

Adolescents 'adaptation to mothers' remarriage: A qualitative studyYousefi M.,¹ Koraei A.*,² Sudani M.³**Abstract**

Introduction: Single women as a result of divorce or the death of their husbands are in a twilight or ambiguity in Eastern cultures, so that they are not as respected as other respectable women because divorce is not a right to live like other women. If this group of women is in a situation of remarriage, they will experience more serious challenges, and these challenges will be more serious when the children are also in the process of remarriage. The aim of this study was to evaluate the quality of adolescents' adaptation to remarriage of mothers in Ahvaz.

Method: This research was conducted using a qualitative method with thematic analysis and theoretical sampling. Ten adolescents with mothers who remarried were interviewed. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The statistical population of the study was all adolescents with remarried mothers. The Klaizy weekly method was used to analyze the interview data. Analysis in this study was performed using MAXQDA software version 2020. The researcher's approach to coding and extracting themes was inductive.

Results: The results of the analysis of 187 primary codes were seven main themes of psychological well-being, emotional support, emotional experiences, attitude to marriage, economic well-being, interpersonal relationships and acceptance of divorce, and eighteen sub-themes on compatibility with parent remarriage.

Conclusion: The reasons for incompatibility with maternal marriage in adolescents are in a wide range of psychological, social, personal, social, etc. factors that should be considered in prevention programs. There seems to be an interactive pattern between the reasons for incompatibility or adaptation to remarriage of mothers. Further study is suggested to explore the process of the basic pattern of children's adjustment to their parents' remarriage.

Keywords: Adaptation, Adolescents, Content analysis, Qualitative study, Remarriage

Received: 18/February/ 2022

Accepted: 25/August/ 2022

Citation: Yousefi M., Koraei A., Sudani M. Adolescents 'adaptation to mothers' remarriage: A qualitative study, Family and health, 2022; 12(3): 93-103

¹ - PhD Student in Counseling, Department of Counseling, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran. ORCID: 0000-0003-0603-727X, m.yousefi@gmail.com

² - Assistant Professor, Department of Counseling, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran, ORCID: 0000-0002-0949-7135, **Corresponding Author: E-mail:** am.koraei@gmail.com

Phone: 09163161241

³ - Invited Professor, Counseling Department, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz Iran / Professor of Counseling Department, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran.

Introduction:

Instability in married life has recently become a major feature of societies, and even the annual number of people remarrying has declined. In 1990, only one million people remained single after their first marriage failed, up from more than 8.2 million in 2016, an increase of 3.16 percent from single people already married. These sudden changes have drawn the attention of scientific experts to the health status of children as survivors of previous marriages (1).

Negative stigmas and labels to children in single-parent families were a major factor in the tendency to remarry single parents (2). But this decision is not always accompanied by positive effects and one can expect a mixture of positive and negative results as a result of factors such as the weakness of children in establishing intimate bonds with half-siblings (3), inability to adapt to new environmental and behavioral changes (4). And the inability of children to face the decision to remarry the parent (5).

In this regard, Mohammadi et al. (6) showed that parents in their remarriage process have faced challenges in perceiving the problems of child presence, including behavioral and adjustment problems, the presence of the child as an obstacle, acceptance or rejection of remarriage by the child (7). Sadeghi Fasaei et al. (8) also mentioned the lack of psychological reconstruction after divorce, social stigma resulting from divorce, aging, barriers to gender culture, the presence of children from previous marriages, reduction of social and economic capital after divorce and modern habits, including They also identified the most important internal and external challenges of remarriage. The researchers also noted that children with remarried parents had less academic achievement and adjustment than single-parent students, and even mentioned more challenges for couples and their children in remarriage.

These results indicate three major weaknesses in previous studies in the field of health dimensions of single parents and children with non-biological parents: First, previous studies have been conducted in limited samples with the aim of showing the effects of remarriage on the welfare and health of children. However, remarriage of parents does not always have negative consequences. Second, have inconsistent findings in this area not specified exactly whether remarriage is beneficial or unhelpful? Can remarriage avoid the challenges of single life with a single parent and increase family life opportunities with a non-biological parent? Third, previous research is more descriptive and the lack of a systematic review of potential explanations for the decision to marry by children does not hide many of the latent effects, and this lack of awareness prevents the increase of knowledge and certainly the design of effective and purposeful interventions for this society. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experience of children from remarriage of their parents.

