it.

The significant difference for age groups with emotion ratings seemed to be more relevant with the teenage participants. They had more extreme emotional ratings than other age groups with lower positive emotion ratings (happy, and fine) and higher negative emotion ratings (annoyed). Teenage stepchildren also perceived considerably more weaknesses in family functioning than their parents and the younger stepchildren age group. These results illustrate how teenagers are more susceptible to reacting emotionally when issues of fairness occur within the family, and perhaps more sensitive to issues within their family functioning.

The relationship a participant had with another family member did have some influence with a few of the negative emotions (angry, sadness, and guilt). The highest ratings were towards oneself rather than at other family members. This was followed by the second highest ratings towards stepparents. Both anger and guilt were rated higher towards biological children rather than stepchildren. Perhaps the reason for this is that family members we are closest to have the capacity to make us angrier than other family members. However, further research needs to investigate this question to determine why this is.

Forgiveness was not significantly dependent on a person's role in the family, gender, or age. Neither was it significantly dependent on the relationship with another family member, rather than on the situation itself (see further information under the 'Achieving Forgiveness' heading). The findings of this research are contradictory to other stepfamily research such as Allan, Crow, and Hawker's (2011). The stepmother participants from this study were less likely to forgive their stepchildren when compared to forgiving their own biological children.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that emotions are not always straight forward in a stepfamily. Negative emotions cannot be assumed to always be directed at

step-relatives, rather they tend to be towards biological relatives. Gender and age can also contribute towards how a particular family member can feel.

Advice for Stepfamilies

All participants were invited to include any advice at the end of the research task, and it was impressive how many responded with a very rich range of comments. Much of the advice suggested that these participants may have already followed it themselves, as well as being heartfelt and useful. Seven strong themes developed from these participants: *hold family meetings, family time, listening, compromising and negotiating, show respect, treat people equally, expressing love*, and *the ex-partner*. Some comments may have been primed by the research itself, such as the themes with holding family meetings, and concepts of fairness with treating people equally. However, even with these themes it seemed that participants were already using these strategies: "*Our family works by having family meetings when serious incidents occur...*" (651, mixed parental role, female, 44-years-old), "*We try to encourage all the children to work things out themselves, to play fairly, to be kind to each other, and to be honest*" (692, mixed parental role, female, 38-years-old).

Some examples of advice that had already been put into practice gives a possible insight into why some of these families managed to have a low FAM *t*-score with above average strengths: "*For our family open communication is the key. The ability to talk and listen to each other's viewpoint, even when conflicting, is really important*" (681, parent, female, 41-years-old), *listening, compromise and negotiation* have helped this family's cohesion as was also evident in their low FAM *t*-scores. In another family, a parent advised that "*It is important that both parents agree on discipline i.e. the parent of the child should be the one to discipline but in agreement with the stepparent*" and "*...before*

we even thought of marrying we always went out as a family so that the children got a chance to get to know their future stepfather. It was they who gave him permission to ask me to marry him. Therefore they were able to accept him as a stepfather more easily" (141, mixed parental role, female, 48-years-old). This parent discussed implicitly the importance of family time – where the family bonded and got to know each other before deciding to unite their families. It also showed respect and listening towards their children on what they had to say about the joining of the two families, and gave them a sense of belonging to a new family unit rather than two separate units. These findings strongly support Michaels' (2006) research, which also found treating the whole family as one unit, respect for all family members, spending quality time together, and communication as factors that contribute to functioning successfully as a family. As discussed in the introduction chapter, children react with hostility when perceiving that they are being unfairly treated (Evans et al., 2002). Some of the families within this research managed fairness through being respectful of other family members, in particular towards their children:

> *"When an individual member has done someone wrong we take that child into a separate room (our room) and talk to them away from the other children so no one else knows what has been said or done (up to the child if they want to tell other siblings). This works well as others do not rub stuff in their face or get to ridicule. I have used this method for quite some time and they all know and now they take me into our room when they want to talk to me about something important to them"* (651, mixed parental role, female, 44-years-old).

This family showed respect for their children, by avoiding humiliating them in front of other siblings, and communicating with them in a respectful way with what is expected of them.

