



Family Formation and Functioning Experiences of Blended Family Members in Ethiopia: A
Constructivist Grounded Theory
(Doctoral Dissertation)

Addis Ababa University
College of Education and Behavioral Studies
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by

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
June, 2024

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College of Education and Behavioral Studies
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This dissertation is submitted to the School of Psychology as part of the requirement for the
degree of philosophy in Applied Social Psychology

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Abstract

The formation of blended families is mainly preceded by divorce, widowhood or romantic breakups for adults and parental separation or loss for children. As a result, the members are likely to form the new family with unsettled negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, and hopelessness. This, in turn, may affect the family's normal functioning. This study explored the family formation processes and the family functioning experiences of blended families in Ethiopia. It employed qualitative research with constructivist grounded theory design to develop models that describe and explain the phenomenon. The study employed purposive and theoretical sampling technique and interviewed twenty-five participants drawn from eight diverse blended families. Accordingly, blended families with different family structure, socio economic, religious and educational background participated in the study. The study employed constant comparative analysis method which helped it to have meaningful interplays between data collection and analysis phases. Finally, the study constructed three different models; blended family formation model, blended family functioning model and a model that depicts the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning. The first identified the state partners were in namely problem state and aspiration state as one of the major factor that informed partners decision to blend. The second depicted three major categories of blended families (functional blended families, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families) based on their reported family functioning experiences and the third model described the link between the former two models. The study has practical implications and contributions to the design and development of evidence based blended family interventions.

Keywords: blended family, blended family formation, blended family functioning, blended family model, constructivist grounded theory, Ethiopia

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my own blended family members who nurtured me in every aspect of my life. And to all blended family members who thrive in properly exploiting the opportunities and overcoming the challenges that come with the family they created.

Acknowledgments

First, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Abebaw Minaye for his professional guidance, material and emotional support. It was just a 12 pages concept note that I submitted him for the first time. He has contributed a lot in my effort of bringing that concept note to this level. His contribution was not limited to professional support. He is a man of character; his empathy, integrity and respect helped me to move forward in this challenging PhD. journey.

My appreciation goes to Dr. Endalkachew Tessler and Dr. Abera Tibebu who were my examiners during my proposal defense. Their critical and insightful comments were extremely helpful to [re] construct the blueprint of my dissertation. I am also indebted to Professor Habtamu Wondimu and Dr. Assefa Berihun who were my examiners during the proposal upgrading phase. Their constructive comments have really enhanced the quality of this work.

My deepest gratitude goes to all blended family members who served as source of data in this study. Their participation and willingness to disclose their detail personal and family information was the heart of this work.

I would also like to thank the faculty members and leaders of the School of Psychology, Addis Ababa University for organizing learning platforms such as defense sessions, seminars and trainings which directly or indirectly helped me to improve the quality of my dissertation. Particularly, I am very much grateful to Dr. Teka Zewdie for his professional guidance and fatherly encouragement. I am very much grateful to the Ethiopian Civil Service University for sponsoring my education. I am indebted to the president and the vice presidents of the ECSU, the HR director and the PhD. program coordinator, the leaders and all staff members at the Training Institute for all their facilitations, follow ups and encouragements.

I am also indebted to my God Father, Aba Petros Solomon (Dr.) for his prayers, challenges and encouragements prior, during and after the formation of my blended family from which this dissertation is conceived, born and grown. I would like to extend my gratitude to my super nice coach Dr. Stephanie Dringus for providing me the opportunity to be part of the Phinished program where she exclusively coach women PhD candidates. I am very much grateful to my amazing parents, Dr. Eshetu Mengistu and W/o Zufan Fikre for proofreading and editing the translation of the interview transcripts. Above all, their support, love and understanding have been the corner stone for the person who I am today. I know they would happily take this PhD. as a payback for their investment on me.

I would like to pass my heartfelt gratitude to my loving, supportive and amazing husband, Mr. Melaku Dagnaw for being by my side in every aspect of my life and for being a caring and loving father to our children. My appreciation goes to my super nice children, Ruta, Edu, Meli, Fikire and Kiduse for the love and warmth they provided and for being my source of energy. I thank you for playing your shares in nurturing our blended family. I am also indebted to my siblings and their soul mates, Faka and Aschu, Netsi and Mihiret, and my sweet little sister Bezi for the warmth, love and understanding they unconditionally provided me during this work and throughout my life. Finally, I would like to thank a special team of eight members who were once just PhD. classmates, now we ended up to be a family who nurture one another in every possible way.

May God bless you all!

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Family is the building block of every society (Shemsu & Belay, 2020); it is unthinkable to have a society without a family. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) regarded family as one of the “most interesting and influential human systems” p. 37. Recently, Wysmulek (2021) described family as the “most basic and enduring form of community” p. 204. Several researchers have assessed the role of family and its environment on the development and wellbeing of the family members (e.g. King, Boyd and Thorsen, 2015; Jensen & Harris, 2017; Shemsu & Belay, 2020).

To this effect, King et al. (2015) recognized the power of families especially parents to create a positive or negative home environment. For them, the members in positive environment develop feelings of belongingness, love and affection for the larger family group. Inversely, the negative home environments and relationships exacerbate negative consequences that affect the wellbeing of its members. Similarly, Jensen and Harris (2017) found out the existence of direct association between high quality mother-child and stepfather-child relationships and reductions in depression during adolescence. They also identified direct association between higher quality step-couple relationships and reductions in depression during emerging and young adulthood.

In sum, family is a very influential social system that could either positively or negatively affect relationship quality and wellbeing of its members. Hence, the family environment affects the individuals in the family and the effect may be extended to the community and society at large. As families become more nurturing by giving love and affection, fulfilling basic needs and

addressing the social needs of themselves, they tend to play a constructive role for the overall development of their society. However, creating a nurturing family environment is a challenging task for most families. The challenge is even more complicated in blended families as bringing feeling of belongingness or family cohesion in stepfamilies requires additional effort from the family members particularly from parents and stepparents (King et al., 2015).

A blended family is formed when at least one of the marriage partners bring a child or children from previous relationships (Travers, 2021). Blended families have features that make them unique from intact families. Members of a blended family have lost an important relationship in the past. The spouses have lost former marriage partners, and the children no longer have both biological parents in the home. Important people in the lives of blended families live elsewhere. The children have a deceased parent or a parent who lives somewhere else. Some stepparents have children of their own who live elsewhere. These people can either support or interfere with the life of the new family. Unlike intact families, where the couple relationship is the longest and oldest one, blended families have longer and older parent-child relationship (Payton, 2018). Consequently, spouses may feel excluded, children may feel left out of the love and affection between the remarried couple. Blended families also struggle with role confusions; as they are not well defined. Establishing new roles that fit the situation and the members involved is not an easy task (Payton, 2018).

I have been running a blended family of my own for the past seven years. As a result of concluding my first marriage in divorce, I had been single parenting my three children for seven years. My current husband brings his two children from his previous relationship which ended in divorce as well. It was after five years of romantic relationship that we decided to blend our families. We had avoided the idea of blending all those years as we were frustrated with the

thought of exposing our children to “evil stepparents”. We both believed that this family was established with the will and involvement of God as the decision came following the prayers, challenges, follow ups and encouragements of close relatives, friends and most importantly from our God Father. Glory to God who has been always with us and enhancing the stability, peace and understanding of our family. It is this personal experience of mine that motivated me to conduct a study on blended families.

The change in family structure is becoming inevitable as marriage, single parenthood, divorce and remarriage rates are increasing. Jensen and Harris (2017) reported 33 percent of all youth in the United States will live in a stepfamily household before reaching 18 years old. This report implies the structural dominance of blended families in the USA. Similarly, King et al. (2015) stated the rise in the number of children who are likely to live at least part of their childhood in a stepfamily due to the rate of the increase in divorce, nonmarital childbearing, and remarriage. Chae (2013) also stated that divorce rates are high and increasing in many Sub-Saharan African countries.

In Ethiopia, I could not find a recent study that reveals either the divorce or the remarriage rates at national level. Based on data drawn from the 1990 National Family and Fertility Survey, Tilson and Larson (2000) reported that 45% of first marriages in Ethiopia ended up in divorce within the first 30 years of marriage. They also reported that two-thirds of women who divorce conclude their next marriage within the first five years. The study identified higher risk of divorce for those who married at early age. Besides, Gizachew, et. al. (2020) asserted the first marriage of a quarter of ever-married women in Ethiopia ended in divorce; which led the researchers to conclude that Ethiopia has high rate of divorce. Likawunt and Getu (2023) also identified Ethiopia as a country with high risk of marital instability.

Contrary to the evidences that show high and increasing divorce rates, the Central Statistical Authority (CSA, 2016) report, 64% of women and 56% of men live as married or living together with a partner and only 6% of women and 2% of men as divorced. The Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI, 2021) report revealed even a slight increase as 66% of women were married or living together with a partner while 6% were divorced/ separated and 2% widowed. Despite the fact that divorce rates are increasing, CSA and EPHI reports are indicating low level of divorce at the times they collected the data. This might serve as a clue for higher-level occurrence of remarriage in Ethiopia. The facts on the increasing divorce rate and the high proportion of adults in marital union may imply the existence of higher-level occurrence of remarriage in Ethiopia which is a contributing route for the formation of blended families.

All in all, a growing prevalence of structural diversity is observed in family structure in different parts of the world including Ethiopia. Though diverse families are becoming the norm at global level, they still remained under researched (Eerola, Paananen & Repo, 2021). Feller (2021) asserted that optimal functioning in a family requires adherence by each member of the family system to tried and tested system standards and precepts.

Given their growing size and specific nature, the effort exerted so far to understand the dynamics in blended families is insignificant. Many researchers have already identified the lack of sufficient investigation on issues related with blended families such as blended family stability (Dainton, 2019; Kumar, 2017; Papernow, 2018). Consequently, a lot is unknown regarding the family formation and functioning experiences of blended families. To this effect, King et al. (2015) suggested the relevance of understanding siblings influence on the nature and quality of relationships in stepfamilies, examining how feelings of family belonging in stepfamilies change over time since its establishment and family belonging in diverse families such as stepmother

families. Besides, Metts, Schrodtt and Braithwaite (2017) shared their conviction on the importance of studying the factors related with stepfamily satisfaction. In this regard, the study recommended identifying the quality of the relationship that exists between both custodial and noncustodial biological parents and stepparents.

Family functioning is conceptualized as how well a family system meets the needs of the family physically and emotionally, as a whole (Dai & Wang, 2015). In the current study, four prominent models that describe and explain the family functioning in the stepfamily structure have been reviewed- the Cinderella Effect, The ABC-X Family Stress Model, The Double ABC-X Family Stress Model and The Stepfamily Development Model.

The terms the Cinderella effect and the Cinderella Syndrome, initially used by the forensic psychiatrist P.D. Scott (1973) and the Canadian Psychologist Martin Daly and his colleague Margo Wilson (Wilson & Daly, 1985) refer to the higher risk of children to be abused or killed by their stepparents than by their biological parents. Daly and colleagues explained it using the evolutionary theory and attributed parental support to the genes they share with their children. Accordingly, biological parents do things that benefit their children and protect them from harm since they shared genes with them. On the contrary, stepparents show no interest to help their stepchildren; they rather harm them. In a family where children compete for social, economic and emotional resources, stepparents abuse and kill their stepchildren. Researchers reported that this phenomenon is supported by a large body of research since its first emergence in the 1970s. Even a researcher who challenged and criticized the methods employed by Daly and colleagues claimed that the Cinderella effect is “real and substantial” though he criticized that the magnitude is exaggerated in Daly’s report (Nobes, 2023 p. 3603).

The ABC-X Family Stress Model, developed by Reuben Hill (1949), aimed at explaining the processes through which families respond to stressful events and the outcomes for family functioning. The Model primarily focused on three precrisis variables which Hill labeled as A, B, and C referring to stressor event, family resources and definition of the stressor event respectively. According to Hill, it is the interaction of these three variables that lead a given family to crisis (Hill, 1958). The Double ABC-X Family Stress Model, as the name implied, is an extension of the ABC-X model. This model aimed at explaining and predicting the recovery and adaptability of families who faced crisis. Accordingly, it encompasses three parts; precrisis, crisis and postcrisis. The model also described the intervening factors that shape the course of adaptation: family resources, coherence and meaning, and the related coping strategies employed by the family (Lavee, McCubbin & Patterson, 1985).

The Stepfamily Development Model of David Mills (1984) has seven distinct stages of stepfamily development. These stages are setting goals, parental limit-setting, stepparent bonding, blending family rules, step relations in the binuclear family, further stepfamily development, and time scales. Each of these stages have specific tasks that will be executed mainly by parents and stepparents for the positive functioning of their stepfamily. Considering the stepparent-stepchild relationship as the most problematic and challenging aspect in stepfamilies, the model generally focuses on developing the stepparent-stepchild relationship by solving problems or improving the quality of their relationship (Mills, 1984).

1.2.Statement of the Problem

Majority of the studies that focus on family functioning have major gaps including: most of them were studied by researchers in Western countries and using Western samples, most of the researches employ quantitative method (Sumari et.al; 2020), other researches rely on data

obtained from single family members (Van Schoors et al., 2015), family functioning theories have not been used to consider family life in adulthood (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000, p. 9). To this effect, Sumari et.al, (2020) emphasized the need to conduct a qualitative study and take into consideration the cultural dimension to understand the issue of family functioning.

Besides, many researchers (Adjiwanou, Boco & Yaya, 2021; Ente, 2019; Ganong et al., 2019; King et al., 2015; Payton, 2018; Shui, 2015) have identified shortage of researches that addresses the complicated issues blended families face including family transitions, influence of former partners, stepparent-stepchild relationships, parental roles, and the perceptions of the society and the family members themselves toward such families. The existing literature on blended families has a narrowed scope as Shui (2015) reported “[it] has been limited to cognitive and behavioral outcomes measured in childhood and early adolescence” p. 117. Particularly, Adjiwanou et al. (2021) indicated lack of research on stepfamilies in Sub Saharan Africa despite the fact that the region is characterized by high prevalence of divorce and remarriage. A recent study conducted on family structure transitions in four low- and middle-income countries including Ethiopia indicated the need for a more contextualized understanding on how families are impacted by family structure transitions (Oldroyd et al., 2021). As Payton (2018) pointed out “there is a wealth of research that can be done in order to better understand blended families and help individuals in blended families manage the inevitable challenges and stressors that may come along with being a part of such a complex family unit.” p. 3. Travers (2021) reflected the significance of researching on blended families as the findings would help the families and those who support them to gain insights on the factors that foster the family’s stability.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no model describing and explaining the blended family phenomenon in the Ethiopian context. However, there are some studies conducted on

issues related with stepfamilies in Ethiopia (Aemero & Lakshim, 2013; Matewos, 2014; Belay & Sitota, 2016). Yet, these studies were not sufficient to give a good picture of the blended family context due to three major factors. First, their focus is on stepfamilies and not on blended families specifically. Blending families is one way of forming a stepfamily. And yet, the later could also be established in other ways even after the formation of intact families such as custodial readjustments made with previous partners and getting a child from extramarital affairs. Second, most of the researches were conducted based on responses that come from a single family member, usually from stepchildren. Hence, the findings reflect the family condition as perceived by the selected respondent. The third gap is related with the research design. Most of the researches employed quantitative research design. Accordingly, the constructs being studied were measured using instruments developed in a different culture. Hence, the adapted instrument may not reflect the true picture of context dependent dimensions of blended family functioning in Ethiopian culture.

In sum, I observed three major gaps in several of the existing family models I reviewed. First, the models hardly capture the former experiences of the family members. Because of their former family experiences, blended family members are very likely to bring their unresolved issues in the new family. Yet, the models fail to link former and current experiences of the blended family members which may result in a blurred view of the blended family members current functioning. Second, several of the models focus on describing and explaining the negative outcomes of the stepfamily structure. Since the models themselves focus on the dysfunctional dimension of stepfamilies, several empirical studies, at least those I reviewed, have been inclined to test only those dysfunctionalities. Third, most of the models are developed and tested mostly in the Western culture. They may not be adequate to show the full picture of

blended families situated in a different culture. The models emerged from the current study have tried to address the identified gaps specifically in terms of revealing the link between blended family formation and functioning, showing both positive and negative family environments, and in describing blended family formation and functioning in the context of Ethiopia.

The purpose of this research is, therefore, to capture in depth experiences of blended families in Ethiopia in order to identify the factors that promote or hinder their family formation and functioning. Ultimately, the study developed models that describe and explain blended family formation and functioning in the context of Ethiopia. In this regard, Kelly (as cited in Feller, 2021) pointed out the need for models that promote healthy family functioning and a model that guides and instills hope in newly formed blended families.

1.3.Objective of the Study

The general objective of this research was constructing models that describe and explain the factors that enhance and impede family formation and functioning based on the experiences of blended families in Ethiopia. Specifically, the research tried to:

1. describe the process partners follow to blend their families in Ethiopia.
2. describe the family functioning experiences of blended families in Ethiopia.
3. construct a model that describes and explains blended family formation in Ethiopia.
4. construct a model that describes and explains blended family functioning in Ethiopia.
5. construct a model that depicts the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning in Ethiopia.

1.4.Scope of the Study

The study explored experiences of selected blended families in Ethiopia in detail. To investigate the family dynamics, the research addressed both simple and complex blended family structures. Simple blended families are families with only one stepparent. In this case, all children belong to one biological parent where the stepparent has no biological child of his/her own from a previous relationship. Accordingly, simple blended families may have full siblings and half siblings but not stepsiblings. Complex blended families possess two stepparents and may have full siblings, stepsiblings and half siblings. I interviewed blended family members with different background such as level of education, geographic location, age, gender, and economic status. This gave me the exposure to study different experiences of blended family members and the family dynamics at the different levels of family complexity. Families who have been blended for a minimum of two years took part in the study. As researches pointed out, it can take a minimum of two years for families to create and solidify a new blended family (Braithwaite et al., 2001; Golish, 2003; Travers, 2021).

1.5.Significance of the Study

The models emerged from this study will serve as a spring board to develop an instrument that could measure blended family formation and blended family functioning in Ethiopian context. The research will also provide insight for policy makers to formulate or modify family policies, guidelines and family laws in light of blended families. Besides, it will help blended family members to identify their blended family functioning category and work for the betterment of their family environment. It gives insight to families who are planning to form blended families to reason out, critically evaluate and reconsider their decision to blend so as to minimize negative consequences of their decision. It will be crucial for dealing with important

blended family matters such as parenting roles, communication patterns, decision making and conflict management. The findings will also serve as evidence based blended family intervention mechanisms for social psychologists, counselors, developmental psychologists and others designing or implementing family education programs.

1.6. Definition of Terms and Concepts

Aspiration state: state of partners who reported to be in a relatively stable state in terms of fulfilling their basic needs but were aspiring to expand their families and enjoy life with a partner.

Blended family: A family where at least one of the marriage partners bring one or more child from their previous relationship at the time of the family formation.

Blended family formation: the action of merging two independent families into one where the new family essentially has a minimum of one parent-child and one stepparent-stepchild relationships.

Deteriorating blended family: a blended family characterized by turmoil and challenges that as the family reported are caused mainly by external parties. The family members are struggling to maintain the family.

Dysfunctional blended family: a family characterized by negative emotion such as negative attitude toward the former spouse of one's partner, the perception of being exploited, lack of trust, negative step relationships, communication gap, undermining the current relation by mentioning the better aspects of one's relation with previous partner. The family members have experiences of separation and expect that the family would dissolve in the future too at some point.

Family functioning: is the ability of a family system to work as a whole and adjust itself to different situations especially the ones that occur due to family transitions. It refers to how families cope with their daily routines by fulfilling their roles in the family (Cong et al, 2022).

Functional blended family: a family characterized by establishing the family on stable ground, communication, understanding, acceptance and solidarity, and sense of sustainability. The family members revealed the tendency of understanding each other.

Non-resident family member: one's parent, sibling(s), child(ren) who were not currently living with the participant at the time of the data collection.

Problem state: state of partners who reported experiences of hardship and severe problems including life threatening challenges such as economic challenge, child rearing, poor health and gender-based violence before blending their family.

Resident family member: individual(s) who are living with the blended family at the time of data collection.

Stepfamily: A family that has a stepchild-stepparent relationship regardless of the time the stepparent-stepchild relationship is formed.

Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

In the first section of this chapter, I gave some introductory information on how the grounded theory design informed the way I reviewed the literature. The second section presents literature reviewed to broaden my conceptual understanding of blended families. In the third section, I presented my review on four prominent stepfamily models and culminated the section by providing a summary of the models and the major gaps I observed on each one of them. The fourth section is devoted to review of several empirical studies conducted on the formation and functioning of blended families which is also followed by a summary of the major research gaps I observed in the empirical studies. The final section of this chapter deals with literature reviewed on grounded theory with a special emphasis on constructivist grounded theory. From the issues raised regarding the grounded theory design during my proposal and upgrading defense sessions, I came to consider the importance of presenting a methodological review in this chapter. Accordingly, a brief report on grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory, and the procedures in constructivist grounded theory is presented.

2.1.Introduction

The issue of when and in what depth to conduct literature review is somehow controversial in grounded theory. The initial grounded theory was characterized by conducting literature review after developing an independent data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whereas, the constructivist grounded theory version offered two types of literature reviews that will be conducted at different stages in the research process. Prior literature review will be

conducted before data collection, and final analytical literature review will be executed after the formation of analytical categories (Charmaz, 2013).

The founders of the initial grounded theory, Glasser and Strauss, maintained a firm stance on delaying the literature review until data analysis is done. Their stance had emanated from their strong intention to avoid importing and imposing prior knowledge and preconceived ideas onto the data (Wilson, 2012). They believed delaying the literature up until finalizing the data analysis phase would foster the researchers' open mindedness during the initial stages of the research process.

Kathy Charmaz, the founder of the constructivist grounded theory, suggested conducting the literature review in two phases; initial and final reviews (Charmaz, 2013). She reflected that prior review of the literature helps researchers to prepare themselves for the world they are investigating. As data is co-constructed in the interaction between the researcher and the participants, researchers need to understand and make sense of the data that comes from the participants. Charmaz emphasizes the importance of prior review for interview studies where participants "don't have time to teach" (Charmaz, 2013, 05:55) researchers about their worldview. So, it is the responsibility of the researcher to understand what the interview participants are saying. The purpose of initial literature review is, therefore, to enhance the researcher's familiarity and understanding with the issue being studied. Wilson (2012) supported this view considering the importance of prior literature review in shaping the research topic and setting the stage of the study as well. Final literature reviews are not part of the proposal as they are conducted after having analytical categories. As Charmaz stated "Final literature reviews reflect analytical categories." Hence, the literature review conducted after the analysis phase is

very much specific and focused on the analytical categories. The purpose of the latter literature review is, therefore, to enrich the categories and fill in their gap.

Seconding the approach suggested by Charmaz, I reviewed the literature in two different phases. I made the initial literature review prior to data collection for the sake of understanding the general issues related with blended family functioning. Then, I continued reviewing the literature after the construction of analytical categories.

I used two groups of databases, one general and the other specific to the fields of psychology and social work. I started the literature review process by looking for relevant literature from general academic databases using the Google Scholar search engine. I used the keywords blended family and other terms used as synonyms by scholars: stepfamily, reconstituted family, remarried family, re-partnered family. Then I combined these terms with other important keywords: family formation, family functioning, protective factors, decision to blend families, blended family expectation, risk factors, functional blended families, deteriorating blended families, dysfunctional blended families. I used the appropriate operator (s) to get relevant items. For example, I connected the synonyms by the Boolean Algebra “OR” like blended family OR reconstituted family OR step family OR remarried family OR re-partnered family not to miss literature on or related to blended families. In this process, I tried to create a good balance between my understanding of the issue and remaining as open minded as I could be. After the construction of the analytical categories, my review of the literature became more focused and specific. I reviewed specific stepfamily models and the issues that matter in the functioning of stepfamilies.

2.2.Overview of Blended Families

Blended families are defined as families formed from the union of two adults where at least one of these has one or more child(ren) from the previous relationship. A different pattern of family size and form is created as a result of parents' decision to merge their families. The new blended family may include children from two or more previous marriages or relationships. Then, each blended family takes on their own form over time (Turnbull et al., 2015) as a result of changes that might occur in the new family. The change in blended families may be due to having a common biological child in the new family or due to child custody arrangements made with non-residential biological parents of the children. Some families even arrange alternate living (Fritzell & Gahler, 2017) with the child's other parent where joint physical custody or shared residence is exercised. As Deutsch (2013) put it siblings and stepsiblings in blended families may live together either on part-time or full-time basis.

Despite the meaning the term blending- fitting together or mixing well- conveys, blended families face so many challenges to form and maintain functional families. They have their own unique features and characteristics that make them different from the formerly independent families. George and Fernandez (2014) described that the dissolution of two intact family structures may lead to formation of a blended family structure that requires reorganization as a whole in terms of its definition, identity, purpose, and roles of the family members. As Payton (2018) argued blended family members experience challenges such as role ambiguity, identity formation and feeling caught in their struggle to adjust with the requirements of the new family environment.

Hence, the task of managing blending families requires members of both families to develop and maintain perspectives that may be quite different from previously held ones. And

yet, as Feller (2021) found out releasing old “patterns and environments” is one of the challenges blended families face mainly due to lack of readiness for “the extreme difficulty of family blending” p.156.

Blending families is more challenging than other family processes such as engaging in first marriages or even second marriages that do not bring a child from previous relationships. There are several possible reasons for this. One is the issues in blended families are wider and deeper than in intact families. As Olson & DeFrain (2000) stated:

Most divorced parents begin looking for a new mate, but they are generally much more skeptical about marriage than they were “the first time around”. Even more difficult than finding a new partner is finding one who also cares about one’s children, and vice versa. (p.12)

On one hand, the perception of being “unsuccessful” in previous family experiences and on the other hand the desire to run new functional families make the intention and act of blending families a very challenging task. In blending families, the concern of parents goes above and beyond their own desires as they want to make sure that the new family is comfortable for the children.

Besides, Feller (2021) asserted the existence of serious behavioral challenges that affect adaptability, performance and relationship of blended families. As the formation of blended families are mostly preceded by negative experiences such as romantic breakup, divorce and death of spouse/ parent, family members encounter unique challenges to understand each other and achieve solidarity (Schrodt, 2021).

The societal attitude toward blended families is also a great challenge that inhibits the family’s sustainability and healthy functioning. Blending families generally creates complex

family environments mainly due to the tendencies of having one or more stepchildren by one or both parents.

The way children respond to the new family might vary based on numerous factors including their age at the time of the new family formation. As Deutsch (2013) stated it is much easier for younger children to accept blended families than adolescents as the latter usually experience strong feelings about parental divorce and remarriage. Besides, the possibility of having common biological children within blended families results in a more complex network of biological, residential, and legal ties (Houdt, 2021) which potentially makes the relationship between and among family members quite tough.

According to Deutsch (2013), the feelings of children toward the new stepparent and stepsiblings might be negative as they tend to perceive them as disruptive in the new family formation process. Children may also perceive the stepparent as enemy who prevent the reunion of their biological parents. Hence, it is likely for the family members to experience series of negative emotions like fear, anxiety and frustration in the family transition process. On top of that, research findings indicated that the divorce rate for second marriages is by far higher than that of first marriages (Ente, 2019).

Blended family functioning has not been adequately explored and remains to be a potential area of research. Researchers (Dainton, 2019; Kumar, 2017; Papernow, 2018) reported that a lot has to be investigated in order to fully understand the nature of blended families and how they function.

2.3.Stepfamily Models

Here I reviewed four influential stepfamily models where two of these are specifically stepfamily models. These are the Cinderella Effect, the ABC-X Family Stress Model, the Double

ABC-X Family Stress Model and the Stepfamily Development Model. After reviewing these models, I provided in a summarized way the gap I observed from the models.

2.3.1. The Cinderella Effect

In the Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science, Jex and Burgess (2021) define the term the Cinderella Effect as ‘The increased prevalence of mistreatment, both lethal and nonlethal, of children by a biologically unrelated step-parent, compared to by a genetically related parent.’ p. 1089. In the year 1973, a forensic psychiatrist P. D. Scott investigated the causes of 29 brutally killed children. In his investigation, Scott found out that 15 (51.7%) of these children were killed by their stepfathers. After few years, the Canadian psychologist Martin Daly and his colleague Margo Wilson used the term, The Cinderella Effect, to refer to the higher risk of children to be abused or killed by their stepparents than by their biological parents (Daly & Wilson, 2008). The researchers reached at this conclusion after analyzing data from the British Home Office’s Homicide Index.

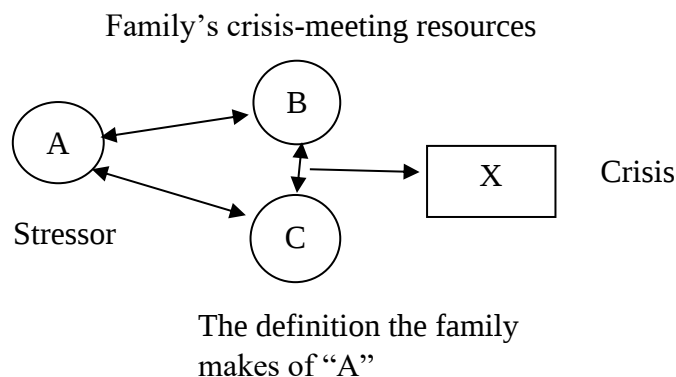
Daly and Wilson explained the phenomenon using evolutionary psychology and attributed less abuse and killing of children by biological parents owing to parental investment to the genes they share with their children. Accordingly, biological parents do things that benefit their children and protect them from harm since they shared genes with them. On the contrary, stepparents show no interest to help their stepchildren; they rather harm them. They claimed that “a child is one hundred times more likely to be abused or killed by a stepparent than by a genetic parent” (Daly & Wilson, 1998).

2.3.2. The ABC-X Model of Family Stress

Reuben Hill developed the Family Stress Theory in 1949 (Daneshpour, 2017; Hill, 1958) and then he renamed it as the ABC-X Model in 1958 (Hill, 1958). The model explained the

processes through which families respond to stressful events which Hill termed as precipitating events or stressors and the outcomes for family functioning. The primary focus of the ABC-X Model is the three precrisis variables labeled as A, B, and C. 'A' refers to the events or stressors that cause the crisis. These are events that bring about change in the family. The event could be any stress triggering occurrence that could be positive such as a family member's promotion, or giving birth or negative such as loss of loved ones, loss of job and diagnosis to a chronic illness. Hill believed that these crisis precipitating events are accompanied by hardships. According to Hill, hardships are problems caused by the stressor which demand resources of the family. The 'B' refers to the family resources that could be available at individual or family member's level such as education and health, and at a family system level such as integration, resilience and adaptability. These resources influence the family's ability to cope with the stressors in that their availability strengthen the family's coping whereas their absence make the family vulnerable to crisis. Finally, the 'C' refers to the family's perception to the events/ stressors which can also influence the family's ability to cope with the event. The family's perception of the stressor event and the accompanying hardships as crisis triggering one exposes the family to crisis. According to the ABC-X model, it is the interaction of these three precrisis variables that produce the crisis which is labeled as X (Hill, 1958). The model explained crisis as a situation that occurs due to the family's inability to positively cope with the stressor. As a result, the change negatively affects the family's functioning (Tidwell, 2022) in general and its affectional and emotional functioning in particular (Hill, 1958).

Figure 2. 1 The ABC-X Family Stress Model



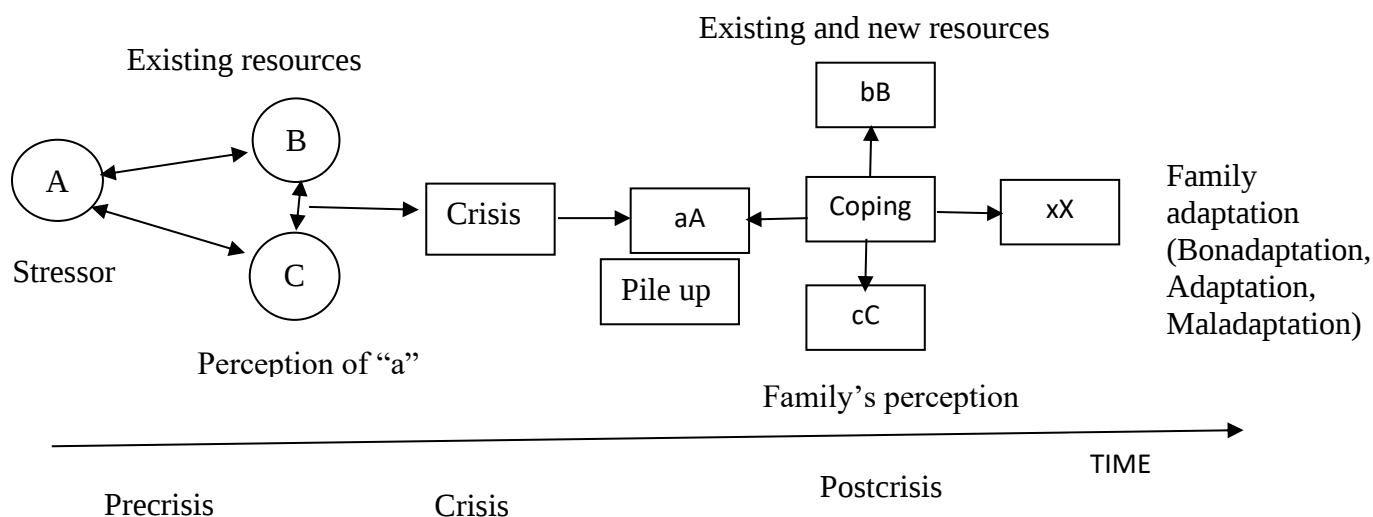
2.3.3. The Double ABC-X Model of Family Stress

The ABC-X Model serves as a base for several other family stress models and its founder, Hill, is recognized as the father of stress model. One of these variants is the McCubbin and Patterson's Double ABC-X Model of Family Stress which they developed in 1982. The Double ABC-X model, as an extension of the ABC-X model (Daneshpour, 2017), employs similar precrisis and crisis variables with slight changes in names and definitions such as renaming and redefining variables. The new model uses lower-case letters for the variables. In this model, 'A' is redefined as stressors manifested both pre and post event of crisis that resulted in a pile of demands. The model renamed the "family's crisis-meeting resources" as "existing resources". Now, the existing resources incorporate social resources in addition to the individual and family resources of the original model. The model also adds postcrisis variables to deal with issues that also come after crisis (Lavee, McCubbin & Patterson, 1985). The model aimed at explaining and predicting the recovery and adaptability of families who faced crisis.

Accordingly, it encompasses three parts; precrisis, crisis and postcrisis. The model also described the intervening factors that shape the course of adaptation: family resources, coherence

and meaning, and the related coping strategies. The postcrisis variable ‘aA’ represented pileup of stressors on the initial stressor, ‘bB’ represents precrisis resources and resources that develop to cope with the initial crisis as well. The ‘cC’ represented the family’s perception to the stressor that caused the crisis (c) and the family’s perception to the crisis, pileup, and existing and new resources. The variable ‘xX’ described the range of outcome of family processes in response to the pileup of stressors; the range goes from maladaptation to bonadaptation. When the family’s perception to these variables is positive, they tend to be bonadaptive. A negative perception to the variables leads the family to be maladaptive. (Lavee, McCubbin & Patterson, 1985).

Figure 2. 2 The Double ABC-X Family Stress Model



2.3.4. The Stepfamily Development Model

The Stepfamily Development Model was initially developed by David Mills and his spouse based on their personal experiences in establishing a stepfamily. Then it was further developed through the therapy services they provided for stepfamilies and the trainings they delivered to professionals who supported stepfamilies (Mills, 1984). Mills strongly argued that adopting family roles based on the model of biological family “leads to problematic

cycles of interactions that block the development of real intimacy in stepfamilies” P. 366. He criticized stepfamilies and professionals who employed models of biological families to “recreate the original biological family” p. 366 in the stepfamily context. In doing so, they did not take into consideration the “profound difference between stepparent and parent.” P. 366. He reiterated that the attempt to create intimacy in stepfamilies using the models for biological families might inhibit the development of real intimacy in stepfamilies. He believed stepfamilies and professional who help them need to be guided by a clear, concrete model that explains optimal stepfamily functioning focusing on the “appropriate development of stepparent-stepchild relationship.” P. 366.

Mill’s Stepfamily Development Model has seven stages and each of these stages have specific tasks that will be executed mainly by parents and stepparents for the positive functioning of their stepfamily. Considering the stepparent-stepchild relationship as the most problematic and challenging aspect in stepfamilies, the model generally focuses on developing the stepparent-stepchild relationship by solving problems or improving the quality of their relationship.

The very first stage in the model is ‘setting goals’ which needs to be decided by the biological parent and the stepparent by collecting inputs from the children if the need arises. Here, the model directed parents to set long term goals focusing on stepparent-stepchild relationship and by exploring all the possible roles a stepparent could assume such as the role of elder sibling, aunt, uncle, friend, teacher, parent and the like.

Next comes the ‘Parental Limit-Setting’ and at this stage the model strictly dictates the parent to assume entire responsibility of setting and enforcing limits to their biological children. Whenever the stepparent has an issue to reflect regarding their stepchild, they

should address it to the biological parent; not directly to the child. During the temporary absence of biological parent, the model dictates the stepparent to take the role of a baby sitter rather than a parent in the way they convey, follow up or control the limits set by the biological parent.

The 'Stepparent Bonding' is the third stage where the parent and the stepparent consciously cooperate to design and implement stepparent bonding which is appropriate with the development of the child. Here, the stepparent is expected to carefully create appropriate bonds depending on the age of the child without violating instructions in the parental limit setting stage. For example, the stepparent can tutor the child without dictating the effort they should exert in their lessons or should give a ride to a teenager without lecturing the precautions or the safety rules they should consider in a party.

In the 'Blending Family Rules' stage, Mills recognized the need to develop new rules that govern the new household. He suggested the parent and the stepparent to develop these rules in negotiation. They can negotiate on the household roles and responsibilities of the family members. If the spouses fail to negotiate on a given rule, Mills prescribed that they have to abide by the biological parent's idea as "the children will not obey any rule that the biological parent does not agree with." P. 369.

The fifth stage is the 'Step Relations in the Binuclear Family'. The focus of this stage is on dealing with conflicts that may exist between the stepfamily and the non-resident biological parent. Mills attribute the conflicts to unsettled emotional divorce between the resident and the non-resident parent. The stepfamily needs to manage such types of outside conflicts for its development. The model encouraged stepparents to support their stepchildren in the relationship they have with the non-resident biological parent.

According to Mills, the above five stages are foundational stages used to avoid the difficulties that limit the stepfamily's development. Stage six - 'Further Stepfamily Development' focuses on exploring family specific ways that enhance the quality of life in the stepfamily. By investing more time and energy, the stepfamily may develop in "idiosyncratic" ways to better satisfy the needs of its members.

Mills termed the last stage in the model as 'Time Scales' and stated that the time required for further development of the stepfamily depends on several factors such as the family's goal, initial stages of the children and other family resources. Mills relate the time scale the stepparent needs to approximately play the role of the biological parent with the age of the children at the time of the stepfamily formation. He suggested that the stepparent may need three years to approximately play the role of a parent for a three years child, five years for a five years child and so on.

2.3.5. Summary of the Models

From my review, I observed three major gaps in several of the existing family models in step family contexts. The first gap I observed in the models is that they do not capture the former experiences of the family members. Because of their former family experiences, blended family members are very likely to bring their unresolved issues in the new family. Meaningful understanding of the current family experience, therefore, requires some background knowledge of their former experiences. This is one of the major gaps observed in the existing family models. The failure to link former and current experiences of the blended family members may result in a blurred view of the family which in turn distorts the concluding remarks of research findings.

The second gap that several of them shared is they focus on describing and explaining the negative outcomes of the stepfamily structure. Since the models themselves focus on the dysfunctional dimension of stepfamilies, most of the empirical studies conducted so far have been inclined to test those dysfunctionalities. I believe lack of balanced models or theories has limited the generation of knowledge on the positive side of blended families. Mill's Stepfamily Development Model has contributed its share in supporting stepfamilies and professionals who help stepfamilies towards the family's healthy functioning. However, this model assumes that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is the major problematic issues in stepfamilies and all the stages and the activities in each stage focus on solving or improving relationship issues of stepparents and their stepchildren. Blended family is a complex and complicated family structure and from my experience and readings, it is difficult to resolve the issues in blended families just by focusing a simple line. Mills (1984) also asserted that a stepfamily development model "need not and should not be held up as the only way but simply a way a stepfamily can develop and avoid major problems" p. 366. This is also related with the unique nature of blended families. In this regard, Torey and Nichole (2005) asserted that blended families face unique challenges but are met with standard solutions.