Methods:

This research is qualitative and with a phenomenological approach. The research environment was for interviewing the participants in the psychological clinic. In order to collect data, purposive sampling was used in terms of maximum diversity to select participants. Having at least 19 years of age, remarried mother, having suitable physical and mental conditions for the interview, having good social conditions and satisfaction to be present at the interview were the most important criteria for selecting adolescents to participate in the study. Due to the residence of the participants in the city of Ahvaz, the selection of the study site was done

purposefully and then after attending the study site, this process continued until theoretical saturation. The researcher was present at the participants' place of residence and conducted interviews with the adolescents to better explain the data and complete the analysis and data saturation. Semi-structured interviews and fieldwork were used to collect data.

Method of implementation: Initially, in coordination with the research unit of Islamic Azad University, and receiving a letter of introduction to education in Ahvaz; The counseling unit was asked to introduce the adolescents in whose file the mother remarried (registered). Due to the limited number of these individuals, it was coordinated with the school management and they were asked to provide the meeting and introduction conditions of these adolescents with the cooperation of the school counselor. After attending the schools and explaining the objectives of the research, the volunteer students were asked to attend the psychological clinic to have a specialized interview and to provide a place free of ester, while the parents of these adolescents were also in the process of research and Consent was received from both parties, participants shared their experiences of remarriage in a relaxed atmosphere, each interview with some open-ended questions about new living conditions and specific questions through various methods of active scrutiny such as silence, repetition and feedback. Participant persuasion was used to provide more relevant information for each case. All interviews were recorded by tape until the last second. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. And were used as complementary data and reliability. Data collection and data analysis are performed simultaneously. Data were analyzed using the weekly Klizey method. Analysis in this study was performed using MAXQDA software version 2020. The researcher's approach to coding and extracting themes was inductive. The analytical data consisted of several steps: 1. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and prepared for content analysis. 2. The transcribed text was read several times for identification before coding. 3. A plan for generating (producing) code and subtopics. 4. Codes and themes were introduced by inductive process as well as open coding by reading the text line by line and assigning appropriate code and separation, distinguishing the themes from each other through continuous comparison. 5. To reach a consensus on coding, compare Continuous and member data control was performed. 6. Finally, the concepts and themes were identified. All of the content and content gained were constantly refined from the interviews to the point that it was left to data saturation and no new data was obtained.

Results:

Ten adolescents aged 15 to 19 years in Ahvaz were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Seven had lost their children in divorce and three had lost their fathers. According to the purpose of the study, the opinions of 10 adolescents in Ahvaz were analyzed using semi-structured interviews, which resulted in seven main themes of psychological well-being (deviant thoughts such as running away from home or suicide, psychological damage such as psychological violence, despair of the future and Involvement in parenting problems, favorable psychological conditions), emotional support (supportive relationships, emotional emptiness), emotional experiences (feelings of loneliness, guilt, anger such as hatred and resentment), attitude to marriage (negative attitude, fear such as fear of marital relationship) Intimacy,

childbearing and fear of divorce), economic well-being (unfavorable economic conditions such as poor financial situation and lack of parental support, financial well-being), interpersonal relationships (rejection, isolation, facing negative social behaviors and independence) and accepting divorce (accepting divorce and Inability to accept divorce) and eighteen sub-themes on compatibility with parent remarriage.

See examples of the main theme of mental well-being:

-For me, my condition has worsened despite my stepfather; And sometimes I think of running away from home (Interview 4)

-Maybe I was trying to commit suicide to tell them and see what to do with me (interview 10.)

-My mother, whose morals got much worse after the divorce, I did not have much contact with her. Now that it has happened that I do not see her much, but I was very nervous.

-I am not happy to be with my mother because my heart wants peace and our feelings for my mother are more pitying (interview 7)

-In my opinion, only the fights and disputes of my parents were over and their problem was between them and they did not involve me in their discussions so that I would not be harmed. Now our blood condition is much more positive. Because both of them are calm (Interview 1.)
Try to make sure that this divorce does not have a negative effect on your life, morale and future (Interview 7)

See examples of the main theme of emotional support:

-With my good sister, she is a victim like me. We can do nothing with each other except pain and heart (Interview 2)

-Before the divorce, my father did not have much emotional connection with me, especially recently (Interview 5)

-I have two brothers. My marriage is the only last child in the family. Their relationship with us faded (Interview 4)

-I do not know about my mother (interview 10)

See examples of the main theme of emotional experiences:

-I do not know about them, but our situation is not good, neither the facilities nor the morale of those who left us alone (Interview 2)

-My relationship with my sister is so good that she, like me, sacrificed herself for my father's selfishness and my mother's behavior (Interview 3)

Children of divorce are all victims (Interview 2)

-I hate a father who, in response to my mother's betrayal, commits adultery and sees me being raped and does nothing. I do not want to talk about it at all. He must be fine with another (interview 10)