The expression of love was another important trait that these families shared, not to be confused with *immediately feeling love for new family members, or the expectation of love*, but the actual behaviour in the expression of love. This would provide the receiver of this action with a sense of value, belonging, comfort, respect, and for some stepparents a sense of accomplishment: *"lots of hugs and cuddles, and dinners are always at the dinner table where talking and sharing the day's activities is encouraged"* and this parent added in regards to the household children to: *"Celebrate their individual success and make sure they know you are proud of them"* (231, mixed parental role, female, 37-years-old); *"...I am really glad that my mum married my stepdad because now I have got a stepsister and someone I can trust and relate to, and my stepdad is really nice to me..."* (184, stepchild, female, 12-years-old).

Some advice from these parents were a blend of many of the themes intertwined, and shows how important it is to use as many of these tools (the themes of advice) as possible for the best results in family functioning:

> *"Actually it has just occurred to me that we don't think of ourselves as a stepfamily as such, we are just a family. And I suppose we "work' for the same reason any other families work. We communicate, spend time together, have a regular family routine, are consistent and love each other"* (761, parent, female, 30-years-old);

> *"Finding time to listen to the child is most important especially if you are the stepparent. Get involved with your stepchild's school, friends, sports groups etc..., the more time you take to get to know your*

stepchild the better your relationship will be" (581, stepparent, female, 44-years-old);

"Being a parent isn't a popularity contest. At points in their life they will tell you graphically how they dislike you. Remain calm and consistent as much as possible. Time and consistency will pull the family through. Children will know who they can count on when the going gets tough" (62, mixed parental role, male, 41-years-old).

What is common with all these family's quotes is also the implicit information that they worked hard on their relationships. This came through strongly in many of the themes with *family time, showing respect, compromising and negotiating, listening,* and *treating all family members equally*.

Methodology, Recruitment, and the Task

The recruitment of participants who met the research criteria proved to be a most challenging process. Although extensive advertising using various media was used, the most successful recruitment method was advertising in primary school newsletters throughout the country. This method was beneficial as it obtained a widely diverse group of stepfamilies, fairly representative of the cultural mix of the population of Aotearoa New Zealand. The brief FAM III *t*-scores revealed that the families investigated reported themselves to be functioning at a fairly harmonious level. Therefore, this sample group was appropriate for research consistent with a positive psychology philosophy, and the resulting findings of the current study have contributed to this school of psychological research.

The behavioural task was designed around a family meeting model, along with a DVD, which turned out to be an innovative method that appeared to engage all who

participated. It had a very high successful response booklet completion rate (almost all report booklets were fully completed including a Brief FAM III General Scale questionnaire filled out) that required an hour of family time. Considering the difficulties with participant response rates to behavioural task research, this challenging methodology was highly successful. It seemed to have worked very well as a method for gathering specific evidence on family functioning around issues of fairness and their resolutions. Feedback from families was extremely positive. Several families actually wrote personal notes or letters additionally to me commenting on how they enjoyed completing the task and discovered information from other family members which they would have otherwise not found out and could therefore now address. One particular parent wrote in a letter how one of their stepchildren got upset during the task accusing the family of not "*loving them*". I followed this letter up with a phone call. The parent that I talked to explained how all the other children disagreed straight away with this statement and told the child in question that they were "*all*" loved. This opened up an opportunity for this family to address this child's feelings which they were more than happy to have this chance to resolve. The quality of the responses that I had received demonstrated the intense engagement these families had with this task, and that they had really enjoyed this research as a family activity. This resulted in both children and adults completing the quantitative ratings, qualitative information and judgements in a thoughtful, meaningful, and perceptive manner. Other feedback that I received was that many of these families were very pleased that this research was studying their family from a functioning perspective rather than dysfunction.

Another benefit of the design of this research task was that it was quite economical to run. Providing the research instructions and having them play from a DVD whilst the families conducted their research responses, allowed this research to be carried

out nationwide. It also took out any physical influence (a potentially confounding variable) of having a researcher present. This procedure meant that family skills were respected and could conduct their task in a more ecologically valid way, along with a wide diversity of families and geographic locations being accessed.

Limitations

Obviously the participants, being self-selected, and limited in number, and especially recruited as self-defined functioning stepfamilies cannot be considered representative of all New Zealand stepfamilies. They also proved to be very articulate, had to be able to access a DVD player, and were likely to be committed to supporting other stepfamilies by participating in a fairly intrusive research project with a complicated protocol that had to be followed. In terms of general demographics they were more typical of the nation's cultural mix, and they were harmonious, on the whole, which was what I wanted, given my goal was to identify and promote stepfamily strengths, not weaknesses. Nevertheless I cannot argue that the conflicts recorded, the relationships observed, the solutions adopted and recommended, and the values expressed encompass the universe of harmonious stepfamily practices within Aotearoa New Zealand or internationally.