The third gap is related with methodological issues. As they are developed and tested mostly in the Western culture, they may not be adequate to show the full picture of blended families situated in a different culture. For example, as situated in a collectivist culture, blended families in Ethiopia may have culture specific issues that cannot be fully addressed with the existing Western dominated models. In this regard, Sumari, Baharudin, Khalid, Ibrahim, and Tharbe, (2020) reported that most studies in family functioning were conducted by researchers in

Western countries and using tools developed based on Western samples. Besides most of the family functioning studies conducted so far are quantitative researches.

2.4. Blended Family Formation and Functioning

Shui (2015) researched on blended families and their influence on sibling relationships and first union formation for his doctoral dissertation. The research considered four family structures namely two biological parent family, single parent family, stepparent family and blended family. The research was aimed at developing two different measures that improve the measurement of blended family structure. One of these measures, reportedly, uses sibling pair reports of family structure to assess the extent of, and reduce, family boundary ambiguity. Among others, the study tried to address two research questions regarding blended families. One of these was: Does sibling relationship quality in blended families differ from that in other families? Accordingly, the research found that sibling affection in blended families is not significantly different from the other family structures. Siblings in blended families only significantly differ from full siblings in single mother families in their reports of conflict. The other research question was: Is growing up in a blended family associated with union formation patterns in young adulthood (e.g., the transition to a first co-residential union)? Regarding this enquiry, the research revealed compared to individuals from two biological parent families, respondents from blended, step and single mother families have significantly higher rates of cohabitation, but only individuals from single mother families have significantly lower rates of marriage. Individuals from stepfamilies show significantly elevated rates of cohabitation but not marriage.

In their investigation on the application of family systems theory to the study of adulthood, Fingerman and Bermann (2000), revealed how between- family, within-family, and

within-individual differences emerge from family interactions. They conducted three case studies of adult families and demonstrated the ways the families' shared beliefs, shape emotional experiences, behavior, and conceptions of self and family in adulthood. The study explored how adult behavior might be understood with regard to the norms sustained by the larger family system. The study identified continuation of family influences on the day-to-day life of its members even after they are grown. The study implies the importance of considering the larger social system to understand the value system of the individual family members and the family units as well. In family context, the larger social system could be the extended family, the community and society at large. This, in turn, entails the importance of exploring the protective and risk factors for the sake of promoting family functionality in blended families.

King et al. (2015) researched on adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfamilies. The authors, guided by family systems theory, examined the associations between family characteristics and adolescents' perceptions of family belonging in stepfather families. They focused on stepfather families because as the researchers stated, of those who live with their stepfamilies' vast majority live with their stepfathers. The researchers center of attention was exploring how perceptions of family belonging were associated with the quality of relationship among family members. The research conceptualized quality relationship as adolescents' perception of closeness and engagement with mothers and stepfathers in activities and communication. The authors found out two factors that are most strongly associated with feelings of family belonging. These are the perceived quality of the stepfather-adolescent relationship and the perceived quality of the mother-adolescent relationship. The latter is found to be strong significant determinant of feeling of belongingness. The findings of this study

implied the crucial role mothers play in promoting quality family environment in blended families.

Ente (2019) conducted qualitative research guided by a grounded theory perspective on blended families with autistic children. The researcher interviewed five remarried couples, three stepparents, one biological parent and one grandparent to determine the adaptations that occur during the family formation and maintenance process. The researcher analyzed the transcriptions using grounded theory method. The research identified five common themes namely; development of parenting roles, adjusting to problem behavior, developing family routines, services and community resources, and resilience in parenting. The researcher found out that remarried couples need to consciously engage themselves in carefully planning and modifying their parenting roles as they may not have similar understanding on the roles they need to play. This is particularly true when the family has a member with a special need as this study emphasized, “Remarried families of children with autism must deal with the nonnormative management and adaptation of schedules, routines within the household, discipline, and how the remarried couple adapts to the needs of the child with autism” (Ente, 2019, p. 81). The research has also identified the role of community resources in addressing the requirements of blended families with autistic child and maximizing the family’s better life outcome. The study also revealed the role of positive adaptation in supporting the families to successfully manage the challenges of life. In sum, the study indicated the contribution of parental roles, resilience and social supports to address the challenges blended families encounter and enhance their family wellbeing.

Metts et al., (2017) explored the emotional and communicative profiles of young adults who experienced parental divorce and stepfamily. The study was aimed at understanding the

predictors of stepfamily satisfaction. Accordingly, the study found out some factors that predict stepfamily satisfaction. One of these findings is that strong negative emotions experienced at the time of the divorce are negative predictors of current stepfamily satisfaction. They also found out that the level of open self-disclosure to a stepparent, is a positive predictor of current stepfamily satisfaction. The third finding is that the extent to which the father's full explanation of the circumstances of the divorce to the current family is a positive predictor of current stepfamily satisfaction. Contrary to this, the extent to which mother's full explanation of the circumstances of the divorce to the current family is a negative predictor of current stepfamily satisfaction. As the findings imply, stepfamily satisfaction is influenced by feelings and emotions experienced even before the formation of the current family. This reveals the importance of the proper identification and management of emotions felt during divorce for future family satisfaction. It is also noted that open communication within stepfamily members regarding current and previous relations is important to enhance stepfamily satisfaction.

Josephsen (2015) conducted a phenomenological study on the experience of parenting half-siblings within a blended family. The study was aimed at providing an in-depth description of the experience of simultaneously parenting mutual children and stepchildren within a blended family. The researcher interviewed six parents and analyzed their experiences in five themes namely *I can parent*, *my children get along*, *we miss you*, *let's talk*, and *it's challenging and rewarding*. Under the *I can parent* theme, the researcher organized the parenting experiences of the participants including the parents' confidence in their child rearing ability, their emotional attachment with their siblings and stepsiblings, their perception of fair treatment between their siblings and stepsiblings. Under the *my children get along* theme, the researcher organized the ways the stepchildren get along with the common biological child, as reported by the participant

parents. Accordingly, positive experiences such as stepchildren's help in taking care of the newborn, and stepchildren's feelings of being connected with the family and negative experiences such as stepsibling's feelings of rivalry and being rejected are presented. Parents and stepsiblings miss the children when they go to visit their non-resident parents. The researcher organized such types of experiences under the theme named *we miss you. Let's talk* is a theme that encompasses issues related with blended family members communication. The final theme, *it's challenging and rewarding*, presents the various coping strategies parents use to deal with issues related with their blended families.

In Ethiopia, Shemsu and Belay (2020) conducted an intervention study titled "A family-based behavioral intervention to enhance family communication and family cohesion among siblings in polygamous family". Their intervention was initiated based on two models; the social ecological model and family-based behavioral intervention model. It is an interpretative phenomenological study where 14 participants drawn from two family structures; six from monogamy family and 8 from polygamy family. Family functioning, along with its three subthemes- Father Fairness, Family Cohesion, and Family Conflict, was one of the major themes identified in this intervention assessment. According to Shemsu and Belay (2020), the participants from both family structures reported that polygynous fathers demonstrated unfair treatment in issues such as availability, income and care against their first wives and her children. Fathers are more affectionate and responsible to their second family than their first family. Regarding family cohesion, they found out polygamous families lack family cohesion and this unhealthy relation between the half siblings is supported by mothers as they encouraged their children to be rivals with their stepmothers and halfsiblings. With regard to family conflict, the third subtheme characterizing family functioning, it is reported that polygamous family

members are in continuous conflict with their stepmothers and halfsiblings. The family members reported that the second wives manipulate the fathers and control their family decisions. Generally, the study reported that fathers' unfair treatment, lack of family cohesion and continuous conflict with stepmothers and half siblings deteriorated the family functioning of polygamous families.

Despite the need to recognize the multifaceted challenges blended families encounter, it is only recently that researchers developed interest to deal with the issue which leaves it to be under researched. This is asserted in Payton (2018),

Because research interest in blended families is relatively recent there is still a wealth of research that can be done in order to better understand blended families and help individuals in blended families manage the inevitable challenges and stressors that may come along with being a part of such a complex family unit. (p.3)

The lack of sufficient researches, in turn, limits the availability of adequate policy provisions and evidence based blended family intervention strategies. Consequently, lack of psychosocial and legal support systems would hinder blended families' capacity to work out for the betterment of their family life. As an instance, the need to work on and support blended families is described as follows:

...there has been a lesser focus on trying to keep newly blended families intact. Because many members of a failed relationship re-partner and have children from these new relationships, we find there is a need to provide support for stepfamilies. (Zelevnikow & Zelevnikow, 2015, p. 317)

Lack of sufficient social and legal support systems such as policies and guidelines could escalate the complications in blended families. Generally, legal guidelines are developed to

address issues of first marriage and divorce. This makes them insufficient to solve peculiar issues emanated from blended families such as the involvement of biological custodial parent, stepparent and biological noncustodial parent in resolving problems related with children from prior relationships.

2.5. Grounded Theory

The aim of this study is developing a constructivist grounded theory that describes and explains blended families. To this effect, the study employs the techniques and procedures provided by the constructivist grounded theory. This section is, therefore, dedicated to review the methodological aspects that will be used in the study. Besides, a brief theoretical review on grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory is done before directly diving to the specific methodological aspects.

Grounded theory was developed by the collaborative effort of two sociologists; Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The cofounders merged their influential academic backgrounds to develop the grounded theory. The core purpose of the grounded theory method is building a theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In line with this core purpose, the theory was developed to achieve three specific purposes. The first was to help the development of theories that are grounded on data so as to close the gap between theory and empirical research. Second, the theory explained the inductive logic used to produce grounded theory. The third was providing justification for the careful and rigorous use of qualitative research methods (Haig, 2007).

Regardless of the fact that the theory was originally developed by sociologists, many researchers including the founders themselves claimed applicability of the theory to a number of other disciplines (Haig, 2007; Meriam & Tisdell, 2015). To this effect, Meriam and Tisdell

(2015) stated both theoretical framework and scientific data analysis procedures as provisions of the theory for researchers with different background. Haig conceptualized grounded theory as a broad qualitative research perspective that encompasses a distinctive methodology, a particular view of scientific method and a set of data analysis and theory construction procedures. He discussed each element as:

The methodology provides a justification for undertaking qualitative research as a legitimate, indeed rigorous, form of inquiry. The conception of scientific method depicts research as a process of inductively generating theories from closely analyzed data. The specific procedures used in grounded theory comprise an array of coding and sampling procedures for data analysis, and a set of interpretative procedures that assist in the construction of theory that emerges from, and is grounded in, the data. (Haig, 2007, p. 2)

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) put it, grounded theory is a theory inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. In the grounded theory method, a theory is developed in a bottom-up approach which makes the resulting theory closely related with the data; grounded on the data. The method enables the researchers to put aside their preconceptions about the phenomena (Rennie, 2006) and solely focus on the data. The theory is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Since the initial version, the grounded theory method has undergone different changes mainly based on ontological, epistemological and methodological differences (Khanal, 2018). To this effect, the initial post/positivist grounded theory was influenced by a realist ontology and objectivist epistemology that combined factor analysis, pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Kassam et al., (2020) described three unique stances of grounded theory; Glaserian Grounded Theory, Straussian Grounded Theory, and Charmaz's

Constructivist Grounded Theory. Regardless of the variations on their philosophical underpinnings, all the three remain loyal to the initial central intention of grounded theory which is exploring complex human interactions (Kassam et al., 2020). The Straussian grounded theory was influenced by the philosophical and theoretical foundations of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. The Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory, assumed a relativist ontology with a subjective epistemology emphasizing social construction of knowledge. Recently, the constructivist grounded theory approach is getting wider coverage and popularity in the qualitative research literatures (Khanal, 2018).

2.5.1. Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory was developed in 2006 by Kathy Charmaz, who was a student of both Glaser and Strauss. In this version, Charmaz challenged the post/positivist ontology while maintaining the pragmatic and subjective interactionism. To this effect, the constructivist approach was developed with two core intentions. The first intention is broadening inquiries focused on understudied human behavior. The second one is becoming aware of the power relations within the researcher-participant relationship (Charmaz, 2014a).

The constructivist version has brought changes on the traditional grounded theory. This section discusses the prominent changes observed in constructive grounded theory. The constructivist approach claims that knowledge is more of constructed than discovered. As Khanal (2018) stated in this approach knowledge is constructed out of the dynamic interaction between the researcher, participants and the context rather than merely discovered out of the existing situation. Here, the researcher's role in the knowledge construction process is recognized and different scholars suggest the role of reflexivity in balancing the researcher-participant power relations. Charmaz (2017) described reflexivity in the context of constructive

grounded theory as an insightful capacity of the researcher to acknowledge their values, preconceptions and assumptions and to self-reflect on them. Accordingly, Kassam et al. (2020) described the criticality of recognizing how researchers are positioned to influence this process through their values and assumptions. Similarly, Charmaz (2017) explains the need for constructive grounded theorists to assume reflexive stances throughout the research process. Reflecting on their positions help researchers to realize and manage the researcher-participant power balance.

The constructivist grounded theory guides researchers to reveal, examine, and scrutinize their assumptions and decision-making (Charmaz, 2014b). Though researchers are coproducers of knowledge, priority should be given for the voices of the participants in the knowledge construction process. This implies the need for researcher's determination and conscious engagement in the meaning making and theory construction process. Charmaz (2014a) suggested employing memo-writing, theoretical sensitivity, and the notion of methodological rigor as strategies to deal with researchers' values, preconceptions and assumptions.

2.5.1.1. Constructivist Grounded Theory Procedures. Charmaz (2006) viewed grounded theory method as flexible guidelines rather than rigid methodological rules. To this effect, she recommends an eight-stage guideline that directs the data collection and analysis process. Wilson (2012) argued that "Constructive grounded theory provides a more flexible 21st century methodological approach for using basic grounded theory guidelines and Charmaz's Constructing Grounded Theory (2006) which are useful and practical guides for the novice researcher" p.12.

The guideline involves line by line and focus coding, early memo writing using focused codes, advanced memo writing, theoretical sampling, saturation and ordering memos to discover

the argument. The process requires the researcher to analyze the data from the beginning of data collection and to make systematic comparisons throughout the inquiry in order to integrate and streamline data collection and analysis. Line by line coding, as Corbin & Strauss (2008) described it is a data segmenting and chunking conducted at the end of each data collection stage for the purpose of understanding and describing the participants' world view. The importance of this process is described as:

Line-by-line active coding keeps the researcher close to the data, preserves the fluidity of the participant's experience and gives the researcher new ways of looking at it. It allows complete immersion in the data, which in turn provides an insider's view. (Wilson, 2012, p. 9)

Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) promote the use of line-by-line coding; "We advocate line-by-line coding as a first step, because it forces the researcher to take a fresh look at the data, compare fragments of these data, and ask analytic questions about them" p. 307. In sum, line-by-line coding is a powerful tool that enhances the researcher's understanding of the data their inquisitiveness about it. It helps the researcher to understand the participants subjective experiences and feelings and the meanings they make about their experiences.

Saldhana (2012) described a code in the context of qualitative research as a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and / or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. Similarly, Charmaz (2006) suggested the use of gerunds i.e. using verbs as nouns to build a sense of action into the coding from the start of the coding process. In this research, I identified words and excerpts used by participants to express their feelings and experiences. Then I gave initial codes such as avoiding abuse, seeking respect, protecting territory, and substituting a parent to them.

2.6.1.2. Focus Coding and Memos. This step is also characterized by memo writing. “Memoing in grounded theory is the key tool that helps the researcher to record insights and directs further data collection until theoretical saturation is reached.” (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 6). After selecting the focus code for each interview transcript, the researcher writes memos. Charmaz (2006) considered this memo writing as the pivotal step between data collection and the draft analysis. According to Wilson (2012) this process uncovered the tentative categories and provided the focus for further data collection in the form of theoretical sampling that continued until all the properties of the categories were saturated. In this research, I examined the codes generated during line-by-line coding and selected the most frequent or significant codes and promoted them to tentative categories.

2.6.1.3. Theoretical Sampling and Constant Comparative Analysis. Theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis are necessary strategies for the construction of a grounded theory (Creswell, 2007). Different scholars claimed that theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis are core elements of the grounded theory approach (Amsteus, 2014; Boeije, 2002).

The constant comparative analysis method was developed by Glasser and Strauss in 1965 (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Researchers use this method to develop concepts from the data by coding and analyzing the data concurrently (Amsteus, 2014; Kolb, 2016). Glasser and Strauss (1967) recommended the researcher to analyze the textual data line by line resulting in the generation of codes. Each emerging code will then be compared with previously identified codes; similar codes will be grouped together while the different ones will be kept separately. This process of constant comparison of codes for their similarities and differences results in a number of cluster of codes (Rennie, 2006). This is an information rich process which gives

insight on the common and unique features of the data. Here, the analyst will strive to conceptualize the overall essence of the clusters which forms a category. In grounded theory, the research begins with raw data and it is through constant comparison method that a substantive theory is constructed (Kolb, 2016). As Amsteus (2014) put it, constant comparative method helps the researcher to engage in the activities required to develop a theory. The method is especially useful for the formation of developmental theories. Here is an explanation:

The constant comparisons of incidents on the basis of as many of their similarities and differences as possible tend to result in the analyst's creating a developmental theory. Hence, the method especially facilitates the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change which pertain to organizations, positions, and social interaction rather than static theories. (Glaser, 1965, p. 444)

In the constant comparative method, data collection and analysis are performed in a continuous interplay whereby particular data points are constantly compared to other data points in order to form categories and concepts. Glaser (1965) stated that the constant comparative analysis method can be described in four stages. First, the researcher compares incidents applicable to each category. Second the researcher integrates the categories and their properties. At the third and fourth stages, the researcher delimits the theory and writes the theory respectively.

Douglas (2003) defined theoretical sampling as the process of sampling events, situation, populations and responses in the inductive generation of theory. Theoretical sampling is “seeking and collecting pertinent data to elaborate and refine categories in your emerging theory” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 192). Similarly, theoretical sampling is described as “the key data collection method that steers the logic of discovery in grounded theory.” (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 5). The

definitions imply the crucial role of theoretical sampling in the grounded theory construction process.

Theoretical sampling helps the researcher to decide on the type of data to be collected and where to get them (Amsteus, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Foley et al. (2021) conceptualized theoretical sampling as a means to sample for additional participants with a set of theoretical considerations in mind. Hence, theoretical Sampling is directed by the analysis made on the previous data (Neill, 2007), the researcher's reflection (Boeije, 2002) on it, concept saturation and ultimately building a theory (Foley et. al., 2021). This implies that theoretical sampling serves as an important tool for the researcher to decide on the next sampling based on the intention to fill in gaps observed while analyzing the previously collected data. Conlon put it as "Theoretical sampling directs the researcher in moving back and forth between data and the emergent theory to identify empirical instances with the potential to further deepen insights into theoretical constructs that have emerged from data that predate the inquiry" (Conlon et al., 2020, p. 6). Hence, theoretical sampling is a method that promotes the simultaneous data collection and analysis procedure which is the common feature in grounded theory method.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm

As a woman running a blended family of my own, I brought to this research the knowledge that blending families and working towards its stability is a very challenging task. It is also my conviction that the challenges and difficulties blended families face are mainly due to lack of insights on the nature of blended families and how to nurture them. Accordingly, I tried my best to use my personal experiences to enhance the trustworthiness of this research through my empathetic understanding and conscious engagement particularly in the data collection and analysis phases of the research. For example, I tried my best to be mindful while conducting the interviews and gave the participants the opportunity to share their side of the story in a relaxed and free flowing manner. Besides, I minimized the effect of exposing this research to my own personal biases through the use of different techniques such as bracketing and reflectivity. I had been examining my own assumptions, beliefs, values, feelings, thoughts and experiences throughout the research process to reduce their undesirable interference. I acknowledged the role of my own personal experience in running a blended family to exhibit empathic neutrality, as Patton (2002) calls it, and make sense of the participants world in a nonjudgmental manner. With all these, I believed my family background has enhanced my understanding of the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the participants.

Needless to mention, I hold a constructivist world view as the nature of the issue I studied requires such a perspective. This research relied on the views and experiences of the selected blended families. The meanings they perceived and constructed was explored mainly through in-

depth interviews. The focus was to capture on going family processes rather than the static family structure. As Corbin (2009) in her article on grounded theory described “It is not events themselves that are the focus of our studies but the meanings given to events and the actions/ interactions/ emotions expressed in response, along with the context in which those responses and the events occur” p. 38. Accordingly, I gathered data regarding the participants context for the sake of understanding the data and shaping the interpretations.

3.2. Research Design

Since the study focuses on the experiences of blended families and how they give meaning to their experiences, qualitative research design best suits to the issue of interest. The study employed constructivist grounded theory analysis. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) put it, a grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. In grounded theory, research does not begin with a theory. Rather, it begins with an issue of interest to be studied and what is relevant to explain the phenomenon systematically emerges. Patton (2002) described its focus as “Grounded theory emphasizes systematic rigor and thoroughness from initial design, through data collection and analysis, culminating in theory generation” p. 489. A grounded theory study goes beyond uncovering or understanding experiences or giving meanings to them. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015) grounded theory seeks to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest.