See examples of the main theme of the attitude towards marriage:

-Maybe if I had good financial and mental conditions after the divorce, I would not have a bad opinion about my divorce (Interview 9)

-I did not think about this, but I am afraid of the future. Do not be like my father, do not live with my wife out of pity (Interview 7)

See examples related to the main theme of the economic situation:

-It saddens me to see my mother try, work and I have to think about income now (Interview 5)

-Financially, a glass-addicted father thinks about providing his own materials, so that the demands of his children in this situation and the age and situation of lack of financial conditions are added to my problems (Interview 3)

-My father and mother are both employed, my mother is a doctor and my father is a lawyer. I get financial support from both parties and I do not have financial problems (Interview 1)

See examples of the main theme of interpersonal relationships:

□ My sister has nothing to do with me at all for fear of her husband's taunts (Interview 10)

I used to be a completely isolated person since I was a child. I was not very close. I also do not have much to do with escaping sarcasm (Interview 4)

□ We ourselves became victims, but unfortunately those around us do not understand (Interview 2), we have the same turmoil and arguments as before the divorce, because those around us do not want to rest. Heavy looks and unnecessary questions and answers bother us, it's not just my father's behaviors and actions anymore, otherwise we still have arguments and chaos (Interview 7)

See examples of the main theme of the sub-theme of independence:

-I do not want to be between their parents after their parents separate, and whether I am in front of you or in front of him torments me. I'm tired of fighting. I want to be calm. I grew up almost independent as a child; And I learned that while being interested in my family, I also think that interest does not make me dependent (Interview 5)

-I try to be independent, if I become independent I will try to free my mind from all problems (Interview 9)

See examples of the main theme of divorce acceptance:

-Not at the moment because I have a good life with my mother and divorce has not had a very bad effect on our spirits and my mother is really satisfied with her divorce. If I was with my father, it would be the same because I have a good relationship with both of them (Interview 1)

-Parents, if they provide good financial conditions for their children and there is no choice but to divorce, the teenager appreciates the financial situation he has and is not under any other pressures and will deal with this issue sooner (Interview 4)

-I miss looking at my friend (Interview 2)

Table 1. Main topics and sub-topics related to compatibility with remarriage of mothers

Row	The main theme	theme 1-Sub	theme 2-Sub
1	Psychological being-well	Deviant Thoughts	Escape from home, suicide
mental damage		Psychological violence, despair of the future involvement in parental problems	
Favorable psychological condition		the Creating a relaxing atmosphere, hope for future	

۲	Emotional support	Supportive relationships	Parents, siblings
		Emotional emptiness	,Decrease relationship, let go
۳	Emotional experiences	Feeling lonely	,Homelessness, abandonment, sacrifice
		feel guilty	pretending Ruminants, suicidal thoughts and to be sick
		Angry	Hatred and annoyance
۴	Attitude to marriage	Negative attitude	Negative beliefs about divorce and mistrust
		the fear	Intimacy, childbearing and divorce
۵	Economic welfare	Unfavorable economic conditions	situation, lack of financial support from parents
		Favorable economic conditions	being and financial rejection-Financial well
۶	Interpersonal relationships	Facing negative social behaviors	Ridicule, pity, embarrassment, personal boasting ,conflict, questioning
			Blameful behaviors and lack of understanding
		Wanted independence	Desire and effort
۷	Accepting divorce	Accept divorce	Good communication with parents, economic stability and mental stability
		Inability to accept divorce	blame, parental selfishness, ,Comparison problems with stepfather

Discussion and Conclusion:

The aim of this study was to investigate the lived experience of adolescents in adapting to maternal remarriage. This research was conducted qualitatively using a phenomenological approach. The results were seven main themes and eighteen sub-themes.

Regarding the theme of psychological well-being, the research findings showed that the adolescents in the present study experienced different mental well-being (code 8) than each other. In this main context, the parent's own welfare conditions also affect this, so that in a study based on the lived experiences of divorced women, the results showed that social acceptance is the most important psychosocial concern of these women, which indicates the acceptance of women in society based on Her marital status is. The findings of this study were divided into five categories including discrediting, social attitudes, deprivation, alienation and suspension. Also, the results of the following categories of support, absolutism, social inequality, inefficiency; Legal abuses, negative impact on health, rejection, threat of sexual identity, threat to social identity, isolation and social acceptance were the most important issues for women after divorce (9). This group of parents, due to their different and, of course,

discriminatory social perceptions, do not provide suitable conditions for their children's lives, and this may put them in the impulsive process of remarriage and neglect their children's issues and concerns; This negligence and tendency to escape from the above cases will prevent the proper bedding and increase the level of incompatibility of children with their decision to marry. In the context of children's life changes after parental separation, it shows that children's psychological well-being with a single-parent family actually leads to lower levels of economic well-being, and this can be one of the strongest explanations for children's maladaptive behaviors with the new family. Lansford (10) also showed that one of the main reasons for children's incompatibility with the new family is the low level of psychological well-being in the members.