A second issue is more of a design and statistical problem. In the instances of scenarios and resolution choice, a larger sample size may have provided a fuller test of the hypotheses, given that the current sample size violated the 'minimum cell count' assumption in the chi squared analyses. This research also might have benefitted from having a comparison group of harmonious functioning non-stepfamilies, which may have allowed me to predict many similarities between these two types of family systems. Therefore, the design of the present study does not permit statements regarding the

uniqueness of stepfamily dynamics. Also, because the family structures could not be controlled, I had every possible combination of family inter-relationships. This meant that some of my quantitative variables could not easily be examined as influential factors. Some such conditional relationships did emerge, but the reality is that the complicated and overlapping family structures and roles precluded ferreting out all possible interactions within the family system. Certain role and gender influences were documented, as well as age-related characteristics, but they were not particularly revealing of stepfamily dynamics, and more interesting family relationship concerns had to be inferred from the participants' verbatim comments.

Conclusion: Implications for Stepfamilies

It is not easy raising a family, and as many of these families had commented, it is not always easy being in a stepfamily. Stepfamilies in Aotearoa New Zealand who consider themselves functioning harmoniously, or at least generally successfully, do experience many of the day-to-day challenges of dealing with conflict and tensions related to the different roles within the family. One stepparent wrote in their response booklet: "*Anyone who thinks it is easy being part of a stepfamily has got rocks in their heads. It can get very complicated and needs a lot of understanding between the adults.*"

Many of the ordinary issues which confront these families are related to perceptions of fairness. Since equality can never be guaranteed and equitable treatment, resources, and opportunity - despite parental strivings - cannot always be achieved for practical reasons, the importance of understanding, followed by acceptance, and leading to forgiveness and moving on, become paramount. Acceptance and forgiveness are accompanied by increases in positive feelings. These families were well aware of this process, whether parent or child was the respondent. They used and showed that solving

problems through discussion, compromise, and increased understanding occurs in an atmosphere of goodwill. Working together in a stepfamily in which parents emphasise love and overt displays of affection to all children within their family unit; recognising the realities of new relationships and actively avoid sensitive areas, such as conflict with past partners or disrespecting other members of the family who are outside the household; are also important in creating and maintaining a harmonious functioning stepfamily. Through the mechanism of an active task in which past and present issues were openly discussed, these families generated a comprehensive range of suggestions for other families to enable all stepfamilies in Aotearoa New Zealand to live in positive, supportive family environments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Advertisement in School Newsletters

Do you have a harmonious functioning s

(Well, at least most of the time!)

Are you a stepparent or stepchild between 9 – 17 years old who thinks the
positive step relationship?
Have you been in this step relationship for about 2 years or m
If so, we would really like you and your family to take part in re

The purpose of this research is to explore how regular stepfamilies manage to
everyday life
Your participation would provide us with information that will be valuable
step families who are still struggling to build up this type of relat

All that is involved is one household family meeting and filling out some questions (

If this sounds interesting please contact Celia Falchi 0274 460 732 or families@ihug.co.nz fo

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a family movie voucher or equivalent super
This research is supported by the New Zealand Families Commission

APPENDIX B: Sample Advertising Poster

APPENDIX C: Family Task Response Booklet

Family Fairness

Response

Booklet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PUKENGA TANGATA

Achieving positive stepfamily relationships: Negotiating fairness and offering forgiveness

STEPPARENT OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBER CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I am 16 years or older

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet (please circle the option that applies to you).

What is your position in this family (mother, stepmother, father, daughter, son, stepson, sister etc)? As you will have more than one position please include them all with those who will be taking part in this research

_____

Signature: .... **Date:** ....

Full Name - printed ....

Postal Address: ....

....

Contact Number ....

Email ....

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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Achieving positive stepfamily relationships: Negotiating fairness and offering forgiveness

STEPCHILD OR OTHER YOUNGER FAMILY MEMBER CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I am between the ages of 9 and 16 years old

I agree to take part in this study, and am happy to follow the information sheet's instructions on how to do it (please circle your choice of agreeing or disagreeing).