The ultimate goal of this research was developing models that describe and explain how blended families are formed and how they function in Ethiopia. The models are specific as they focus only on issues related with blended family functioning. Besides, some hypotheses have emerged from the models which could be tested and applied to enhance the functioning of blended families. In line with this, theories formed from grounded theory are characterized by

specificity and practicality. As asserted in Merriam and Tisdell (2015) grounded theory leads to the development of substantive theory rather than a grand theory. They also stated that grounded theory is particularly useful for addressing questions about process; that is, how something changes over time. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) described, “Essentially, grounded theory is a flexible, systematic, comparative method of constructing theory from data that supports studying social and social psychological processes” p. 720.

Moreover, as a theory based on data, grounded theory has proved to be rigorous and applicable for academic dissertations. To this effect, Patton (2018) stated that grounded theory has won widespread acceptance as sufficiently rigorous to serve as an acceptable framework for academic dissertations. I benefited a lot from the analytical tools that constructivist grounded theory provides and I was able to grasp the different meanings each family gives to their blended family formation and blended family functioning experiences (Patton, 2018). Hence, grounded theory is the best design that fits with the purpose of the study.

In this regard, the lessons I learned from the upgrading phase of this study helped me a lot to test and prove the applicability of the research design I selected for this particular study. The dimensions I had seen in the upgrading phase showed me the issues in blended families are diverse and complicated which truly deserves to be studied. There is a lot unknown that needs to be explored about blended families which assured me the appropriateness of the design I selected. My initial plan was researching on the family functioning experiences of blended families, however from the upgrading phase I learned the importance of understanding blended family formation as the “past” of family members has a lot to do with their present family functioning. Currently, the study is about both the blended family formation and the blended family functioning experiences of the participant family members.

I found in-depth interview to be the best tool for the research under investigation. That phase also helped me to improve my initial plan in some of the activities. For example, my initial plan was to execute all interviews at the homes of the families for the sake of understanding their family context. And yet, from the experiences I had in interviewing the first few family members, I learned that sometimes it may not be practical and even recommended to conduct the interview at home. This is because some of the family houses may not provide safe and comfortable space for the participant family members. So, in such cases I visited the home setting and tried to get contextual information but conducted the interview in some other place, as recommended by the participants. Besides, initially I was planning to make all interviews in person. Later, I added video call as an alternative for participants who were not accessible for a face-to-face interview.

From my experiences, I learned that family interview requires flexibility as it is exposed to unpredictable situations. The upgrading phase has also shaped the criteria I used to consider family members. My initial plan was to take families with children under 18 years old. Later on, I learned that children at any age should be considered as long as they live with the family. This is because in the context of Ethiopia it is customary for adult children to live with their parents and influence the family functioning. Besides, adult children who are “independent” of the family because they are not living in the same household but who are practically engaged in the day-to-day activities and decisions of the family should be considered as a family member.

I learned that interviewing families is a very challenging and demanding task. I found it to be beyond my expectation. Prior to interviewing the families, I believed that I am an insider to the issue and I would be empathetic. And yet, I faced challenges in two family contexts.

I considered myself as an insider to the issue and even claimed to be empathically neutral while interviewing the participants. Besides, I thought I was a woman who can control emotional outbursts and give due consideration for cultural variations. However, there were two scenarios where I became vulnerable and demonstrated emotional disturbances. The first case happened while I was interviewing F3W and she was just describing what she did while F3H and F3D were taking her to the delivery room for cesarean section. She was terrified about who would take care of F3D if she died in delivery. So, a day before her appointment, she wrote a letter that requested F3H to receive her consignee to responsibly raise F3D. She put the letter inside the bible. When she was about to get into the delivery room, she informed them that she has written something that the three of them would read when they returned home. The narration took me to my own feelings which I experienced while getting into the delivery room. It has been 14 years since I experienced the last delivery and yet I lost control and found myself crying in front of my interviewee. I then paused the interview for few minutes, tried to relax and asked excuses and resumed. The second case happened the moment I heard about the marriage of the stepsiblings in F5's family. I heard this on the phone from the person who was connecting me with the family. It was very simple for her to inform me about the marriage. I was lucky to have that shocking information ahead of time, as I got enough time to "put aside" my personal values and remain nonjudgmental while conducting the interview. These cases helped me to consciously develop my self-control skill and consistently monitor my perspective. In this regard, the challenges I experienced in one interview were giving me the opportunity to learn more and do better in upcoming interviews. For example, managing family interviews is extremely challenging and it requires frequent rescheduling. At first it was offending as it made me out of schedule. Later, I learned to have Plan Bs for every interview schedule.

3.3. Research Methods

3.3.1. *Sampling Technique and Sample Size*

As Creswell (2007) put it, participants in grounded theory are chosen considering their contribution to the development of the theory. Families were selected based on their symbolic representation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) of the features that were relevant for the study. Accordingly, purposive sampling technique was used to select families who qualified for the inclusion criteria set. I used two inclusion criteria. One is that at least one of the marriage partners should have brought a child or more at the time the blended family was formed. I used this criterion to explore how children influence blended family formation and the stepparent-stepchild relationship dynamics since the formation of the blended family. The other criterion is that the family should have been blended for a minimum of two years at the time of the data collection. As researches indicated that it can take a minimum of two years for families to create and solidify a new blended family (Braithwaite et al., 2001; Golish, 2003; Travers, 2021).

Blended families with different family structure, socio economic, religious, and educational background were recruited in the study to maximize the likelihood of getting various perspectives on the issue being explored. I recruited the participants using convenient sampling technique with some mix of opportunity sampling. I am a fulltime trainer at the Ethiopian Civil Service University and associate trainer at several other private and public training and consultancy firms. I used this opportunity to give a brief information about my research and the participants inclusion criteria to training participants and fellow trainers as well. Since training participants come to our organization from the different parts of the country, it gave me the chance to reach out blended families who live in different regions. The sampling was mainly convenient as the training participants or other people who were informed about my interest

connected me with blended families who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Besides, I got two blended family members using opportunity sampling techniques. One of these was a fellow trainer who was running a blended family of her own and the other woman appeared to be a participant in the training I delivered.

I was flexible on the number of participants; as looking for more participants was basically determined by the level of categorical saturation. However, as a grounded theory research, the sample size has to be large enough to reveal the family dynamics, similarities and differences. Based on the reviews I made so far, there is no specific figure given for the number of participants in a grounded theory. Different scholars suggest different sample size ranging from 20 to 50 in order to develop a well saturated theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Thomson, 2011; Morse, 2000). Creswell and Creswell (2018) reviewed many qualitative studies and came up with an estimate of 20-30 participants to take part in a grounded theory. Thomson (2011) analyzed one hundred articles that utilized grounded theory and interviews as a data collection method and found out the average sample size to be 25. Morse (2000) suggested 30 to 50 participants to grounded theory methodology. He recommended 30 interviews to fully develop patterns, concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions of the given phenomena.

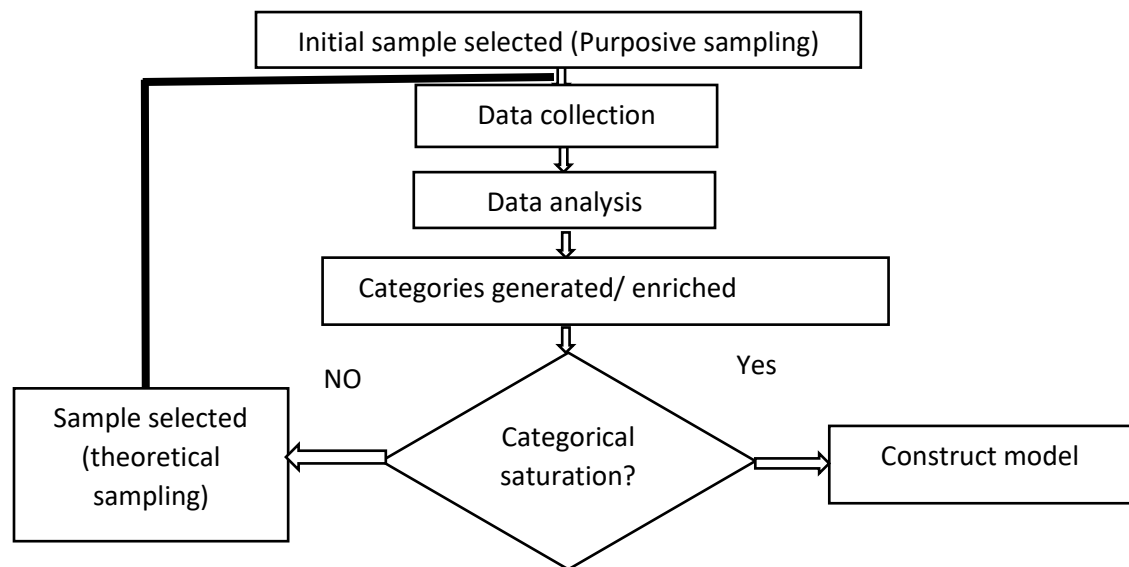
The most viable approach to resolve the sample size issue is data saturation or data richness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell, 2007; Thomson, 2011; Morse, 2000). As a grounded theory study, selection was guided by theoretical sampling. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) considered theoretical purpose and theoretical relevance as key criteria of selection in theoretical sampling. They stated that “Sampling continues until theoretical saturation is reached and no new analytical insights are forthcoming” p. 81.

As a grounded theory study, the data collection process was guided by theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation, as Charmaz (2014a) explained it occurred when no significant new insights from data can better describe, dimensionalize or contextualize the categories that have emerged from data. The idea of saturation itself comes from grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this research, twenty-five family members drawn from eight blended families took part and I terminated the data collection process when I believed categorical saturation is reached.

As suggested in Strauss and Corbin (1998), this research implemented different sampling strategies. During the initial phases, purposive sampling was used to select the first three families based on the inclusion criteria. Accordingly, I interviewed nine participants drawn from these three families in the first round of the data collection phase. Four, two and three participants were interviewed from F1, F2 and F3 respectively. The selected blended family members were supposed to have rich information in their blended family experience and they were interviewed using a relatively unstructured interview guide. Even within this phase, data collection and analysis were made simultaneously. The first family, F1, was a complex blended family as both marriage partners have a biological and step relationship with the children. I interviewed the parents and their respective stepdaughters. Then, I transcribed the four interviews verbatim and translated the transcriptions from Amharic to English. I then, gave the transcripts along with the translated versions to my mother who is a linguist and well experienced translator from Amharic to English and the vice versa. Then, I imported the translated interview files to NVivo 12 plus and employed line-by-line coding on each of the interview files. Then, I employed the constant comparative analysis method to compare the various data segments such as codes with codes, codes with categories and categories with categories. I repeated all these steps with the second

family and then with the third. Initial categories emerged from the analysis of the three family members. The initial categories were previous experience, blending procedure, value orientation, quality of life, and relationship with “Outsiders”. Later, in the theory formation phase, sampling was dictated by categorical gaps as identified by the constant comparative analysis method. This made sampling more of theoretical as it was intended to fill in the identified gaps to construct the models.

Figure 3. 1 Purposive and Theoretical Sampling



I presented the upgrading phase of my dissertation after interviewing 18 family members drawn from the first five blended families; three purposefully selected and two theoretically selected families. Then, I continued identifying the categorical gaps and employing theoretical sampling to select the consequent families to fill in the identified gaps. Accordingly, I kept on modifying the interview guide based on the information required to fill the gaps which made the guide more and more structured.

3.3.2. *Data Collection Methods*

As noted, the key concern of this research was analyzing issues related with family formation and family functioning in blended families with the aim of developing models that describe and explain the scenarios in blended families. In-depth interview was conducted using unstructured interview guide and data was collected on diverse family issues from the participant families. Narrative interviewing, which is considered as the most unstructured type of interviewing (Langellier, 1989) was conducted during the initial stages of the data collection phase. Accordingly, participant families were told to narrate their story which is related with their blended family life. Generally, interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory study (Foley, et. al, 2021; Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Meriam & Tsidel, 2015). And specifically, narrative interviews helped the participants to freely describe their experiences.

Interviews are common data collection tools in family focused researches. Freeman et al. (2021) conducted a study where 15 families participated; 57 family members aged from 6 to 80 years were interviewed at their homes. The research suggested the importance of flexibility and substantial interviewing experience to be compatible in working with dynamic and fluid family

environments so as to be successful regardless of the complexities one might face in family interviewing.

Hence, I collected, coded, and analyzed the data simultaneously (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and terminated data collection when theoretical saturation is meaningfully achieved. I also decided on the data that would be collected next. As is common in other qualitative researches, I served as the data collection instrument. Here I played a great role by consciously, actively, and intensely participating in getting clarified, elaborated, accurate, unique, and unanticipated responses from the participants. I conducted individual interview with 25 family members. Each interview was audio taped and then transcribed.

3.3.3. Data Quality Control

Lincoln and Guba as stated in Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to establish trustworthiness of a qualitative research. In light of these, I executed the major phases of the research including data collection, interpretation and reporting in a meticulously designed manner. Accordingly, all interviews were conducted by myself which helped me to apply my knowledge and experience in the data collection phase. I ensured that appropriate techniques and styles of interviewing were in place including rapport building, managing emotional outbursts, and dealing with sensitive data. This helped me to build trust and credibility with the participants. Besides, the place, date and time of all interviews were set by the participants for their convenience. Twenty-two participants were interviewed in their respective family's home while three were interviewed in the place they selected around their residence. I observed that the participants were comfortable during the interview process. According to Freeman et al., (2021) convenient place and time will help interviewees to be more comfortable, relaxed, and function effectively. However, Freeman also

mentioned the challenges of interviewing at home such as frequent interruptions, taking more time than planned and lack of adequate facility. Accidental cancellation of interviews was one of the major problems I faced. Usually, all participants in a family cancelled their interview as the reason for one member could work for the others as well. I made frequent rescheduling with participants and tried to have plan Bs to properly manage my time. The other problem was interruption of the interview session after it started. Mostly the interruption lasted for a brief period but in a couple of cases we were forced to resume after a day or two. In one of the cases, I was interviewing the father and at the middle of the session, his little daughter fell and took her to health center for tetanus injection. In the other case, I was interviewing the husband while the relatives of his wife came to visit them without prior notice. So, we finalized the interview with him on the day after and rescheduled the interview I was supposed to conduct with the other members for the other week. In the process, I learned to reduce the effect of all the anticipated and emerging challenges on the data quality.

I transcribed the audiotapes by myself and kept the data and all relevant records carefully. In addition, I conducted member checking at the preliminary analysis phase. Here, I took back the preliminary analysis to five participants who belong to different families and collected feedbacks on the representation of their experiences. I then modified the analysis based on the participants reflections. This enabled me and the participants to maintain equality in the power dynamics and collaborate in the data collection, interpretation, and reporting phases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This helped me to ensure the theory formulated is indeed grounded in the data. As Glaser (1965) stated presenting data as evidence for conclusions and indicating the codified procedures by which the researcher obtained the theory from the data is a standard approach to convey credibility.

Besides, I provided detailed information about each family as a unit and all its members so that readers can get complete information about the participants and their settings.

Immediately after interviewing a family, I revisited the raw data and recorded contextual information that might be useful for analysis. As recommended in Creswell and Poth (2018), I provided rich information through describing physical settings, movements, and activities. This, in turn, might help readers to make decisions on transferability of the findings to other settings with shared characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My reflexivity based on my own personal experiences related to the issue of interest also helped the readers to understand my stance and how it might have affected the interpretation. I rather used my strong connection with the issue under investigation as “power house” of the research. To this effect, Corbin (2009) described the relevance of the researcher’s inclination toward the topic as:

...it is very important for a researcher to be excited about the topic he or she is studying.

It is difficult for a researcher to be creative, do the hard work required, and keep plodding along over time if she or he lacks a passion for what is being studied p.43.

3.3.4. Interview Guide

I used a relatively unstructured interview guide (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) with the family member I interviewed first. This is the person who is perceived, by the members, to have rich information about the family. I forwarded a single question: “I would like you to tell me about your family life. Please include as many details as possible.” and then the narration went on in a natural and free-flowing manner. Once the interview started, I remained active listener interrupting only when I need clarification on the narrations. The interviews I made with the other family members were semi structured interviews guided by questions designed to get new

information and to clarify and elaborate already collected information. Hence, the questions vary from family to family and from member to member in a given family.

Though it is still unstructured, the interview guide used for consequent family interviews was modified based on the preliminary analysis of previous interviews. Accordingly, after the preliminary analysis of the first family's data, I added:

Please tell me about your previous family?

What were the things you considered (selection criteria) while blending your family?

After analyzing the second family's data, I added:

What type of relationship do you have with persons who are not living with the current family? (Your former spouse, biological parents, children, stepchildren, siblings, extended families)

Though every analysis kept on informing the initial interview guide, the interviews conducted during the first phase were more of unstructured. Then, I employed the attached semi structured interview guide after the emergence of initial categories. As the data collection process was continuously informed by the data analysis, the interview guide was modified in a way to achieve categorical saturation. This, in turn, made the final interview guide to be more and more structured.

3.3.5. *Method of Data Analysis*

Both the data collection and analysis activities were conducted simultaneously. I analyzed the collected data, decided on the next steps in data collection and analysis iteratively and dynamically. The interview transcripts were read repeatedly in order to come up with a comprehensive analysis of the data which leads to the identification of recurrent themes and subthemes. The data organization, analysis and presentation phases were supported by NVivo 12

Plus qualitative data analysis software. First, I transcribed the audio data and then I translated the Amharic version to English. Both the transcribed and translated data are available in Microsoft Word format. Though very tiresome and demanding, the transcription and translation processes helped me to get along with the interview data. Then, I imported the translated interview files to NVivo 12 Plus and developed initial codes. My familiarity with the data facilitated the task of generating line by line codes using NVivo. After developing the initial line by line codes. Then, the continuous comparison method was employed to classify the extracted codes based on their similarities and differences. Accordingly, patterns were detected and categories were formed. This process helped to identify themes and subthemes.

Similar to the data collection process, I served as the central data analysis instrument. Both the data collection and analysis activities were conducted simultaneously (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I analyzed the collected data while still interviewing other families (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Besides, analyzing the data employed the constant comparative analysis method which involves identifying the similarities and differences between data segments or categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) was used as more and more evidences emerged. This method helped me to identify the data gap and decide on the actions to be taken in order to fill the identified gaps.

I constantly compared data collected from participants with ideas about the emerging model to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on how it works (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the research employed constructivist approach to grounded theory, a core category was formed by connecting all sub categories to build a model.

Data analysis was conducted in three broader steps; data organization, coding, and theme development (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, I organized the data and made

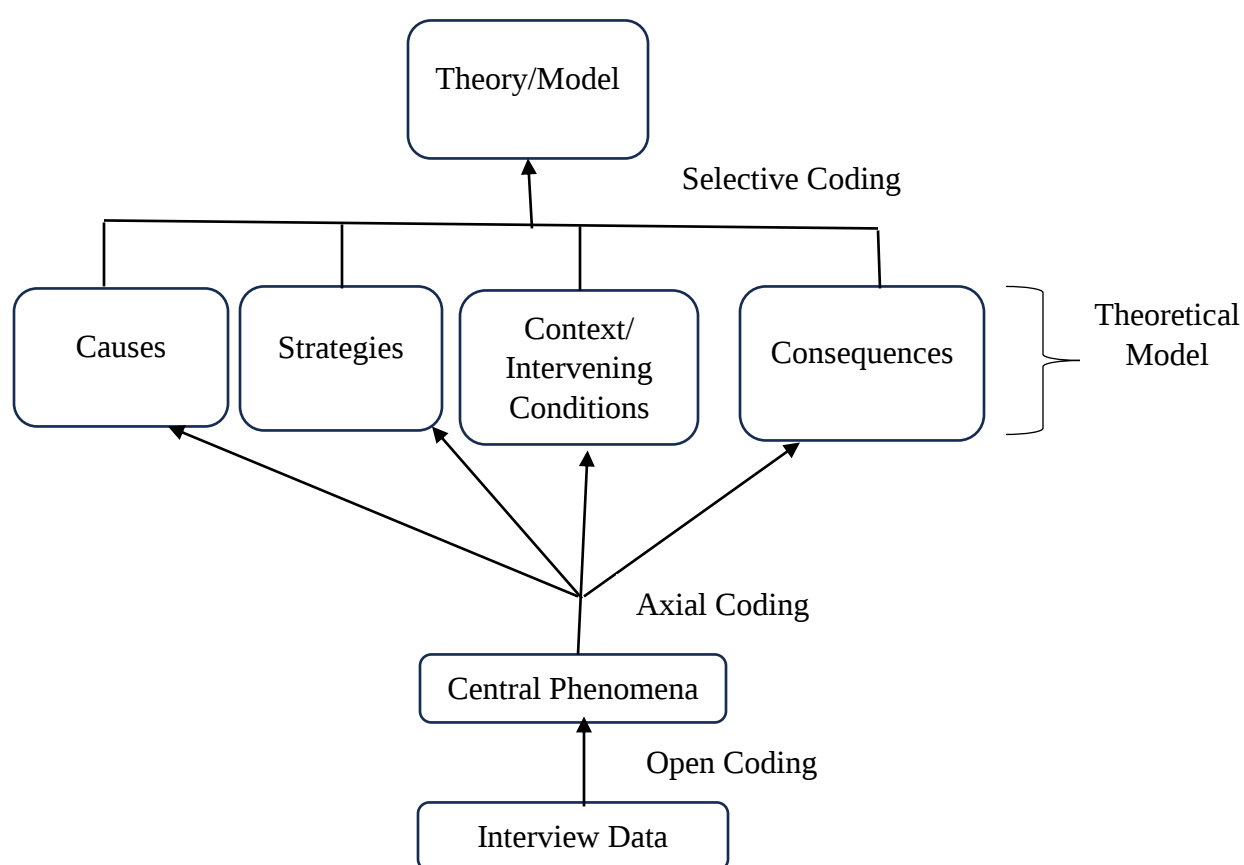
it ready for analysis. The organization included transcribing the data, maintaining the soft copy of field notes, and sorting and arranging the data. At this stage, I carefully read the whole transcript and strived to get the overall picture of the data. In my reading, I reflected and kept margin notes as and when ideas came to my mind. These notes (memos) later enhanced my explanation of the setting, context, and participants of the study.