The findings also showed that adolescents experienced a variety of emotional vacuums, such as reduced family relationships and abandonment, which prevented them from adapting to the status quo. In this regard, Papernow (11) states that having a family with the main parent is the best way of life for children, and a single-parent family and families with an adoptive parent are not appropriate. In fact, the documents explicitly state that the "traditional family (two officially married parents)" is not only "the only lasting unit of society", but also the most enduring unit. The most important research evidence in Sweden showed that the rate of very bad behaviors is higher among children of single-parent families. There is also an increase in the incidence of mental illness, suicide or suicide attempts, trauma and addiction among children in single-parent families. In confirmation of this result, McLanahan Sandefur (12) showed that the unemployment rate of young people who grew up in a single-parent family is higher than young people who grew up in a two-parent family. Because, in principle, stepfathers are reluctant to support children from previous marriages, this will increase the level of intra-family conflict and decrease the level of mutual support.

Feeling lonely, on the other hand, includes experiencing emotions such as feelings of helplessness, abandonment, and sacrifice (Code 5). In terms of guilt, adolescents to some extent considered their efforts to prevent parental divorce inadequate and blamed themselves in part for the divorce (Code 6). They were also angry with their parents, and this anger manifested itself in two forms: hatred and resentment. In a way, scientific evidence has shown that boys' aggression is higher in families without fathers or non-biological fathers, and the reason is the inability of the mother as head of the family to nurture masculinity in boys and lack of support from stepfathers to communicate properly with children from previous marriages. Excessive commanding by some stepfathers causes aggression in boys. Aggression seems to be the indirect result of a boy's heterogeneous and incompatible relationship with his father or stepfather. Of course, this is related to the level of knowledge and ability of the mother and, to a lesser extent, the quality of the family income (13). Parental behaviors are also constantly problematic for children living in new foster families, as children from first marriages at this time are a competitive resource in which parents devote more time to their spouse than to their child (14). Children tended to cling to the past, and boundaries were created around the family of origin that tried to continue with only their parents (usually mothers), not including the stepfather (15). Because according to Faroo (16) children do not expect non-biological parents to perform parenting and disciplinary duties, parents expect this from their new spouses, which

creates many problems in communication with their children and relationships. It poses serious challenges between the child and the non-biological parent.

In this study, adolescents' attitudes toward marriage were negative and the experience of parental divorce led to the formation of negative beliefs about divorce (Code 3). Also, one of the adolescents mentioned that he has distrusted women due to his mother's behavior in the divorce process (Code 9). Also, the negative experience of divorce led to the formation of various fears in adolescents, including fear of intimacy, fear of childbearing, and fear of divorce. Some teens also noted that it was easier to cope with divorce because of financial well-being. Neither parent or one parent is well-off (Code 6). Some also pointed out that after the marriage, the parents suffered a lot of financial problems, and factors such as the poor financial situation of the custodial parent, as well as the parents' lack of financial support for the adolescent, endured bad conditions, which affected their post-divorce adjustment. Stepmothers and stepfathers, on the other hand, are typically expected to take on gender-related roles, with the former being the educator and the latter the financier. In a more recent study of children's relationships with non-biological parents, Stewart found that genetic parents, the fathers, expected their stepfathers to provide financial support and support for their children, and that mothers preferred their children to have financial and emotional relationships with their biological fathers. Therefore, these conflicting expectations are another issue that can lead to conflict and increase the level of incompatibility in the new family context.

In the area of divorce acceptance, adolescents who were in good financial contact with their parents were financially secure (Code 4) and in good mental condition (Code 1), were able to accept their parents' divorce, and were unable to do so. Divorce was incapable of accepting divorce due to comparisons of life and parents with others, blame for parental selfishness, and problems with the stepfather (Code 1). On the other hand, adolescents' interpersonal relationships due to rejection by family members, isolationism, sarcasm, pity (code 7), questioning (code 10) and boasting of others (code 9) as well as embarrassment (code 5) and personal conflict (code 10)) And faced with negative social behaviors (codes 2 and 8) had problems and adolescents did not have interpersonal relationships to have healthy relationships and improve mental conditions, and ultimately created a desire and effort for independence. In fact, if the child does not adapt to the new family life situation, the risk of losing interest and attachment to life will increase, and thus increase the feeling of loneliness and the occurrence of high-risk behaviors such as suicide. Therefore, accepting the divorce process and effective communication with biological and non-biological parents is one of the effective factors in adapting to the new life (18). The need to comply with health protocols and the concern of the researcher and group members were other major limitations in conducting this research. Paying attention to the psychological needs of children of divorce and children who have lost their parents, providing counseling services in welfare centers for remarried families, holding pre-marriage training courses for parents and children, as well as assessing adolescents' adaptation to remarriage quantitatively. The lived experience of parents after remarriage and a comparative study of the needs of children and parents in the process of deciding to remarry, qualitative studies in larger groups are suggested to other researchers.