What is your position in this family (daughter, stepdaughter, son, stepson, sister, stepsister etc)? As you will have more than one position in your family, please include all your positions that apply to those who will be taking part in this research

_____

Full Name - printed:

Age: **Date:**

Signature

Postal Address:

Contact Number

Email

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
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TE KURA PUKENGA TANGATA

Achieving positive stepfamily relationships: Negotiating fairness and offering forgiveness

PARENT / GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Stepparent and Other Family Member Information Sheet and have understood the details of the study and have discussed it with my child.

I have had the chance to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I understand my right to withdraw my child from the study at any time, and that my child can choose not to participate at any time.

☐ YES, I give permission for my child

_____

(please print the name of your child here)

☐ Boy   Girl ☐ *(please tick the appropriate box)*   Age: _____

to participate in this research under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: _____**Date:**_____

Full Name (printed): _____

Relationship to child (e.g., mother, father, guardian, etc.):

_____

I need to know a bit more about you as a family

Please fill in the following as best you can

Name: _____

Gender: _____   Age: _____

What cultural group do you most identify with e.g. Maori, Pakeha, Chinese, etc?

_____

How long have you been in the relationship / stepfamily for?   _____

Who lives at home with you (i.e. Me, Mum, Stepdad, Younger Sister, Grandma):

_____

_____

_____

Your family description: _____
(Such as mum, stepmum, son, daughter, stepson etc. You may have two family
description names such as mum and stepmum, or son and stepson, please put both)

Which family members are taking part in this meeting (what is their relationship to you
such as mum, son, stepmum, stepson)?

_____

_____

_____

Family Situations

Write down a list of potentially unfair family situations that you believed had been managed well (you have 5 minutes to do this part, with more space on the next page).

_____

_____

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Then choose **ONE** and put it as your example below.

Include why it may have been **unfair** and what you had done to **resolve** the unfair issue (you have 3 minutes to do this).

Please note that this is what you will read out to the rest of your family.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

How long ago did this situation take place approximately (day, week, year ago)?____

Everyone takes a turn, so please choose what order you are all going to have a turn at sharing your experience 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th etc_____

Section A - First Family Member

Please put your responses to your first family member's examples here including your own response if you are first.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

      If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

1	2	3	4	5
Somewhat fair		Fair		Very Fair

      If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

1	2	3	4	5
Somewhat unfair		Unfair		Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
   Why:

_____

_____

_____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could have done better?

_____

_____

_____

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_____

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_____

_____

Section B - Second Family Member

Please put your responses to your second family member's examples here including your own response if you are second.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

   If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5

   Somewhat fair   Fair   Very Fair

   If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5
   Somewhat unfair   Unfair   Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv) Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v) Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi) Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii) Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii) Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix) Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
   Why:
_____

_____

_____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could
   have done better?

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Section C - Third Family Member

Please put your responses to your third family member's examples here including your own response if you are third.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

   If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5

   Somewhat fair   Fair   Very Fair

   If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5
   Somewhat unfair   Unfair   Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv) Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v) Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi) Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii) Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii) Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix) Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
   Why:

_____

_____

_____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could
   have done better?

Section D - Fourth Family Member

Please put your responses to your fourth family member's examples here including your own response if you are fourth.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

　　　If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

　　　1　　　　　2　　　　　3　　　　　4　　　　　5

　　Somewhat fair　　　　　　Fair　　　　　　Very Fair

　　　If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

　　　1　　　　　2　　　　　3　　　　　4　　　　　5
　　Somewhat unfair　　　　Unfair　　　　　Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
   Why:
   _____

   _____

   _____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could
   have done better?

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Section E - Fifth Family Member

Please put your responses to your fifth family member's examples here including your own response if you are fifth.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

      If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

      1   2   3   4   5

  Somewhat fair   Fair   Very Fair

      If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

      1   2   3   4   5
  Somewhat unfair   Unfair   Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv) Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v) Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi) Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii) Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii) Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix) Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
    Why:
_____

_____

_____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could
    have done better?

Section F - Sixth Family Member

Please put your responses to your sixth family member's examples here including your own response if you are sixth.
(Answer all the questions in this section which will take approximately 5 minutes, remember to turn the page for the following questions).