Then, I made use of data coding to further organize the data. As a grounded theory, the analysis employed the three coding types- open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2007). In open coding, the transcripts and field note were segmented into categories and each category was labeled with a term or phrase. The categories were examined in relation with the context, meanings, and circumstances of blended families. Here, I made use of the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to enrich the categories with relevant information. I continually and iteratively looked for information that fits-in each category from the transcripts, field notes and upcoming interviews. This process continued until the categories were saturated i.e. until the data was no more insightful in terms of describing, dimensionalizing, or contextualizing the categories Charmaz (2014a).

As Creswell and Poth (2018) described the process consists of going back and forth between the participants, gathering new interviews, and then returning to the evolving theory to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on how it works. Data winnowing was conducted at this stage to reject the data that is not relevant for the study. Generally speaking, open coding is a process that reduces the huge data into manageable categories. According to Creswell (2007), these initial set of categories characterize the process or action being explored in the grounded theory study. Then, the researcher identified a single core category which will be the focus of the theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018) out of the given set of categories.

As Creswell (2007) put it the researcher can use two alternative techniques to select this central category. One is the emphasis given by the participants- select the one which is extensively discussed by the participants. The other is considering conceptual interest- select the one which is central to the process being studied in the grounded theory. The selected central phenomenon becomes central feature of the theory. Axial coding is used to explain the central phenomenon and form the theoretical model. This process requires examining the data and/ or collecting new data to identify issues related with the central phenomenon. Here the researcher looked for detail information including causal conditions that influenced the issue of interest, the strategies for addressing the issue, the context and intervening conditions that shape the strategies, and the consequences of undertaking the strategies (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, a model has been drawn from the intersection of the categories. Figure 3.3 depicts the overall data analysis procedure.

Figure 3. 2 Data Analysis Procedure in Grounded Theory



All in all, I executed complex analysis that focuses on the processes, actions and interactions (Creswell, 2007) with the themes to develop them into a theoretical model. Generally, the data analysis procedures and specifically the data organization and coding parts were supported by NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Particularly the coding and query facilities it provides helped me to organize the interview data, to better understand it, and more importantly to create categories based on similarities and differences of the interview data. For example, after creating a code named -former spouse, running a query named “former spouse” on the interview data brought all data where family members reflected about former spouse together. This, in turn, gave me the opportunity to give a deeper look on the query results and identify the similarities and differences between and among the data segments in this regard. Running the visual facilities such as Word Tree and Word Cloud on the query results also facilitated the analysis phase. As Rennie (2006) stated NVivo was designed especially for the grounded theory method and it has a visible role in reducing the time required for analysis. However, the researcher, not the software, served as the major data analysis instrument.

3.3.6. Ethical Consideration

As research conducted on families, anticipating the possible ethical issues, and giving them due consideration throughout the research process is vital. The researcher strictly followed APA Ethical Principles and has got ethical clearance from Addis Ababa University, School of Psychology, Ethical Review Committee. I believe the interviews helped the participants to be reflexive and learn from their experiences which in turn might have enhanced betterment of the family and its members. A consent form that includes a clearly stated purpose of the research, respects the norms and values of blended families and considers the sensitive issues that might arise in such families has been prepared. Detail information was provided to the participants

prior to getting their consent. I obtained consent from adult family participants. For children who were under 18, I collected consent from them and assent from their respective parents. However, individual consent was collected for children who are older than seventeen. Privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data have been protected. Anonymity of participants was maintained by assigning codes for families, members and places. The data is kept in a safe and secured place.

Besides, I was determined to be reflexive enough to reflect professional ethics in reporting the findings. Accordingly, I respected the diversified perspectives that arise from the participants and reported the full range of findings without suppressing, falsifying or inventing findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a woman running a blended family, I examined my own assumptions, beliefs, values, feelings, thoughts and experiences to reduce their possible effect on the study. I tried my best to be mindful while conducting interviews and give the participants the opportunity to share their side of the story in a relaxed and free flowing manner. I recommended a psychotherapy service to participants drawn from two families who were facing severe problems in their family functioning. I gave due recognition for others' work in direct quotes and paraphrases.

Chapter Four

4. Findings

I organized this chapter in five distinct but related sections. In the first section, I described the participants and their family context. Accordingly, each of the eight families are presented independently and details that describe the family context such as tenure since the blended family is formed, how each of the marriage partners ended their former relationship, age and number of children partners brought to the blended family, the family's economic, educational occupational information is provided. I hope this section would let the reader know the participants which is very important to understand the information provided in the upcoming sections.

In the second section, I presented the process the families followed to form their respective blended families. Under this section three major categories namely, previous experience, facilitators and speed of blended family formation are presented. The former of these categories has three sub categories- similar experience, problem state and aspiration state. This section is culminated by presenting the family formation model that is constructed from the aforementioned categories and subcategories.

The subsequent two sections are used to present the blended family functioning model and the model that describes the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning. The blended family formation model depicts two states- problem state and aspiration state. The blended family functioning model is emerged from the family functioning experiences of the participant blended family members. Accordingly, the model describes three categories- functional blended families, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families and their characterizing features. Finally, the model that depicts the link between

blended family formation and blended family functioning is presented followed by a list of key points that inferred from it.

4.1.Participants and Their Family Context

Data was collected from eight families. A minimum of two and a maximum of five members were interviewed from each family. Both simple and complex blended families have participated in this study. In simple blended families there is only one stepparent in the household; the other parent is biologically linked with all the children in the household. In complex blended families, parents have both biological and stepchildren in the household. Participant families have been blended from a minimum of three years to a maximum of 15 years. In depth interviews were conducted with a total of 25 family members; eight husbands, eight wives, five daughters and four sons. For the sake of maintaining privacy and confidentiality, codes are used for all family members. Accordingly, families are designated by F1to F8. Husbands, wives, daughters and sons are identified by adding the letters H, W, D and S respectively in the family code. For example, F3W represents the wife in family 3 and F5S represents the son in family 5. In families where I interviewed more than one daughter or son, I used D1, D2 or S1, S2 to distinguish one child from the other. Table 1 gives brief information about the participant families.

Table 4. 1***Participants Profile***

Name	Designation	Type	Common Child	Years since blended	No. of Members Interviewed
Family 1	F1	Complex	Yes	11	4
Family 2	F2	Simple	Yes	6	3
Family 3	F3	Simple	Yes	7	2
Family 4	F4	Simple	No	3	3
Family 5	F5	Simple	No	12	5
Family 6	F6	Complex	Yes	15	4
Family 7	F7	Complex	No	3	2
Family 8	F8	Simple	Yes	6	2

F1

F1H, 42 and F1W, 35 have been married for 11 years. The couple's marriage was facilitated by a person who is the confessor of F1W and best friend of F1H. They brought their respective daughters from their previous relationship. The couple lost their first spouses with death. The family consists of seven members; two parents, two stepsiblings from the previous relationship, two mutual children from the current relationship and the house maid. The girls, F1D1 and F1D2, were nine and eight years old respectively when the new family was formed. Then the couple gave birth to a girl and a boy who were seven and five years old respectively when the data was collected. F1H has first degree in Theology, diploma in Accounting and he is a graduating class student for BA in management. He worked as an accountant and earned a monthly salary of 7,000 Birr. F1W is a business woman who dropped out from grade 6. F1D1, F1H's daughter from his previous marriage is a first-year medicine student. F1D2, F1W's daughter from her previous marriage, is a second-year accounting student in the TVET program. The elder and younger mutual children are in grade two and kindergarten respectively. They live in their own two bedrooms house. They have extra rooms in their compound which they rented it

out. The house was built by the late husband of F1W. The family earned a monthly income of 25, 000 Birr on average. The house maid is 27 and a grade six drop out. The family members believed they are leading a better life after blending their families than the life they had as single parent households. Financial stability, positive behavior of individuals-especially F1W, shared values and family members attachments were the major factors that enhanced their family functioning. The major sources of conflict were child disciplining, value differences on education and managing TV schedules.

F2

F2H, 47 and F2W, 44 have been married for six years. Each has a daughter from their first marriages which ended in divorce. F2W has a master's degree in Public Management and F2H has the same in Agriculture. F2D, F2W's daughter, lives with the current family while F2H's daughter lives with her mother. F2D is a third-year university student while the couple's common child is five years old boy who is in kindergarten. F2W is a lecturer in a public university and F2H is a consultant at a manufacturing industry. The family earns 30, 000 Birr per month. They live in a two-bedroom rented house. F2H deposits 1,000 Birr per month to his ex-wife's account for child support. F2W's former husband is married and has children whereas F2H's former wife is a single mother of her daughter. The family has a house maid who has completed grade 12. Having a common child, better economic status, personal and social wellbeing, family members attachment and understanding were the major manifestations of the family's functioning. Differences in child rearing, value differences in spirituality, need to be understood without verbal communication, and inefficiency in financial management are the major gaps the family is struggling with.

F3

F3H, 62 and F3W, 41 have been married for seven years. The couple's marriage was facilitated by a person who is a friend both for F2W and F3H's brother. F3H, who neither had been married nor had a child before, joined F3W and her seven years daughter and established the new family. The couple have a six years old boy common child. The family has a house maid who works for the family during the day and returned back home during the night. F3W is an artist who lives in Addis Ababa while F3H lives in the USA. The daughter is 14 years and she is an 8th grader while the boy is in grade one. The family allotted 15,000 Birr, F2H sends 8,000.00 Birr every month and F3W's monthly income is 7,000.00 on average. They live in a single bedroom condominium which F3W bought when she divorced with her first husband. Her first husband is married and has three children from his new relationship. The family believed that their family functioning has worsened as a result of blending their families. Unexpected family life, abusive relationship, remorse and relationship with former spouse were the major factors that affected the family functioning. The couple in this family blamed the person who facilitated their introduction for getting them to the 'wrong person'. And yet, this family is happy for getting a child from the new relationship and considered it as the major benefit of the blended family.

F4

F4H, 50 and F4W, 33 have been married for three years. The couple's marriage was facilitated by a person who was the customer of F4W, she was working at her own local coffee corner at that time, and relative of F4H. F4H, who has completed grade 12, is a driving license trainer. He earns a net pay of 4,950 Birr per month. He has three children, a girl and two boys, from his previous marriage. His eldest daughter is 15 years old, the second and the third are a 5-

and 3-years old boys. His first wife died on the 16th day after she gave birth to her third child. F4W had attended primary education up to grade three. She had been engaged in small scale businesses until she established the current family, now she is a housewife. She had been married twice but both ended in divorce. She has two children, a daughter and a son from her first husband. Her children live with their grandmother, F4W's mother since she divorced her first husband. The family lives in a single room house provided by F4W's brother. Recognition, attachment and support from F4W's mother and brother were the factors that contribute for the family's functioning. F4W's guilty consciousness due to the family's inability to support her nonresident children, the couple's rejection by family members and community members due to the formation of the blended family, the couple's inability to get a common child that "binds" the family members, and poverty were the major factors that aggravate the family's functioning. The family is struggling to maintain stability.

F5

F5H, 39 and F5W, 50 have been married for 12 years. F5W was a widowed single parent of her three children who were 14, 9, and 5 years old when F5H who was a bachelor joined in. F5W has been a business woman, she produces and sells traditional cloths, since she married her late husband. She lives in a big compound which she inherited from her grandparents. After the death of her former husband, she constructed many rooms in the compound for rent to avoid financial challenges. She earns around 40,000 Birr per month from the rent and her business altogether. F5H is a government employee who earns 3000 Birr per month. F5S1, 26, completed his first degree in Accounting and Finance and he is an accountant in a private bank. F5D, 21, is doing her degree in a private college. F5S2, 17, is an 11th grader. The family members reflected that the youngest has always a positive relationship with his stepfather; just like a "real" father

and child attachment. However, the stepparent-stepchild relationship with the other children is getting worse and worse from time to time. This, in turn, is the major factor that leads the family to be dysfunctional. The couple believed that the family had been leading a better life until the children grew up.

F6

F6H, 68 and F6W, 45 have been married for 15 years. F6H has a son from his late wife, who died while their child was 10 years old. Then he married F6W when his son was 12. F6W brought two children from her former two marriages which ended in divorce. Her daughter was eight and her son was three when she married F6H. F6H has never attended formal education and he cannot read and write. F6W had completed grade three. They believed they are in good economic status when compared with the community members. They live in a wide compound which encompasses a three-room corrugated iron-sheet house, a cottage for cooking and stable for their cattle are resided which is an indicator of better economic status in the village where most live in huts. F6S1, the eldest son of F6H, and the eldest daughter of F6W are now married and have a two years old daughter. Stepsiblings' marriage is not something strange in the community, as the family members reflected. Having a two-parent family, family support, economic stability, social recognition and family expansion especially having a grandchild were the major factors that promote the family's functioning. Whereas dictatorship, interfamily conflict, and family member's health condition were the factors that have been affecting the families functioning. Generally speaking, the family believes that they are in good terms regarding their family functioning experiences.

F7

F7H, 60 and F7W, 45 have been married for three years. Both of them ended up their marriage in divorce. F7W has one child, a son of 23 years old from her former marriage and F7H has two daughters aged 19 and 24 years old from his former marriage. F7W and F7H single parent their respective children for 15 and 12 years respectively. Their children were concerned about the loneliness their parents would face after they joined university or got married. So, they were pushing their respective parents to consider marrying someone who would be a good company to the rest of their life. It was with this similar intention that they opened their hearts for a marriage partner. They met for the first time on a training program facilitated by F7H where F7W was a trainee and an active participant during the five days training. Their similar experience helped them to understand each other and to consider blending their families. Then, F7W and her son left their private rented house and joined F7H and his two children who were living in a big villa which F7H got from his organization. The family members believe that responsibility sharing, sense of having a complete family, enjoyable experiences are the factors that promote the family's functioning. Rigid boundary in financial management, and F7W's fear of potential love affair between her son and her stepdaughter are sources of concern for the family members.

F8

F8H, 52 and F8W, 37 have been married for six years. F8H neither had been married nor had a child before the formation of the new family. F8W was single parenting her two children as her former husband was imprisoned. Her daughter was 8 and her son was 6 years old when they established the blended family. She was a house wife at that time and she was economically challenged to raise her children as her former husband was the bread winner. F8H was a lecturer

at a private college who was abusing khat and alcohol. His parents and siblings were concerned about his physical health and emotional wellbeing and they were suggesting him to get married assuming doing so would help him to get rid of his addiction. F8W was a friend of his little sister and she used to visit them at home. F8W and F8H became very close to each other following the imprisonment of F8W's former husband. Finally, the couple decided to get married hoping the new family would solve their respective problems. However, their marriage was not accepted by their parents and siblings for different reasons. Though F8H's family members were consistently advising him to get married, his decision to marry a mother of two was completely unacceptable for them. F8W's family members did not accept the marriage as she has broken her promise with her husband. They believed it is a sinful act to get married while her husband is imprisoned. Regardless of the rejection that comes from their respective families, the blended family members were leading a better life nearly for the first four years. However, their family life has been struggling with serious challenges for the past two years. They believe that external family members involvement, release of F8W's former husband from prison and issues related with stepparent and stepchild relationship are the major setbacks of the family's functioning.

I interviewed all except three participants in their respective homes. I made the interview with F3W and F2H in a cafeteria located around their respective residence and I interviewed F7W in her office compound. F3W's single bedroom condominium was sheltering her relatives who were displaced due to the civil war in the northern part of Ethiopia. The common child in F2 was highly attached with F2H and he wanted to get his full attention whenever they are together. Hence, literally, no one can engage in a serious conversation with F2H as long as he is with his child. It was for this reason that we conducted the interview in a nearby cafeteria. F7W suggested that she would feel safe and relaxed to share her family experiences outside of her residence. I

conducted face to face interview with all participants except F3H. I interviewed him in a video call as he was living in the USA at the time of the interview. F5S1 and F6S1 were already married and had established their own households. Yet, I decided to interview them as both were living in the same compound with their parents and were highly engaged in the day-to-day lives of the selected blended families.

F1W and F5W were widowed while all the other wives were divorced. All the wives in the eight blended families have at least one child from their former relationship. Seven of these were single parenting their child[ren] while F4W left her children with her parents. Four of the eight husbands were single parenting their respective child[ren] before the formation of the blended family. All of these, with the exception of F7H, were widowers. Three of the eight husbands (F3H, F5H and F8H) had neither been married nor had a child before the formation of the current family. Age differences that range from 3 years (the couple in F2) to 23 years (the couple in F6) are observed between the marriage partners. More than 10 years age difference is seen in six of the eight couples. In all the cases, except the couple in F5, the husbands are older than the wives. F5H is 11 years younger than his wife. The couples in all families were living together with the exception of the couple in F3 who were living in different countries. All couples except F5 were legally married.

4.2. Blended Family Formation

Three major categories namely, previous experience, facilitators and speed of family formation emerged from the data participants provided regarding the process of their blended family formation. The former category has three subcategories- similar experience, problem state and aspiration state. Each of these categories are discussed in this section and the section is

finally culminated by the model of blended family formation that emerged from the aforementioned categories.

4.2.1. *Previous Experience*

Under this category, I organized the stories family members shared with me regarding the experiences they had prior to the formation of the current blended family. Family members relate, in one way or another, their former experience with their blended family formation. The information categorized under previous experience is has emanated from three subcategories namely; similar experience, problem state and aspiration state.

4.2.1.1. Similar Experience. An old proverb goes to say “Birds of the same feather fly together.” Having similar life experiences have been valued both by members of the same family and across participant families. Accordingly, the role of similarity in establishing unity and understanding was boldly reflected in three of the eight families: F1, F2 and F7. The couple in F1 had similar life experiences. Both were raising their respective daughters alone before blending their families. Both lost their previous spouses with death. They were interested in getting life partners who had experienced the challenges of single parenting just like them. They were interested to marry a person who has a single daughter. F1H and F1W described the situation they were in before establishing the current family as follows:

My former wife died when my daughter was only six years old. Since I could not afford to hire a house maid, I was the one who took care of my daughter. I was responsible to cook and wash our clothes, I was the one who prepared her lunch box and accompany her to school. As a priest, my duties at church were also demanding. (F1H)

My first marriage was a family arranged one and it was executed in Ethiopian Orthodox Church through Sirate Teklil (church procedure and ceremony of approving marriage).