The aim of this study was to investigate the lived experience of adolescents in adapting to maternal remarriage. The results of qualitative analysis showed that the analysis of 187 primary

codes, seven main themes of psychological well-being, emotional support, emotional experiences, attitude to marriage, economic well-being, interpersonal relationships and acceptance of divorce and eighteen sub-themes on compatibility with remarriage He was a parent. Therefore, it seems that being aware of the challenges of the children as survivors of the previous marriage to remarry the parent will reduce the problems caused by this choice and appropriate treatment strategies will be used by the trustees and experts.

Acknowledgments:

The present article is taken from the doctoral dissertation in the Faculty of Humanities, Islamic Azad University of Ahvaz, and while thanking the staff of this university, all the adolescents and families participating in the research are thanked.

Funding:

This study was funded by Research Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz

Conflict of interest:

None declared.

Ethical approval:

The Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, (1064818615285411399162290039).

References:

1. Hu Y. Marital disruption, remarriage and child well-being in China. *Journal of Family Issues*, 2020; 41(7): 978-1009.
2. Yeung W-J, Park H. Growing up in one-parent families in Asia. *Marriage and Family Review*, 2016; 52(1-2): 1-14.
3. Becker O-A, Salzburger V, Lois N, Nauck B. What narrows the step gap? Closeness between parents and adult (step)children in Germany. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2013; 75(5): 1130-1148.
4. Sun Y, Li Y. Effects of family structure type and stability on children's academic performance trajectories. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2011; 73(3): 541-556.
5. Fomby P, Cherlin, A-J. Family instability and child well-being. *American Sociological Review*, 2007;(72): 181-204.
6. Mohammadi R, Mohammadi Z. Challenges for Remarriage of Women with Children: A Qualitative Study. *Women in Development & Politics*, 2019; 17(1): 97-119. [In Persian].
7. Hiyoshi A, Fall K, Netuveli G, Montgomery S. Remarriage after divorce and depression risk. *Social Science & Medicine*, 2015; 141: 109-114.
8. Sadeghi Fasaei S, Ishari M. Remarriage and its challenges among divorced men and women in Tehran. *The First National Congress of Family Psychology A Step in Drawing the Optimal Family Pattern*; 2014. [In Persian].
9. Zaree F, Solhi M, Taghdisi M H, Kamali M, Shojaeezadeh D, Nejat S et al . Post-divorce life experience in divorcee women: A qualitative study. *RJMS*. 2014; 21 (124):13-26. [In Persian].

10. Lansford J-E. Parental divorce and children's adjustment. *Perspectives on psychological science*, 2009; 4(2): 140-152.
11. Papernow P-L. The stepfamily cycle: An experiential model of stepfamily development. *Family Relations*, 2008: 355-363.
12. McLanahan S, Sandefur G. *Growing Up with a Single Parent. What Hurts, What Helps*: ERIC; 1994.
13. Thomson E, Hanson T-L, Mc Lanahan S-S. Family structure and child well-being: Economic resources vs. parental behaviors. *Social Forces*, 2010; 73(1): 221-242.
14. Thomson E, Mc Lanahan S-S. Reflections on "Family structure and child well-being: Economic resources vs. parental socialization." *Social Forces*, 2012; 91(1): 45-53.
15. Pylyser C, Buysse A, Loeys T. Stepfamilies doing family: A meta-ethnography. *Family Process*, 2018; 57(2): 496-509.
16. Faroo F. *Remarriage in the Malay Community: An exploration of perceptions, expectations and adjustments to stepfamily living*. PPIS, Singapore Muslim Women's Association; 2012.
17. Stewart S-D. Children with nonresident parents: Living arrangements, visitation, and child support. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2010; 72(5): 1078-1091.
18. Houghton S, Hattie J, Carroll A, Wood L, Baffour B. It hurts to be lonely! Loneliness and positive mental wellbeing in Australian rural and urban adolescents. *Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools*, 2016; 26(1): 52-67.