The family member sharing their example is:_____

1) How do you feel about the situation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2) Did you feel that the end result was fair? (*please tick one box*)   YES ☐   NO ☐

   If YES (or **fair)**, then how fair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5

   Somewhat fair   Fair   Very Fair

   If NO (or **unfair)**, then how unfair would you rate this? (*circle one number*)

   1   2   3   4   5
   Somewhat unfair   Unfair   Very Unfair

3) How do you feel about the situation **back** when it happened? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i) Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii) Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii) Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5

	Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
iv) Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v) Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi) Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii) Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii) Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix) Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

4) How do you feel about the situation **now**? (*Please circle one number for each emotion*)

		Not at all	A little	Some what	Moderately	Very	Extremely
i)	Happy	0	1	2	3	4	5
ii)	Fine	0	1	2	3	4	5
iii)	Annoyed	0	1	2	3	4	5
iv)	Angry	0	1	2	3	4	5
v)	Sad	0	1	2	3	4	5
vi)	Guilty	0	1	2	3	4	5
vii)	Nothing	0	1	2	3	4	5
viii)	Accepting	0	1	2	3	4	5
ix)	Other_____	0	1	2	3	4	5

5) If the situation was unfair for you have you forgiven the person? Yes ☐   No ☐
   Why:
_____

_____

_____

6) What would you have preferred to have happened or what do you think they could have done better?

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Section G

Please only fill in this next question after you have completed the relationship questionnaire. This part is not essential but it would be useful to have your opinion.

Is there any advice that you would like to give other stepfamilies on how to deal with issues of unfairness, or what needs to occur for forgiveness to happen?

_____

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APPENDIX D: Information Sheets

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PUKENGA TANGATA

Achieving positive stepfamily relationships: Negotiating fairness and offering forgiveness

INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE FAMILY MEMBERS

Who am I?

Hi, my name is Celia Falchi and I am a female graduate student currently working on positive stepfamily research for my Doctorate of Clinical Psychology and training to be a Clinical Psychologist. I am also part of a research group called CHERUBS – Children's Environment's: Research Unit for Behavioural Studies and am supervised by Professor Ian Evans and Dr Antonia Lyons, at Massey University, Wellington.

What is the research about?

The purpose of this research is to explore how harmonious functioning stepfamilies manage fairness in everyday life such as rules, discipline, displays of affection, privileges or opportunities, or any other relevant areas of family life.

While there is a certain amount of advice and information available to step-families, new stepparents, and even stepchildren, none of this material has been explicitly designed for bi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand. I would like to invite you, and other family members in your household to take part in my research. Your participation would provide us with information that may be valuable for new and other step families struggling to build up this type of relationship.

So how does this all work and what are the criteria?

I am currently looking for 100 interested stepfamilies nationwide to take part in my research and am recruiting these families through advertising in school and church newsletters, the internet, and through word of mouth.
The research requirements are:

- At least a stepparent and their stepchild within the household are willing to be involved in this research.
- The stepfamily members perceive their step relationships to be functioning well within their household.
- The step relationship between the stepparent and stepchild is at least 2 years old
- The stepchild is between the ages of 9 and 17 years old.
- The stepchild lives in the same house with the stepparent at least part time.
- Any other household family members over the age of 9 years old are also invited to take part in this research
- The family members involved in the research are willing to hold a family meeting to talk about fairness

Participating families will receive a family movie pass for providing their valuable time in this study.

So what do you have to do exactly?

You are asked to hold a family meeting with a stepparent, stepchild, and any other family member that is willing to be involved in this research to share how potentially unfair situations were managed well. Each member of your family is to come up with an example of fairness or unfairness and how it was resolved to share in the meeting. You will all have a response booklet to answer some questions about how you feel and what you thought about each example members of your family share. We ask that each family member writes their own response and that no-one else in the family reads the responses of others. Then at the end of your meeting everyone is asked to fill out a few short questions about how you see yourself in your family. A DVD is provided to help talk you through the structured family meeting, keep members on task, and help keep the time. If you do not have a DVD player, then the person elected 'Chair' will read out from the DVD script provided and will need to keep time. The Chair will also be in charge of collecting all the response booklets and questionnaires and making sure everyone puts them in their sealed envelopes, and posting them back to me.

This meeting is expected to take between 40 minutes and an hour depending on how many family members take part.

What is the worst that can happen?