My (former) husband was a very good person but he died in accident when my daughter was five years old. Life after his death was full of ups and downs. I became the only responsible person for every aspect of my own and my daughter's life. I was engaged in home management, child rearing and business. (F1W)

Similarity in background has also been reflected in F2. The first marriages of this couple ended in divorce. Each has a daughter from the dissolved marriage. Both believed they had tried to maintain their first marriage for the sake of their respective daughter's wellbeing. As the couple reported, both experienced emotional disturbances after the divorce. They elaborated,

As a young lady I believed one should live with the first spouse and my divorce was accidental. I was very much disturbed. How could I answer the question of my daughter? How could I support her and fulfill what she wants to get and I was very much worried by such questions which I was not ready to answer. (F2W)

My divorce was followed by frustration. My former wife has never allowed me to see my daughter. Since she is very aggressive, I preferred submitting to her wills rather than requesting my legal right to visit my child. I was afraid that she could harm her if I confronted her or took the case to court. I haven't seen my daughter even once for the past eight years. (F2H)

The couple in F7 also had similar experiences before establishing their blended family. Both ended their first marriages in divorce. They had been single parenting their children for more than a decade. Both of them remained single for many years to protect their children from "evil stepparents". F7W was twenty-eight years old when she divorced with her former husband. Her mother and sisters were concerned about the life challenges she might face as a young single mother. Hence, they used to persistently advise her to get married leaving her child to them. This

advice was upsetting to her son as he was afraid not to miss the love and warmth she provided him. So, he used to warn her not to consider what others were saying which was also what she wanted. She was determined to raise her child by herself. And she witnessed that they were living a happy life; she never felt any gap by being a single Mom. She said she started to open herself for marriage as a result of the changes demonstrated by her son. She elaborated,

Later on, my son who was strongly against the idea of my marriage until he joined preparatory (grade 11) started to change his perception. He became very much concerned about my life as he was left less than two years to join university. He blamed himself for warning me to avoid marriage. He even accused me for taking his words for granted. He used to say, “you should have married ignoring my fears; after all I was just a little boy to decide on such serious matters.” He was feeling guilty to leave me alone after all those years of togetherness. So, he insisted on getting someone who would be a good company.
(F7W)

Similarly, the very idea of F7H’s marriage emanated from his daughters. The elder was 21 and the younger was 16 when he got married. As they grew up, the girls started to think about the fate of their father perceiving that he has successfully accomplished the challenging journey of single parenting. Besides, his elder daughter was planning to get married after few years so the girls raised the issue with their father and begged him to get married. He reflected how that event influenced him as follows:

It was very surprising for me as we had never discussed such type of issue before. They said they are fully grown up and they can manage themselves. They started comforting me by saying from this time onwards even the worst stepmother would not harm them as they are adults and they can also support each other. Hearing those words was really...

really comforting for me. You know, as a father I know they were growing up but I never expected that level of maturity from them. I never forget the challenges I faced as a single father but hearing about it from them made it unique. Knowing that they are in turn worried about my personal life made me emotional. At that moment, I was struggling to hold back my tears.

The stepsiblings in F1, F1D1 and F1D2, were also in similar context before the formation of the new family. Both were feeling lonely and they were sad for their respective parents were engaged in over-stretched responsibilities. As F1D1 put it:

My childhood was a burden for my father. He was the one who washes my body and clothes, prepares food, supports me in my education, takes me to and returns me from school. He was responsible for each and every activity at home. I used to wish for him to be as free as the men in our neighbors and the fathers of my friends. Moreover, I had no one at home to play with; I wished if we were able to afford hiring a house maid who would support him and play with me when Ababa (in Amharic it meant father) was not at home.

F1D2 had experienced her mother's distress after the loss of her father. She stated that her mother was always crying and complaining about her bad luck. She described how her mother was strict while raising her in this way:

(F1W) was extremely strict while she raised me. I was not allowed to get out of my house and to play with my friends even within our compound. Her great fear was that if I became a bad girl, people would attribute that to her inability to discipline a child. She used to warn me that “Ye set lij tasbiyignalesh”) [Amharic phrase that reflects the inability of a widow or a single mother to raise a well-mannered child.]

Another similarity is observed across family members between F1W and F7W as both of them were concerned about the communities' doubt in the child rearing ability of single mothers. The child rearing style of these two mothers was informed by their respective community's value system.

I tried my best to base the classification of partners' former state on the data they provided regarding their pre-blended family life. Accordingly, I checked on two things to identify the partners former state as problem state. The first one is the severity of the state they were in as expressed by the partners themselves. The second is the fact that they explained the act their blended family formation as a way out from that state. Similarly, I classified partners' former state as aspiration state based on two points. First, if they were in a relatively better situation at least in terms of securing their basic needs such as their shelter, food, and health condition. Second, if they justified their action of blending their families with something other than ensuring their basic needs.

4.2.1.2. Problem State. Some partners described the challenging situation they were in before blending their families. I tried my best to base the classification on the data partners provided regarding their former life. Basically, I checked on two things to classify partners as belonging in problem state. First, severity of the state they were in as expressed by the partners themselves. Second, they attributed blending their family as a way out from the state they were in back then. Accordingly, economic challenge, struggling with child rearing, poor health condition and exposure to gender-based violence were their major challenges. Economic challenge was a shared problem while gender differences were observed in the others. Men partners associated their blended family formation with the need to get care and support for self and children. Here are reflections from the then widower single fathers.

Taking care of the little boys was very much challenging for me. That was the only reason that pushed me to marry another woman while I was still mourning the loss of my former wife, who died on the 16th day after she gave birth to our third child (F4H).

My former wife died when my son was 10. I have been a good farmer all the time but I am not good at child rearing. My relatives and friends advised me to get married and raise my child properly (F6H).

Since I could not afford to hire a house maid, I was the one who took care of my daughter. I was responsible to cook and wash our clothes, I was the one who prepared her lunch box and accompany her to school. As a priest, my duties at church were also demanding (F1H).

As a person living and working in the USA and experienced difficulties to overcome the life challenges he encountered there, F3H decided to get a “wife” who could support and treat him. He explained his decision: “I decided to get a wife who can support me in generating income and treat me at home. It has been hard to get healthy food and my medication on time which exacerbated my health condition”.

Women participants’ decision to form blended families had been mainly influenced by economic challenge and their exposure to gender-based violence. They shared their feelings:

The men in my neighborhood were abusive; they tried to snatch part of my land assuming that I am incapable, a widowed woman who would give up to pressure (F1W).

There were two men who nagged me for marriage. Especially one of them was abusive; when I said no, he started threatening me. He said, “if you would not marry me, I would abduct you.” (F4W).

It was the most challenging time in my life. I was not able to feed myself and my two children. The father of my daughter was imprisoned and that of my son was irresponsible. So, I accepted his (F6H's) proposal and joined his family just the day after our introduction. (F6W)

I was not able to pay for the house rent. So, I along with my two children, left that house and moved to his place following his offer. (F8W)

Partners in problem state associated their decision to blend with the challenging state they were in. They explained the purpose of blending their respective families with the need to curb the problem they had been struggling with. At least one of the partners in F1, F4, F6 and F8 reflected on the relationship between their blended family formation and the state they were in prior to it.

F4 was formed for the sake of getting support and treatment. Life for F4H was challenging as his wife died leaving their three children. The eldest was 12 while the youngest was a two-weeks infant when she died. His wife's death also affected him economically as she was a working mother who earned a better salary than him. Since he could not afford hiring a baby sitter, his wife's parents raised the youngest child until he turned one. Then, they brought him back to F4H and told him to raise all the three together. As he reiterated, that was a very tough time in his family life. He was financially struggling and he had no one to support him in raising the kids, especially the younger two. It was to overcome this challenge that he decided to marry a new wife. F4H reflected it this way:

Remarriage was not my plan. I never thought to marry another woman. I loved my first wife very much. Taking care of the little boy was very much challenging for me. That was the only reason that pushed me to marry another woman. He (the youngest) was only one year old when I got married.

The couple in F8 formed the blended family with different intentions. F8W was in severe social and financial crisis as her former husband was imprisoned leaving her and her two children without a penny. F8H developed a feeling of love as the couple become more and more close to each other. They elaborated,

He (former husband) was a banker and was accused of sabotage. Everything was accidental for me. He said nothing about the crime. My children were seven and five years old when he got imprisoned. We were living in a private rented house; you know it is automatic, either you have to pay or leave their house. My parents were not able to support me. I got my current husband while I was in that situation. (F8W)

I knew her (F8W) even before her husband's (former) imprisonment. She was my sister's friend. And she used to come to our home with her children. The kids were so adorable. She was very kind, humble and respectful. She used to advise me to take care of my health as I was alcoholic, chew khat, and smoke cigarettes. As we get close and close, I started to develop a special feeling for her. I loved her. What won my heart was her personality. She was super nice. So, I decided to marry her. (F8H)

F8H shared with me that everyone in his close circle were against his decision as they believed that he had a better opportunity than marrying a mother of two. According to F8H, particularly his mother and one of his best friends challenged him a lot and tried to show his prospect if he concluded the marriage. His mother's concern was on the economic challenge he may face due to the rapid transition from managing only himself to being the only bread winner for a family of four members. This was the warning that came from his mother, “ልጄ የሰው ሰው የሚበላውን ሽሮ እና በርበሬ እየተቆጣጠርክ መኖር ካሰኘህ ምን ማድረግ እችላለሁ?” verbatim translated as, “My son, what shall I do if you prefer leading your life checking and controlling the resources being

consumed by people who do not belong to you?” His friend’s concern was on the challenges he might face as the children particularly the then little boy grew up. His friend was worried in the power imbalance that would arise as he (F8H) gets older and weaker and his stepson gets younger and stronger. He recalled the words of his friend, “የሚሰጥ ልጅ እና የበር መቃን እያደር ይጠነካል፡፡” literally it means, stepchildren become more and more stiff as they grow up. He said “It is resisting all these concerns and warnings that I decided to marry her.”

F1W perceived she was exposed to lots of social pressures (her God father, relatives, neighbors and community associations) encouraged her to live being married so as to protect herself and raise her child properly. She was also concerned about protecting her property from deceivers, as she referred “my neighbors and the men in my surroundings”. She thinks that the pressures came due to the fact that she was a widowed single mother. She said that many of her neighbors mistreated and harassed her and disrespected her territory. She reiterated “They tried to snatch a part of my land assuming that I am incapable, a woman who would give up to pressure.” She believed someone from her deceased husband’s family was conspiring to forcefully get her out of her home. She also described that her neighbors were pushing her to sell her house for a cheap price. According to F1W, one of her former husband’s relatives was threatening her assuming that she did not deserve to live in that house after their relative died without using his property. He used to deal with brokers and it was common to be “visited” by potential buyers without her prior awareness and permission. She considered that getting married helps to overcome such challenges. She described, “My neighbors harassed me a lot since there was no man in my house. You see, people respect you, your compound and your belongings when you have a man that protects you.”

F1W and F4W symbolized husbands to protection, dignity and respect. For them, marriage is a way of getting protected from disrespect, abuse and harassment. As F4W stated:

Before him (her current husband), there were two men who were requesting me for marriage. Especially one of them was pressuring me. But when I said no, he started threatening me. He said, if you would not marry me, I would abduct you with bajaj [he was a bajaj driver]. I was frustrated suspecting that he might use some drug like hashish to make me unconscious and did what he wanted. So, when this person, my current husband, came in between, I immediately accepted his offer to get protection.

F1H attributed the purpose of forming the new family as “I wanted to get married for the wellbeing of my child and to protect myself from bodily temptation.” By bodily temptation, he is referring to sexual desire. And yet, as a religious person, he strived to avoid sex out of marriage as he believed having sex out of marriage is a sinful act. Hence, through marriage he could satisfy his sexual desire and maintain the wellbeing of his daughter as well.

F6 was formed with mutual understandings on the benefits that the marriage would bring to each family. F6H’s former wife died when their son was 10 years old. He never experienced economic challenge as he has many plots of land and is a good farmer. Single parenting was very challenging for F6H since he was accustomed only to farming. Since he was not supposed to work the “women’s’ duties”, his relatives and friends were suggesting him to “bring a woman” who could manage the house and raise his son. On the contrary, economic challenge was the primary reason that made F6W along with her two children to join F6H and his son, F6S1. The father of her first child was supportive and he used to give annual food supplies for his daughter until he got imprisoned. Whereas, the father of her second child has never supported her in anything. When the support that used to come from her first husband was terminated following

his imprisonment, F6W suffered a lot to raise her children. It was at this time that her current husband requested her to be his wife. The couple then discussed and reached at consensus to live and raise their children together.

4.2.1.3. Aspiration State. Partners classified in aspiration state were those who reported to be in a relatively better state at least in terms of securing their basic needs such as their shelter, food and health condition. Consequently, these partners justified their action of blending their families with something other than ensuring their survival needs. The partners categorized in this state are those who blended their families assuming that they would be better off with a partner than continuing being single for the rest of their life. Unlike the partners in problem state, the partners who belong here were not experiencing a pushing factor prior to forming their current family. They just wanted to enjoy life better and to satisfy the desires of their children. Here are some of the reflections that came from the marriage partners who belong in the aspiration category:

They (his daughters) were right in advising me to get married. In one way, it is a sign of celebrating my success in rearing my children. Life has its own phases. They were no more dependent on me. My children are moving forward, they are graduating, getting married, giving birth. It was time to get a person who feels and shares my happiness in such events. (F7H)

F2W was inspired by the opportunity of getting a person who was concerned about the wellbeing of her daughter. She stated that the men who approached her before her current husband were nice to her but they were not concerned at all about her daughter; they even did not care to greet her in telephone conversations. Experiencing even those who looked warm to her were cold when it came to her daughter, she was nonchalant towards having a serious

relationship with men. However, F2H has helped her to develop a positive attitude towards him.

She witnessed that

...but I came to know how matured and how kind and genuine he was. I really do not know how I could define this gentleman. My heart was filled with happiness. You know what I did? I decided to introduce him with my daughter right away. His affection to my daughter made me to reconsider my thought of remarriage.

It was the sincere desire of her son that motivated F5W to form a blended family. She became attracted to F5H as she believed he was a loving husband to her and a person committed to satisfy the desires of her children. She explained,

Mainly I married to give an end to the everyday question of my youngest child as he was consistently asking about having a father. He was eager to get a father who accompanies him to school, takes him to game zones and other recreation places. Luckily, I got a person who loves and takes care of me. A person who is committed to fulfill the desires of the children. (F5W)

Similar to her husband's, F7W's marriage was influenced by her son's concern. He was worried as it was time for him to join college. The warning that came from her son made her unable to bear the perception of being alone. It was this situation that made her to open her heart and look for a life partner. She described,

I got married when my son was at the verge of completing high school. I was worried about being alone. Once my son told me that "Mom, only my single leg is at home, the other is out." That expression was very powerful. He was right; he was about to leave home. Who is going to be by my side whenever I needed protection? Who will be there to

share my joy and sorrow? Who will be there with me in my typical day? With who am I going to share my day-to-day experiences? (F7W).

The partners in this category were aspiring for expanding their families such as getting a child, substituting the missed parent, and getting stepsiblings to their children. The women in this state were aspiring to fulfill the desires of their children and enjoy life with a marriage partner. Some were aspiring to “regain” dignity and respect through remarriage. Accordingly, the decision of wives was mainly influenced by their desire to expand families and get companions.

F3W’s major interest was getting a second child and bringing a dependable father for her daughter who respects her as well. She said,

The only reason I needed marriage was to give birth. I was interested to have two, three children. And yet, since my child grew without a father, I was not interested to raise another child without a father. Because of this I was firmly interested to get married and have a child.

However, F3W rejected marriage proposals forwarded from several men as she was looking for a person who can be a good father to her daughter and who respects and supports her as well. Accordingly, she decided to marry her current husband as a dependable person based on the “evaluation” she made. She reflected,

He is short and fat; he would not have been my choice if my focus was on physical beauty. But I was interested in his maturity that I measured in two things. One is that he is an old man; he is 21 years older than me. And the other is the way he speaks. He told me about a lot of good things. I was convinced that he would be a good person to me and to my daughter as well. He told me that he will take us to America and my daughter will join a very good school. And we will raise her nicely. (F3W)

F3H is the eldest child of his family. All his younger siblings are married and have children. For many years, he was the only one in his family who did not marry. And all those years, his parents and siblings were pushing him to get married. And yet, it was only lately that he started to develop interest to get married. He was 56 when he established the current family. Contrary to his wife, having a child was not his primary concern. He was rather interested to get a wife who could support and treat him. As a person diagnosed with diabetic and blood pressure, F3H experienced difficulties to overcome the life challenges one encountered in the USA. Hence, he wanted to get a wife who could be on his side throughout his life. He said that because of the complications in his health, he cannot work more than one job. And even that is challenging for him as he is also responsible to cook and do all the house chore by himself. He explained the reason behind his marriage as:

I wanted to get a wife who can support me in generating income and treat me at home. Getting healthy food and taking my medications on time have always been a challenge for me. Life in America is difficult. At that time, I had been living in San Francisco and most of the married couples I knew were successful in their life. So, I was highly motivated to get a wife.

F5W established the current family for the sake of fulfilling the desires of her youngest child, F5S2. He was one-year old when his biological father died. He started asking about getting a father as he started playing with other kids in their compound and intensified when he joined kindergarten. He felt he was the only one without a father and he insisted his mother to “bring” one for him. She elaborated,

Since he (F5S2) was only a year old, he does not know his father. Once, there were house renters in our compound and one of the children told him that he had no father but the

speaker had. He came and asked me whether he has no father, I told him the truth what happened to his father. But he kept on facing similar challenges when he joined kindergarten. He used to nag me to get him a father. That was my major reason to get married.

The couple in F7, with the initiation and encouragement of their children, believed that it was time to focus on themselves, relax and enjoy what life brings after the successful accomplishment of their child rearing responsibility. They believed that they need to get someone as the children were growing to be full adults. F7W explained,

I have never been alone in my life. And I had never thought about it until my son brought it to my attention. What is life without a person? So, I opened my heart and become ready to bring someone into my life. This is the only reason I got married. I have no other reason. I don't have economic problem; I have no interest to get a child. I just need someone to be with me for the rest of my life.

4.2.2. *Facilitators*

In all the cases the ultimate decision to blend families were made by the marriage partners. Yet, the decision to blend was informed by children, relatives, friends, religious leaders and other community members. I named these persons *facilitators* as their main role in the blended family formation process is supporting the partners decision in various ways. According to the data, the family formation process of partners in problem state was facilitated by community members such as friends, customers, and spiritual leaders. Whereas, the family formation process of partners in aspiration state was facilitated by their children.

The partner selection process in F1, F3 and F4 was completely made by the facilitator. The partners then accepted each other as life mates. They also collected prior information from the person who facilitated the process. In all these three families, trustworthiness of the information provided by the facilitator was not questioned and it helped them to accept their respective mates.

As F1H and F1W stated, they knew each other through the person they both believed and respected. This person was the God father of F1W and best friend of F1H. Once, F1H told his friend that he wanted to get married but he doesn't think he could get a woman of his choice. Accordingly, his friend thought that F1H and F1W would be best matches if they got married. F1W said:

One day, my God father gave me a call and informed me that he had something serious to discuss with me. By then, he already knew how disappointed I was in getting a trustworthy person. He told me about [F1H] in detail; how disciplined, spiritual and dependable person he is. Since I trusted my God father, I believed that Abuye (referring Abune Gebre Menfes Kidus, a saint in Ethiopian Orthodox Church) had accepted my

prayers and gave me the life partner I wished for long. I decided right away as he fulfilled my two preconditions. One was a person who is ready to receive the Holy Communion (“Kidus Kurban”) with me. The second was a person who has only one daughter, just like me (F1W).

F1H also believed that his friend, F1W’s God Father, had played a great role in managing their fears and uncertainties and somehow disproving their misconceptions. F1H elaborated:

As she (F1W) was born and raised in Addis Ababa, I wondered what her life style would be and how to reconcile if it mismatches with my interest. As a religious person who came from countryside, I was shocked by the life style of girls and women in Addis Ababa. Thanks to my friend, he got me a blessed wife. I was also worried about the girls (the daughters of the two couples) ...how would we manage the conflicts that might arise? And yet, the trust I had on my friend helped me to decide.

Similarly, it was F3W’s friend who was also best friend of F3H’s brother who introduced this couple. The major reason F3H came to Ethiopia was to get a life partner. Accordingly, his relatives and friends were introducing him with potential women but none of them were his choice. He was left with less than two weeks’ time when his brother’s friend introduced him with his current wife. As F3H reflected, he was comfortable with the introduction and he liked and decided to marry her right away. He even shared his relatives and friends that he has got the woman he wanted to marry even before requesting F3W. He said he was sure about marrying her as he liked her appearance, smile, and discipline. F3W, on the contrary, was feeling tense with the procedure. She described her feeling as:

At first, it was awkward for me to meet a to-be marriage partner in this way. My friend tried his best to set the stage and help me feel relaxed. To be frank, I was preoccupied

when I went to the place of our appointment. I met my friend and my current husband in a certain restaurant, I was not comfortable to open up and chat with them for several minutes. I felt tense and confused.

The couple in F4 also met by the help of a person who is F4H's relative and F4W's regular customer in her local coffee corner. The person was concerned about F4H's family life as he was struggling a lot to balance between his work and taking care of the children. After observing her behavior and learning about her family life, he informed her about F4H. The couple described it this way:

When his relative told me his story, especially when I learned that he is a father of three children, I became happy. If he has children, he will accept my children too. He would not hate them; he would rather be supportive. This was my major reason to approach the man. I met him on the next day. Of course, I loved him even before getting him in person.
(F4W)

It was a relative of mine who introduced me with (F4W). He was one of my mediators. My wife's brother was not happy by the marriage fearing she would be hurt as this is her third marriage. It was with the help of my relative that they accepted the marriage (F4H).

From the story of the couple, we can induce that having information from a person both parties know was strong enough to let them decide blending their families. And yet, there are cases where families might complain the facilitator if the marriage is not functioning as per their expectation. For instance, F3H reflected his feeling toward the facilitator as, "The guy who introduced me with her is a damn boy he took me to the wrong place."

The wives in F2, F7 and F5 described that the idea of their marriage initially came from their children. The women in the former two were divorced mothers of a single child who had

been single parenting for more than seven years. Despite the challenges they faced as a single parent and the satisfaction they have in their current blended family; they marked the period they single parented as the best time in terms of experiencing quality mother-child relationship. Both reported it to be end of the dysfunctional marriage they had and beginning of submitting themselves to satisfy their children's desire. They shared how the children initiated the idea of their marriage:

My daughter's childhood dream was to reconcile her father and I when she grew up. As a result, she became mad when she saw me with anyone of the opposite sex whoever the person is. When she was 14, her father married his third wife and she became disappointed. She even felt guilty for controlling me from engaging to a new life. So, she begged me to get married and promised to accept the person as a father (F2 Wife).

The data revealed the role of community members such as friends, religious leaders, and relatives which was boldly observed in the blended family formation of the marriage partners who belong in the problem state. The roles played by these community members include influencing the decision of the partners by giving a piece of advice, creating pressure, selecting the "appropriate" partner and connecting with them. As evidenced in the data, community members involvement is observed when partners face challenges related with child rearing, economic problem and health related problems. It is apparent from the data that the family formation decision of partners in the aspiration state was influenced by the involvement of their children. In most of the cases, the influence came from adolescents and youth and in this case the children's concern is evidenced to be the safety and wellbeing of their parents. In one case, the influence came from a preschooler who was interested to have a father figure at home.

4.2.3. Speed of Family Formation

In all the eight families the decision to blend was rapidly followed by action of blending the families. In the six families, with the exception of F2 and F7, reaching decision was also solely based on the information they heard about their respective mates either from the persons themselves or from the facilitators. None of them took time to learn more about the behavior of the other family members. These six families blended their respective families within three months; four of them blended in less than ten days. From these six families, it was only F3W who informed her daughter about the new family prior to its formation. The children in the other five families knew about the new family when they started to live together.

The children in F1, F4, F5, F6 and F8 came to know about the new family when they started to live together. None of them had prior information about the family formation. The accidental family transition has caused the generation of different feelings on the children. As the children in F1 and F5 reflected, the unexpected change made them to be confused. They described their experiences as follows:

Well, my father did not inform me directly. One day, when we returned from school, he brought me to this house and introduced me with the family (F1W and F1D2). [F1D2] and I were in the same school which was located near their home. After that, everything happened very rapidly...we moved to their place and started to live together. Though I was happy to play with F1D2 and with the way we were treated, I was not comfortable with the thought of living with a stepmother. (F1D1)

I was by then relatively a big boy (he was 14) and we have an elder half-sister (father side) who was living with us at that time. We did not know him [F5H] much. There was a sort of rumor. It was not as such clear for us. I was very close to my father and used to go

together to visit our uncles and saw this man there. We ever were not greeting each other.

The procedure of his coming to our house was not right. At that time, he was returning from somewhere, and he directly came to our house which was strange and outrageous.

(F5S1)

F5H also recalled the way he moved in. He believed the character of his wife and her children was nice. He described the way he joined the family as follows:

She is a good person and the children were nice by then. We were happy when we pass time together. After a month or so, I just brought my luggage and started to live with them (F5H).

F4 was also formed in a similar way. The partner's meeting was arranged by the person who introduced them. He took F4W to the restaurant where F4H was waiting as per their appointment. Then they get to know each other and had some discussion on the challenges they faced in their previous marriages and child rearing. The next day, they tested for HIV and on the third day F4H sent mediators to F4W's parents. The person who introduced them was one of the three mediators. This person also played a great role in convincing F4W's relatives especially her brother about F4H's quality. F4W's brother had resisted the marriage fearing that she would again suffer as she did in her former two marriages. Finally, they accepted the request as the mediators informed them how disciplined, hardworking and religious (in Ethiopia being religious is a positive quality) F4H was. Then the couple legalized their marriage in that same week.

F3 was also established shortly after the couple's introduction. As F3H was left with few days to return back to the USA, everything happened very rapidly. The couple met on the third day after their first introduction. On that day, both of them discussed about their experiences, expectations and how they would support each other and the like. Finally, they discussed about

the marriage procedure and they wanted to legalize it as the marriage certificate was important to start processing F3W and her daughter's visa right away. Accordingly, F3H sent mediators to F3W's parents on Thursday and on that same day they invited 13 guests for dinner and concluded their marriage. The couple passed the night together and on Friday, the next day, they had a photograph program with their relatives. F3H left to the USA on Saturday night; on the third day of their wedding and the 9th day of their introduction.

The family formation procedure in F2 and F7 is quite similar to each other but differ from the other families. The couples in both families get to know each other in a five days professional development program held out of the city they live. During their stay, they discussed about their families which helped them to learn that they have similar family backgrounds. They continued their discussion even after they returned back home and promoted their relationship to love affair. They let their children know about their relationship and organized programs where everybody got to know each other. The children played a great role in the formation of these blended families.

F2H usually visited F2W and F2D at home. F2D was turning 16 at that time and she was a 10th grader. F2H started supporting F2D in her academic work and the family believed that her academic performance started to excel from that time onwards. F2D believed that F2H's integrity and kindness and easygoing personality helped her to establish a very good relationship with him. She narrated how she got to know F2H in this way:

I first met (F2H) in the church on a holiday. He was a simple man and I came to like him. After that he used to come home and had fun. There were many pleasant things. We had good days together. He was living at a distant place from our home. Then he rented a house in our vicinity and we were getting together frequently.

F2 was established after two years and the initial idea came from F2D as the three of them enjoyed the time they had together. They were not happy when F2H went to his house in the evenings after the good time they have together. Sometimes, F2H used to pass the night there but their house was too small to accommodate the three. Then F2D came with the idea of renting a bigger house and living together than paying for two small houses. F2H liked the idea very much but F2W resisted as she was planning to stay in that way and learn more about F2H and their relationship before taking it to marriage. And yet, F2D and F2H insisted and moved to a new house. The couple got legally married immediately after they moved to the new house.

All couples except F5 established their families legally but without formal marriage ceremonies accustomed in Ethiopia. Two couples practiced sending mediators to the woman's parents to get approval of the marriage; this is a tradition in Ethiopia.

4.2.4. Model of Blended Family Formation

The model of blended family formation emerged from the categories and subcategories presented in the previous subsections. Accordingly, the data revealed that the partners decision to blend their respective families emanated from the state they were in before the formation of the blended family. They linked their prior situation with the purpose of forming their current family. It was either to get rid of the problem they were in or to seize the opportunity they anticipated that they formed the current family.

The data also revealed the facilitating role of children, friends, relatives and other community members in the process of blending families. The data revealed for partners who were in problem state, facilitation was done by non-family members. This might be because of the problematic situation of the family at the time, the family members could not have been able to solve their problem without the support of outsiders. In the case of partners who were in aspiration state, their

children were there to consider their parents situation and encourage them to look for opportunities they believed are better for their parents. Besides, having similar previous experience appeared to be a factor that helped family members to understand each other and develop trust which in turn encouraged the families to decide and go for blending.

The other pattern observed in the process of blended family formation is speed of blending families. Partners blended their families right away in situations where at least one of them were in problem state. The data already revealed three factors for the rapid blended family formation of partners where at least one of them were in problem state. First, they believed doing so would bring immediate solution to the problem they were struggling with. Second, trusting the person who facilitated the process and the information they provided. Third, being influenced by the common prior experiences they shared. When both partners were in aspiration state, they took longer time to blend than when only one or none were in aspiration state.

Table 4.2 shows the factors that contributed to the formation of blended families in Ethiopia. As can be seen from it, a family may have a couple who came from either similar or different prior state. The blended family formation model depicted in Figure 4.1 is constructed from the interview data. The model is constructed following the steps and techniques of the constructivist grounded theory design presented in Figure 3.2.

Description of terms in the model

Partners' state: refers to the situation the members in a couple were prior to blending their families. Two categories emerged from the data based on the level of challenge or severity of the problem the partners were in; problem state and aspiration state.

Problem state: partners who reported experiences of hardship and severe problems including life threatening challenges were categorized in this state. The major challenges observed here were economic challenge, child rearing, poor health and gender-based violence.

Aspiration state: Partners who reported to be in a relatively stable state in terms of fulfilling their basic needs but were aspiring to expand their families and enjoy life with a partner were categorized in this state.

Children or community members' involvement: refers to ideas, advices, requests, encouragements and other services partners reportedly received from community members and their children and used the service in their decision to blend. The involvement could be initiated either by one of the partners or by the child or community member.

Decision to blend: refers to the decision couples made to live together blending their respective families.

Action of blending: The situation where couples actually merged their families and started to live as a household.

4.3. Blended Family Functioning Experiences

In this section I presented the experiences of the family members since the formation of the blended family till the time of data collection. Accordingly, I identified “Blended Family Condition” as the core category that emerged from three categories, functional blended family,

deteriorating blended family and dysfunctional blended family. The categories are formed based on the reports that came from the participants. Each of these categories has characterizing features that emanate from the interview data. Accordingly, functional blended families have sense of stability, good skills of coping with challenges, and better communication and acceptance among family members. Deteriorating blended families are characterized by the desire to maintain the family, feelings of sympathy to one another, frustration to cope with challenges, lack of decision making and problem-solving skills, disagreement with non-residential family members and extended families. Dysfunctional blended families are characterized by tense family environment, violent behavior and the belief that the family would dissolve at any time. Having a common child is considered as a blessing by all families regardless of the category they belong. They believe that common children serve as a bridge to connect every other family member.

The categories and the model that emerged from the data are presented in this section.

Table 4. 3

Participant Family's Family Functioning Category

Designation	Family Functioning Category
F1, F2, F6, F7	Functional
F4	Deteriorating
F3, F5, F8	Dysfunctional

I created the blended family categories based on three set of information that came from the participants. The first is the interaction between and among the family members which range from predominantly positive to predominantly negative. The second set of information I used is the marriage partners' history of separation. Some families had experienced separation at least

once after blending. Finally, I used the overall intention of members to sustain their family and make it long lasting. Every family, regardless of the classes, has its own strengths and gaps. the classification simply shows how they are functioning in most of the cases. Accordingly, functional blended families are predominantly in good terms with their members, do not have a history of separation so far and they have a good intention of sustaining their relationships. However, this does not mean there are no nuances, struggles and challenges in these families. Similarly, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families have their own positive sides though the problems are out dominating.

4.3.1. Functional Blended Families

Functional blended families are characterized by establishing the family on stable ground, communication, understanding, acceptance and solidarity, and sense of sustainability. The family members revealed the tendency of understanding each other. For example, in F7 the girls were “not so good” at cooking while the son is “excellent” which is against the social gender norm. Yet, the family members accept their differences and even use it to build solidarity. For example, the daughters in F7 enjoyed cooking special food with their step brother. Besides, the family has strong sense of wholeness especially during holidays and family events.

The couples in the functional blended families remained single for a minimum of three years (F6H) and a maximum of ten years (F7H). The average time elapsed to form the current family is nearly 6 years. In the three functional blended families, three of the seven nonresident parents/ former spouses are dead (both in F1, and mother of F6S1), F6S2 has no contact at all with his biological father, all children and partners in F7 rarely communicate with their biological parents/ former spouses. Children who have a feeling of being abandoned by their biological parents revealed a tendency of accepting their stepparents (F6S2, F7D1 and F7D2).

Functional blended family members have strong sense of sustainability. They recognized that families face challenges and setbacks due to various reasons such as mismatch in child rearing practices as the partners in F1 and F2 face, managing imagined love affair of stepsiblings', as in F7, and dealing with actual occurrence of love affair in stepsiblings', as in F6, and dealing with the feeling of abandoning a biological child who live elsewhere as in F2. Regardless of the challenges they faced or may face, the members believed that challenges are to be resolved in a way that enhances the stability and sustainability of their family. Besides, the parents are working towards the success of their stepchildren in their education such as F2H academically supported his stepdaughter, F6H educated his stepson in a technical college covering his fee, F7W overtook the responsibilities of her step daughters so that they could focus on their education. Here are some reflections that come from members of functional blended families:

Both of us were concerned about the wellbeing of our children. Both of us have invested all our life for their wellbeing and we never want to ruin that at any cost. We prioritize our children than our own needs and desires (F7H).

F1D1 is both my sister and my best friend. We share our secrets. She was only a grade ahead of me. However, since she is a very clever student, she supported me in my education. At the end of each academic year, I used to collect her exercise books. Mostly we had the same teachers and they gave the same lessons, class works and home works every year...I used to copy the answers from her exercise books (laughing) (F1D2).

We sat down and discussed about the way forward. We arranged private bedrooms for each of them, we agreed to have a separate account for their school fee. For example, I save 2000 Birr per month to my son's fee and he does the same for his daughter. We

listed down all our family consumption expenses and settled our contribution. We also agreed to revise this as the change in the cost of living is very dynamic (F7W).

Father [stepfather] raised me since I was three and I did not know that I have another father and he is my stepfather. I used to sleep with him and I was always with him wherever he went, be it to the farm or the nearby town (F6S2).

The role of F6W [stepmother] for the peaceful life of the whole family has been very great. She and I discuss and resolve what so ever the case is. She is intelligent, sociable and has a very strong persuasion skill. She contributed a lot for our understanding and reaching where we are now. Now, we are living a very good life (F6S1).

4.3.2. Deteriorating Blended Families

I identified one family, F4 that belong to deteriorating blended family. The family is characterized by unhealthy comparison, disapproval and rejection by family, extended family and community members, other aggravating factors, in one hand and desire to maintain the family on the other hand. The family members tend to consistently compare their current life with the former one and get disappointed. F4W who used to generate income and support her children before the formation of the current family feels remorse as she is now completely dependent on the little income her husband generates. Besides, she perceives imbalance in the way she treats her stepchildren and F4H treats her biological children and feels that she is being exploited by the current family.

The couple in F4 encountered rejection by their own children, relatives and community members as their act of forming a new family was recognized as inappropriate. The couple reported that they are misunderstood and their respective family and community members have wrongly interpreted their actions of blending. In the case of F4H, the fact that he blended his

family in the year his former wife died made his eldest daughter and all his in-laws (from his former wife's side) downgraded him since they considered his act as a sign of brutality and absence of grief to his former wife. In many parts of Ethiopia including the region where F4 resides, prolonged grief to the loss of loved ones is taken as a culturally appropriate behavior. There are several traditional and religious practices that take place particularly during the first year as a memorial of the deceased. For example, several feasts are prepared starting from the day of the funeral to the first year where the most prominent ones are on the funeral day, on the third day, on the 40th and/or 80th depending on sex of the deceased, bi-annual and annual. Family members grieving the loss of their loved ones wear black clothes, restrain themselves from music and dance and they may even postpone joyous events such as wedding ceremonies and other parties. F4D was so angry at her father due to his marriage and their communication had become quite tense. All his in-laws (from his former wife's side) rejected him since the time they heard his marriage. Similarly, the children of F4W blamed her for abandoning them to raise her stepchildren. Her friends and former neighbors regarded her as a selfish and irresponsible woman.

Besides, factors such as financial and health related problems worsened the functioning of this family. The family members demonstrated low resilience whenever they encountered additional challenges. For example, F4W cursed the decision she made to form the current family whenever her biological children needed some money that she could not afford. This, in turn, upset F4H as he considered his wife is not understanding the extent he struggled to hardly cover the expenses of his family let alone to help "others".

Regardless of all the challenges and turmoil, the members in deteriorating blended families want to maintain the current family. They attributed the challenges they faced to

external factors mainly to rejection by children, extended family members and other community members. They believed there is nothing personal in their disagreements and recognized the effort each one of them exerted for the wellbeing of the family. They assumed the family will be fine if the factors that aggravate their situation are resolved. They appreciate the way family members supported each other and enjoy the company of one another. In this regard, F4D appreciates the way F4W treats the children and she feels good for her little brothers to have a compassionate stepmother.

Regardless of the seemingly good relationship most of the family members demonstrate, they are struggling with issues that are leading the family to deteriorate. One of the major contributing factors for the family's deterioration is the family's particularly F4Ws inability to support her nonresident biological children due to the family's economic challenge. F4W was engaged in her own small-scale businesses like selling milk, butter, and coffee. Her income was enough to support her two children who live with their grandparents. She stopped her business when she joined the new family as taking care of her stepchildren became her major responsibility. Consequently, she stopped supporting her biological children which made her to be vulnerable and in a state of confusion.

F4W feels bad as she is not helping her children. Here is an instance she mentioned "Last time my son asked me 200 Birr [$\approx$ 5 USD] for educational materials but I had nothing to give him so I cried." At times, F4W considers terminating the marriage and continuing to support her children but this also comes with its own cost that frustrated her. Here are some of the reflections that came from the members of this deteriorating blended family:

I got married for the sake of my children. The money I earn is not enough to cover our basic expenses such as food items, school fee, transportation and medication let alone to

hire a babysitter. Besides, no one supports me. The parents and sisters of my late wife took me as enemy. They harassed me; one of her sisters even beat me as if I got married to satisfy my body (F4H).

The interview data reflected the misunderstanding that occurs between F4H and F4D. F4D has never accepted the act of her father. She blamed him for not taking a “better option” to raise the children than being engaged in marital affair shortly after her mother’s sudden death. She expressed her thoughts as follows:

He [F4H] should have raised us hiring a house maid. Our mother’s death was accidental; she was not sick. She was in her maternity. We used to live a better life when she was alive. But, just within a year he got married. Our grandparents and aunts [mother’s side] are also mad at him (F4D).

Regardless of condemning her father’s action, F4D has recognized the love and support her stepmother provided to the family. She has also accepted her as a friend and has better communication with her than she has with her father. She described the role of F4W like this:

She [F4W] is good for all of us. She treats my brothers like her own children; she cleans their feces, washes their body, feeds them... everything. She is like a friend to me. We chat and laugh each other; I tell her what happened in school. I feel by far comfortable with her than with my father after he got married (F4D).

F4D appreciated her husband for the way he treated her. From the conversation I had with her it seemed that she did not dare to consider herself as a wife. She still referred his former wife as “his wife” and acknowledged F4H for treating her in the way he treated his daughter. Here is an instance:

He [F4H] treated me in the same way as he treated his daughter. When he brings something be it socks or slipper, he brings for both of us. He did not differentiate me from her. He never bought anything for himself after his [former] wife died. All his clothes and shoes were bought when she was alive (F4W).

Though she is happy with her current family members, her communication with her biological children particularly with her elder daughter is not healthy. She stated,

I cannot bring them here to live with us as we are hardly fulfilling even the basic needs of the household. My children complained for abandoning them. My daughter blamed me for divorcing their father. We argue in every issue. I think she has some bad spirit (ዓይነት ጥላ አለባት) that created hatred between us. Even some villagers criticized for taking care of my stepchildren leaving behind my own (F4W).

F4W admitted that she cannot financially support her children with the current economic status of her family. She considered divorce to get time to work and generate money and yet the idea of getting divorced for the third time caused frustration. She shared her feelings as follows:

When I think about how to support my children, I wanted to end up this marriage and get hired as a housemaid. You see, I can easily alleviate the economic challenge. But I am already in it [in the marriage]. Breaking a relationship is not as easy as starting it. How can I even shoulder the village's gossip if I got divorced for the third time? (F4W)

As can be inferred from the story of F4, the family is struggling with economic, social and psychological challenges. The economic challenge is manifested by the inability to fulfill the basic needs of nonresident children. Besides, this blended family is not accepted by the resident and nonresident daughters, extended family members and other community members. From F4H's side, the community believes that it is a betrayal to his late wife to get married that

“soon”. From F4W’s side, the community considered her as a heartless woman who abandoned her biological children as she got married for the third time terminating the support she used to provide for her children. Regardless of all the challenges they have been facing, the couple in F4 believed that they would be able to lead a better life if their economic challenge is resolved.