The risk or discomfort from taking part in this research is minimal. It is possible that you may be reminded of unfair situations that occurred in your family, or other family members may become upset about past grievances, which may mean that your family may need to talk about this. In the event that safety issues arise in the response booklets we will contact you for further clarification if needed. Our DVD will include some information about communication and resolving common unfair issues in families at the end, and you are welcome to contact me if you need further assistance.

What happens to your information after the research has ended?

This information from the response booklets and questionnaires will be used only for this research. This research may be presented at academic conferences and published at a later date. The data will be securely stored at Massey University for a period of 5 years (University policy), and after that it will be securely destroyed. I will post you a summary of the findings once I have completed the data analysis.

What are your rights?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study up until the analysis has been done (1st October 2011);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

My contact details are

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact either me or one of my supervisors. I can be contacted by phone, on 801 5799 ext 62165, or 027 446 0732. If I am not available, please leave a message and I will get back to you. Or you can write to me:

Celia Falchi
CHERUBS, K1
C/o School of Psychology,
Massey University, PO Box 576, Wellington

The best way to get hold of me is with email: families@ihug.co.nz

This research is supervised by:

Professor Ian Evans,
School of Psychology,
Massey University,
PO Box 756,
Wellington,
(04) 8015799 ext 62125
I.M.Evans@massey.ac.nz.

Dr Antonia Lyons
School of Psychology
Massey University
PO Box 756
Wellington
(04) 8015799 ext 62164
A.Lyons@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 10/31. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 2541, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you very much for considering taking part in my research. Your time and effort is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Celia Falchi
CHERUBS
Children's Environments: Research Unit for Behavioural Studies

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PUKENGA TANGATA

Achieving positive stepfamily relationships: Negotiating fairness and offering forgiveness

INFORMATION SHEET FOR THE YOUNGER FAMILY MEMBERS

Who am I?

Hi, my name is Celia Falchi and I am a female student and at the moment I am working on stepfamily research for my Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (human behaviour studies and learning to be a psychologist). I am part of a research group called CHERUBS – Children's Environment's: Research Unit for Behavioural Studies and we study child and family behaviour. My supervisors (or teachers) are Professor Ian Evans and Dr Antonia Lyons, at Massey University, Wellington.

What is the research about?

I would like to study how stepfamilies manage to work well together, especially with how they deal with fairness. This information may be helpful for new and other stepfamilies struggling to work together as a family.

Would you like to be involved in my research?

I would like to invite you, and other family members in your household to take part in my research. You will be able to help us discover how stepfamilies manage to build up good relationships and work well together.

So how does this work and do I get selected?

I am looking for 100 stepfamilies around New Zealand who would like to take part in my research.

We are looking for stepfamilies who:

- At least a stepparent and their stepchild would not mind being involved in this research.
- The stepfamily works well together as a family.
- The stepparent and stepchild have known each other for at least 2 years.
- The stepchild is between the ages of 9 and 17 years old.
- The stepchild lives in the same house with the stepparent at least some of the time.
- Anyone else in the same house over the age of 9 years old can also be in the research if they want to be.
- You are willing to be in a family meeting to talk about fairness

Stepfamilies who do the research will receive a family movie pass to thank them for their time.

So what do you have to do exactly?

You are asked to hold a family meeting with a stepparent, stepchild, and any other family member that is willing to be involved in this research to share how potentially unfair situations were managed well. Each member of your family is to come up with an example of fairness or unfairness and how it was resolved to share in the meeting.

You will all have a response booklet to answer some questions about how you feel and what you thought about each example members of your family share. We ask that each family member writes their own response and that no-one else in the family reads the responses of others. Then at the end of your meeting everyone is asked to fill out a few short questions about how you see yourself in your family. A DVD is provided to help talk you through the structured family meeting, keep members on task, and help keep the time. If you do not have a DVD player, then the person elected 'Chair' will read out from the DVD script provided and will need to keep time. If you find the questionnaire difficult to understand, you can choose an older family member to help you with it. The Chair will also be in charge of collecting all the response booklets and questionnaires and making sure everyone puts them in their sealed envelopes, and posting them back to me.

This meeting is expected to take between 40 minutes and an hour depending on how many family members take part.

What is the worst that can happen?

You may be reminded of unfair things that have happened in your family, or other family members may become upset about something that has happened. This means that everyone may need to talk about this. Our DVD will include some information about communication and fairness at the end.

What happens to your information after the research has ended?

This information from the booklet and question sheet will be used only for my research. I may talk about my findings at conferences, and publish them at a later date. Your information will be securely stored at Massey University for a period of 5 years (University policy), and after that it will be securely destroyed. I will post you a summary of the findings once I have collected all my stepfamilies information and summarized it all.

What are your rights?

You do not have to do this research if you do not want to. If you decide to take part, you have the right to:

- Do not have to answer any particular question;
- Pull out of the study at any time until 1st October 2010;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- no information will show who you are in my research;
- you will be given a summary of my research when it is finished.

My contact details are

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact either me or one of my supervisors. I can be contacted by phone, on 801 5799 ext 62165, or 027 446 0732. If I am not available, please leave a message and I will get back to you. Or you can write to me:
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This research is supervised by:

Professor Ian Evans,	Dr Antonia Lyons
School of Psychology,	School of Psychology
Massey University,	Massey University
PO Box 756,	PO Box 756
Wellington,	Wellington
(04) 8015799 ext 62125	(04) 8015799 ext 62164
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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 10/31. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 2541, email humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you very much for considering taking part in my research. Your time and effort is appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Celia Falchi
CHERUBS
Children's Environments: Research Unit for Behavioural Studies

APPENDIX E: Generalised Estimating Equations Model

Over the period of May 2012 to August 2012 I received statistics tutoring in Generalised Estimating Equations from Dr Dalice Sim, Statistical Consultant, School of Mathematics, Statistics and Operations Research, Victoria University. It was from these tutoring sessions that the following Generalised Estimating Equations Model is explained.

The model equations for GEE are exactly those for the Generalized Linear Model, $g(Y) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \cdots + \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon_{ij}$, where g(.) is an appropriate 'link function' which links the dependent variable to a linear combination of the independent variables, and ε_{ij} is an error term, which follows a specified distribution. For our continuous variables, I used g(Y) = Y (the identity function), and the error distribution was normal. For the categorical dependent variables I used $g(Y) = ln\frac{p}{(1-p)}$, the log odds link function, with the binomial distribution for the errors. Both of these are standard choices for these situations.

When the above predictive equation is used in GEE, the within cluster (family) correlation is modelled and therefore the p-values and coefficient estimates control for the within family correlation. Therefore, the hypothesis tests and coefficient estimates can be interpreted as the 'averaged' (over families) effect of X_i on Y"

APPENDIX F: Emotional Ratings Means and Standard Deviations

Table 19

Emotional Means, Number of Observations, and Standard Deviations of Emotional Ratings towards Othe

Relationship		PostHappy	PostFine	PostAnnoyed	PostAngry
Myself	Mean	2.85	2.79	1.11	.74
	N	132	128	119	120
	Std. Deviation	1.745	1.677	1.534	1.375
Partner	Mean	3.15	3.20	.57	.43
	N	60	60	54	53
	Std. Deviation	1.448	1.459	1.238	1.065
Biological Child	Mean	2.77	2.84	.80	.55
	N	61	58	61	60
	Std. Deviation	1.627	1.642	1.352	1.199
Step Child	Mean	2.83	2.86	.73	.43
	N	59	64	59	56
	Std. Deviation	1.763	1.781	1.201	.892
Parent	Mean	3.11	3.21	.68	.52
	N	62	62	60	60
	Std. Deviation	1.757	1.590	1.186	1.142
Step Parent	Mean	2.88	3.17	.89	.81
	N	72	70	66	68
	Std. Deviation	1.846	1.736	1.520	1.499

Table 19

Emotional Means, Number of Observations, and Standard Deviations of Emotional Ratings towards O

Relationship		PostHappy	PostFine	PostAnnoyed	PostAngry
Sibling	Mean	2.77	2.76	.86	.65
	N	44	45	43	43
	Std. Deviation	1.915	1.885	1.552	1.307
Step Sibling	Mean	2.90	2.88	.70	.69
	N	51	51	50	49
	Std. Deviation	1.847	1.716	1.233	1.176
Total	Mean	2.90	2.95	.83	.62
	N	541	538	512	509
	Std. Deviation	1.737	1.682	1.383	1.245

APPENDIX G: SPSS Cross Tabs Tables for Forgiveness in Scenarios

and Resolutions

Table 20
*Relatives scenario choice * Forgiveness Crosstabulation*

			Forgiveness		
			Yes	No	Total
Relatives scenario choice	Differential treatment	Count	49	9	58
		% within Relatives scenario choice	84.5%	15.5%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	18.5%	17.6%	18.4%
		% of Total	15.5%	2.8%	18.4%
	Fighting	Count	43	8	51
		% within Relatives scenario choice	84.3%	15.7%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	16.2%	15.7%	16.1%
		% of Total	13.6%	2.5%	16.1%
	Lack of specific support	Count	31	2	33
		% within Relatives scenario choice	93.9%	6.1%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	11.7%	3.9%	10.4%
		% of Total	9.8%	.6%	10.4%
	Household chores	Count	33	7	40
		% within Relatives scenario choice	82.5%	17.5%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	12.5%	13.7%	12.7%
		% of Total	10.4%	2.2%	12.7%
	Same rule for all	Count	26	0	26
		% within Relatives scenario choice	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	9.8%	.0%	8.2%
		% of Total	8.2%	.0%	8.2%
	Discipline	Count	17	3	20
		% within Relatives scenario choice	85.0%	15.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	6.4%	5.9%	6.3%

		% of Total	5.4%	.9%	6.3%
	Missing out	Count	7	10	17
		% within Relatives scenario choice	41.2%	58.8%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	2.6%	19.6%	5.4%
		% of Total	2.2%	3.2%	5.4%
	Expectations	Count	29	5	34
		% within Relatives scenario choice	85.3%	14.7%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	10.9%	9.8%	10.8%
		% of Total	9.2%	1.6%	10.8%
	Disagreements	Count	17	4	21
		% within Relatives scenario choice	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	6.4%	7.8%	6.6%
		% of Total	5.4%	1.3%	6.6%
	Disrespect	Count	8	1	9
		% within Relatives scenario choice	88.9%	11.1%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	3.0%	2.0%	2.8%
		% of Total	2.5%	.3%	2.8%
	Finance	Count	2	0	2
		% within Relatives scenario choice	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	.8%	.0%	.6%
		% of Total	.6%	.0%	.6%
	Bad mood	Count	2	0	2
		% within Relatives scenario choice	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	.8%	.0%	.6%
		% of Total	.6%	.0%	.6%
	Issue between households	Count	0	2	2
		% within Relatives scenario choice	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	.0%	3.9%	.6%
		% of Total	.0%	.6%	.6%
	No scenario	Count	1	0	1

			100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Relatives scenario choice	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	.4%	.0%	.3%
		% of Total	.3%	.0%	.3%
Total		Count	265	51	316
		% within Relatives scenario choice	83.9%	16.1%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	83.9%	16.1%	100.0%

Table 21

*Relatives choice of resolution * Forgiveness Crosstabulation*

			Forgiveness		
			Yes	No	Total
Relatives choice of resolution	Compromise	Count	80	23	103
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	77.7%	22.3%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	30.2%	45.1%	32.6%
		% of Total	25.3%	7.3%	32.6%
	Communication	Count	50	11	61
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	82.0%	18.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	18.9%	21.6%	19.3%
		% of Total	15.8%	3.5%	19.3%
	Sharing	Count	41	1	42
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	97.6%	2.4%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	15.5%	2.0%	13.3%
		% of Total	13.0%	.3%	13.3%
	Justification	Count	27	1	28
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	96.4%	3.6%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	10.2%	2.0%	8.9%
		% of Total	8.5%	.3%	8.9%
	Apology	Count	14	2	16

			87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	5.3%	3.9%	5.1%
		% of Total	4.4%	.6%	5.1%
	Equality	Count	14	3	17
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	82.4%	17.6%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	5.3%	5.9%	5.4%
		% of Total	4.4%	.9%	5.4%
	Discipline	Count	12	0	12
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	4.5%	.0%	3.8%
		% of Total	3.8%	.0%	3.8%
	No Resolution	Count	27	10	37
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	73.0%	27.0%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	10.2%	19.6%	11.7%
		% of Total	8.5%	3.2%	11.7%
Total		Count	265	51	316
		% within Relatives choice of resolution	83.9%	16.1%	100.0%
		% within Forgiveness	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	83.9%	16.1%	100.0%

APPENDIX H: Instructional DVD