4.3.3. Dysfunctional Blended Families

Dysfunctional blended families are characterized by negative emotion such as negative attitude toward the former spouse of one’s partner, the perception of being exploited, lack of trust, negative step relationships, communication gap, undermining the current relation by mentioning the better aspects of one’s relation with previous partner. However, the members in all the three dysfunctional families reported that they had been functioning well for some time since the family’s establishment.

In case of F3, F3H returned back to the USA immediately as they concluded their marriage. So, their communication was mainly via phone and video calls. According to F3W, the family went well until the birth of their common child. The communication among the three family members was nice during the first few months of the family’s life.

He talked with my daughter, sent her toys and clothes. He sent us money to celebrate her birthday in the way she wanted it to be. He treated her very much. He treated me also. He treated both of us until I gave birth. He came to Addis when I was left with 20 days to give birth. His treatment continued during those days. My daughter used to sing and dance for us every evening. She felt relaxed. She is not as such courageous, she is fearful rather. But she became relaxed and comfortable with him. As I told you, he did a lot to her. He took us to game zones and recreation centers. (F3W)

F2H on his part, was eager to lead the life he anticipated while forming the new family. He expressed the situation as follows,

My focus was on processing their visa and bringing them here [San Fransisco] as soon as possible. I was eager to lead a healthy and settled life. The thought of having someone who could reduce my workload and take care of my health was really heartwarming.

(F3H)

In case of F5, the family members, except F5S1, were leading a better life for the first four or five years. The children F5S1, F5D1 and F5S2 were fourteen, nine and five years old respectively when F5H joined the family. F5H, who has been a driver at a government office, used to take the family to various recreation centers and game zones both in the city and outside. F5D and F5S2 easily became very much close to their stepfather and they had easily accepted him as their real father. They reflected,

I was a child of 9 years by then. As I had no much memory of my biological father, I accepted him as a father. He took us to recreation centers and let us relax. He had love for us as we were little children. When we made wrong things/ mistakes, he used to warn us even physically punished us. We used to focus on what he was doing for us like going out for recreation together, eating and drinking only. (F5D)

He [stepfather] used to follow up and control me when I was a child. He used to check my exercise books, supported me in my HomeWorks and assignments. He beat me, took me to game zones and supported me in my education. We were very close and I still love him. And I still love it when he is around. (F5S2)

In the case of F8, the couple believed that the family was in a relatively good condition for the first three years. Though the family has been challenged by its extended members from

both sides, the couple were able to resist the challenges for some time. The extended family members from the F8H's side even came to accept the family as they observed visible differences in the life style of F8H. He described,

I stopped taking alcohol as they (F8W and kids) moved in to my house. I stopped it right away. She (F8W) used to say "your family would accept me if you start a healthy life". Since I loved her, I was committed to accept her advices. Can you imagine? It did not take me longer than a year to terminate khat and cigarette. I never took any of these things for the last five years. As she [F8W] expected, my new life becomes a source of joy for my family particularly my mother. My mother even convinced my siblings who are leaving abroad to financially support me. Now, it is my brother who pays the house rent for us and my sister pays the school fee for my son (biological child). (F8H)

Members from the dysfunctional families have perceived events that marked their family's transition to a dysfunctional state. For some of the members the transition was sharp and immediate than for the others. The data revealed that members of the same family mentioned different events for the family's transition. Here are reflections from some of the dysfunctional family members:

I started to doubt my decision as I returned back to the USA after concluding my marriage. My friends reflected that she married me to get a chance to come to America. They bet she would file a divorce once she settled her life here. After a while, she told me about the pregnancy which was against my plan. My plan was not to create a family that needs my care and support it was the other way. The worst thing happened during my stay in Ethiopia. The way she behaved was not like a married and respected woman. Literally, you cannot walk with her as she stops to hug everyone on the street. (F3H)

F3W in her part, associated the change in her husband's behavior with the birth of their child. She witnessed that he became a "different person" since that day onwards. She reiterated,

The problem came on the day the child [their common child] was born. As the child was born, he became a completely different person; a person that you can't imagine. I gave birth in hospital and it was on Saturday and I returned back home on Sunday. He started to change his behavior on that same day. (F3W)

The family life in F5 started to be tense when F5S1 reached 17 years of age. Though he has never accepted the marriage from the onset, his influence on the family was not visible up until he grew up to this age. He never trusted his stepfather and he started to share his concerns to his sister, F5D who became an ally. The children shared their concerns as follows,

As we grew up, we started to look into matters and evaluate whether things were right or wrong. The very negative impact was the imposition on our Mom, meaning the respect and love for her as well as the support he provides to Mom was not satisfactory, he even stands negative on various issues. When she consulted him on what she thinks are good he is always opposite and that is not good for us. Meaning if he does not make her happy, we cannot accept him as a father and such cases make us angry (F5D).

F5S1 doubted the intention behind his stepfather's decision to marry his mother. From the age and income gap that existed between the couple, he concluded that his stepfather is using his mother to lead a better life. He reflected,

He is very... very young, 11 years younger than her. Why did he marry a mother of three children? He is a public employee who earns only 3000 Birr [≈50 USD per month]. He has been making use of her. He has been living a very luxurious life since he

moved in. He has never been concerned about her health condition. I wonder how she trusted him [F5S1].

F5W is the source of income for the family. She believed that covering every family expense is an instrument to avoid F5H's interference in the life of her children. Except the youngest, the other two children have no verbal communication with their stepfather. They believe that F5H is abusing their mother and she is unnecessarily tolerating his destructive behavior. Contrary to the children's view, the couple believed that they are in a loving and respectful relationship. F5W reflected,

We love and respect each other and you know, disagreement is normal for a husband and a wife. He had never quarreled with the children. Afterall, I am the one who cover every expense of the family. Why would he quarrel with them? He has no financial contribution for their development (F5W).

For F3W, her family life changed the day she birthed their common child. She marked that day as the day her husband made an automatic shift of behavior. The change was so abrupt for her and it affected her psychological and physical health. According to her, F3H started harassing her daughter, denying access to services, he tried to detach her from her mother and her little brother. She described the situation like this:

He did not want her to be with me, he did not want her to get in to the bedroom. She was very eager to see her little brother, she wanted to see when we dress him, he was tiny and she wanted to see him. When she said "Let me see him." He yelled, "Get out of the bedroom!"

F3W reported that his abusive relationship continued throughout her period of maternity. In Ethiopia, special support and treatment is given to a woman after childbirth for consecutive

forty days. Mostly, the mother stays at home during these days receiving special attention and treatment. She is provided with nutrient rich food, physical and emotional support by her family members and by other members of the community as well. The woman's mother, sisters, and/or mother in-laws will stay with her to support her in taking care of her and the new born. Friends, neighbors and relatives visit and congratulate the family for their newborns and bring presents commonly for the new born. Generally, the ritual is to comfort the woman and help her to forget the pains of pregnancy and labor. Contrary to this tradition, F3W recalls that her maternity was a period where she experienced both physical and psychological problems. She puts it this way:

My maternity period passed miserably. He described my daughter as naughty and impolite to all our guests. He said that directly and indirectly. For example, he highly appreciated my niece when both are present without saying anything about my child. He might say, "Wow, this is a very disciplined girl! I wonder how her mom raised her!" You understand what he meant though he didn't mention my child's name. He reflected such types of comments even to his own siblings to the point of their frustration. He always presented what she did negatively.

F3W reported what happened on the seventh day after childbirth which was the day of circumcision for their baby boy. The event occurred while they were taking the boy to the health center where he got the procedure. She reiterated:

On that day, my daughter wanted to sit beside him and direct him all the way to hospital. So, she seated in the front chair. I was at the back holding the child. And we were waiting for him. She was excited and was saying "I know the direction; I can show him the way!" Then he came from home holding my niece's hand and opened the door and told her to get out and leave the front seat to my niece. Then, she took umbrage at the way he treated

her and sat beside me. Since she was annoyed, she was not answering even when I talked to her. You know what, he was following her reactions through the spokeo [rear view mirror] and he insulted her a lot he said, “You are the worst girl in the world. I have never seen a girl as bad as you in my life.” Oh, I can’t tell you how I felt at that time. I can say that was the moment I experienced the most extreme shock in my life.

Despite the insults and negative expressions her stepfather used to describe her, F3W’s daughter is a well-behaved girl who is appreciated for her discipline by various community members. F3W witnessed that her daughter is very disciplined and liked by her peers, teachers and the school community and her neighbors. She stated:

My daughter is a very... very disciplined and liked girl. Even in her school, she is recognized for her behavior as others are for the academic performance. She has been recognized for her behavior since she joined school. Her teachers always appreciated the way she is raised. She is also liked by our neighbors; many kids wanted to be her friends. This is also what I witnessed. Sometimes they asked me how she was raised, and I said it is not because of her rearing it is God’s blessing.

Despite her own perception and the community’s recognition to her daughter’s good behavior, her husband instantly started attacking her daughter. This, in turn, put F3W in a state of challenge. It was not easy for her to accept the situation the family was in due to the abusive behavior of her husband. She felt that all the years she waited and the effort she put to get a good person was in vain. She described it as follows:

His behavior shifted automatically and I never expected that. I had been single mom for seven years for the sake of avoiding such type of miserable life especially for my daughter. I had been protecting myself from being trapped by a person who might

mistreat her. It was difficult for me to accept that situation. I was not a type of woman who compromised her child's wellbeing. But that just came to my life intensely and rapidly.

The problem was not limited to the emotional damage of F3W and her daughter. It also affected F3W's physiological health condition. The fact that she was in her maternity might have also contributed to her health condition. She explained:

The expressions I saw on her face when she got out of the car were reflections of her broken heart. She was frightened and the change was automatic. He even said to her, "you will never get into this car from this time onwards.". You see, the car is mine; I bought it before he came to my life. She felt as if she was in someone's car. She was frustrated. That made me very sick. I started to bleed heavily on that same day and I was admitted to hospital. The whole period of my maternity was extremely difficult.

The members in dysfunctional blended families feel that they are no more benefiting from the family; they rather perceived it as a loss. Dysfunctional blended families demonstrate abusive relationship such as yelling, insulting and beating amongst themselves. All the three dysfunctional blended families experienced short term family separation and they believe the family would end up in divorce any time.

F3H reported a number of bad things happened to him after the marriage which forced him to lead a life against his plan. He continuously compared his current life with the one he had before and regret his decision to marry F3W. He believed that they are completely different people who do not match at all. He described:

My life is damaged because of this family. I am forced to live out of my plan. Before, doing a job was not a must for me. If I was not interested, I would just take rest. But now

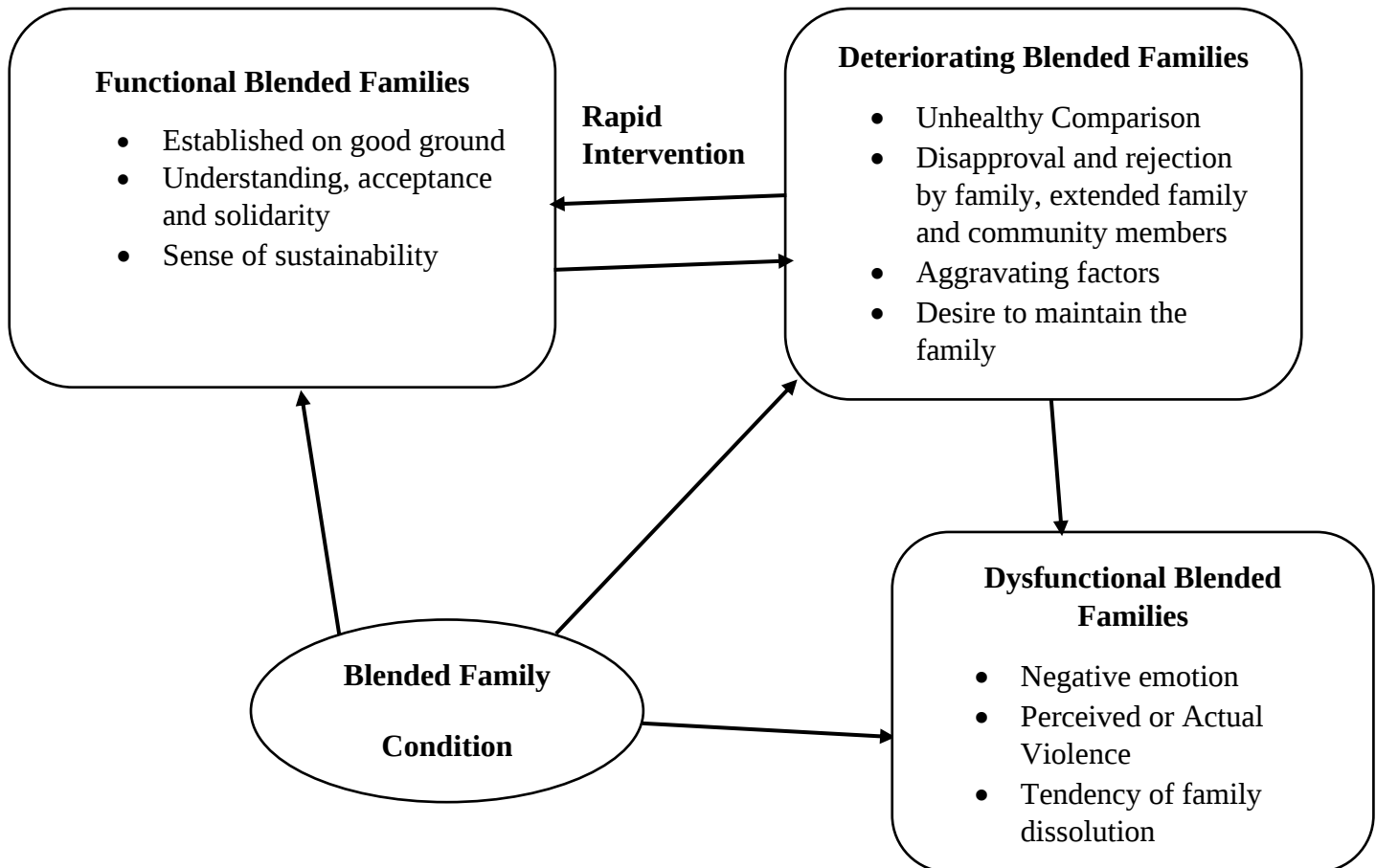
not to work has never been optional since the time I got married; I have to work and get money. The woman I married is not my type in age [he is 21 years older than her], interest, behavior. She is not like me. I should have married a woman who would be on my side in everything. A woman who listens to, treats and supports me; a woman who would not upset me. My greatest problem is the woman I married (F3H).

F3H is 21 years older than his wife and at first, he was not concerned about their differences. He came to take their differences seriously as his friends informed him that it is for the sake of coming to the USA that she married him and would definitely ask divorce once she got the chance. He, then, started to question himself about why she married him. According to his perception, a young artist who lives in her own condominium and drives her own car should have no reason to marry him unless she has some hidden intention. Now, he believed that what his friends said is true. He, therefore, wanted to delay processing their visa as he thinks it is much easier to send money to Ethiopia rather than supporting his child in the USA; as he is expecting his wife to claim divorce once she is there. He wanted to maintain the marriage for the sake of raising his child in a two-parent household. He stated, “Otherwise, I will return back to Ethiopia and raise my child there. I want to live with her for the sake of raising my child.” (F3H).

F3D has a biological father and half siblings who are not members of the current household. She loves all of them very much. She missed her biological father very much but he offends her as he never respected his promise to visit her on weekly basis. In order to satisfy her interest, F3W usually takes her to her father’s place. However, F3H has never liked F3W’s involvement in this regard and it has been one of the major sources of disagreement in the family.

F8W brought two children from her former marriage whereas F8H was single and had no child before the formation of the current family. Now, the couple have two common children. Though their marriage was not accepted by their respective parents and close relatives, the couple resisted the pressure and formed the current blended family. However, the couple's difference in child rearing has been a major source of conflict since the formation of the family. F8W feels that her husband is treating the children as a "stepparent" whereas F8H believes he is directing them in the way he wanted. The couples conflict aggravated as the children grew up. F8H describes their current situation as follows:

We were separated a couple of times. She left me alone and went to her parents' house; taking all the children. I do not want to go there and she knows that. There are conflicts. We are hurting each other. Both of us are not happy now. Even our discussions are not doing any good as we are only blaming one another. So, the reason why we are living together now is; she does not like to terminate her marriage for the second time. And I do not want to miss my children (F8H).

Figure 4. 2***A Model of Blended Family Functioning in Ethiopia***

4.4.The Link Between Blended Family Formation and Blended Family Functioning

After the construction of the blended family formation and the blended family functioning models, I explored the data for existing patterns that link the two-family scenarios. The data revealed that the couples in each of the functional blended families were in a similar state prior to forming their respective blended families. This is also the case in the couple who belong to the deteriorating blended family. The marriage partners in the dysfunctional blended

families came both from varying and similar states. Those in F5 and F8 were in similar state with the former in aspiration and the latter in problem state. One of the partners in F3 was from problem state while the other was from aspiration state.

Table 4. 4

Prior State and Current Family Functioning

Designation	Prior state of family	Family functioning category
F1 (Male: Female)	Problem: Problem	Functional
F2 (Male: Female)	Aspiration: Aspiration	Functional
F3 (Male: Female)	Problem: Aspiration	Dysfunctional
F4 (Male: Female)	Problem: Problem	Deteriorating
F5 (Male: Female)	Aspiration: Aspiration	Dysfunctional
F6 (Male: Female)	Problem: Problem	Functional
F7 (Male: Female)	Aspiration: Aspiration	Functional
F8 (Male: Female)	Problem: Problem	Dysfunctional

4.4.1. Patterns in Functional Blended Families

The data revealed common patterns between and among the four functional blended families, F1, F2, F6, and F7. One common pattern identified in these families is that the couples in each of these families were in a similar state prior to blending their respective families. The couples in F1 and F6 were in problem state while the couples in F2 and F7 were in aspiration state. A closer look on the data that came from the members of these families attributed their current family functioning to the benefit the blended family brought in terms of solving their former problems or sense of achieving what they aspired. I identified two themes namely; *excelling expectation* and *achieving expectation* that link the blended family formation and the blended family functioning models in the case of functional blended families.

Under excelling expectation, family members mainly mention quality of spouse and relationship between step family members. Here are some of the points that goes beyond the expectations of functional blended family members.

Luckily, when we got married, I learned that she is by far spiritual than I am. The way she dresses and her overall life style has been beyond my expectation. My wife is also good at managing the children. She is very kind; thanks to God, she made our life smooth and happier than ever (F1H).

The way we celebrate holidays is really...really fantastic. My wife prepares all types of foods and drinks. We invite guests and we also visit relatives and friends. The children also organize surprising parties for our birthdays and anniversaries. Holiday was just a typical day for us before [F7W and F7S] joined us. Now, I have a very high sense of fulfillment and my daughters are very...very happy (F7H).

I don't have a vivid memory of my birth father. They said he visited me for the last time when I was three. But Ababey (referring his stepfather) has always been with me. He invested a lot for my education. He is still willing to pay more if I want to pursue my education. Even my siblings say "You are his favorite child". We have a special attachment and I feel that he is the only father I have (F6S2).

Baba (referring to her stepfather) is an amazing person. We have always been his priority. He is a person who gives his life for his family. Em...how can I tell you...If he has only 100 Birr in his pocket that he needs for transport and if I come and ask him if he has some money, he will give me all of it even without asking why I need it. This is Baba; can you imagine that? He is different [F2D].

The members in functional blended families expected family expansion, dignity and respect, better economy, getting rid of gendered roles, responsibility sharing and sexual satisfaction when they formed their family. And they believed, regardless of the problems and challenges they sometimes face, they have achieved their aspirations. The families believed their peace is a result of acceptance, open communication, and having clearly stated roles.

The couple in F1 believed that responsibility is shared among the family members. F1H is responsible to serve God and the Church, manage the house rent, tutoring and disciplining the children, and managing his own learning. F1W is responsible to execute her business, take care of the children, cover expenses of the family, do shopping and directing and supervising the house maid. The elder daughters, those from the previous relationships, are responsible mainly for their own learning and in their spare time they support their siblings in their learning, and accompany them to and take them out of school. Emotional wellbeing is the other widely shared benefit in F1's family. The couple believed that the new family has brought happiness, respect, attachment, stability and overall life satisfaction to its members.

The couple in F6 appreciated their decision to form blended family as it helped them to lead a happier life than they expected. The current family helped them to raise the children together in a well-respected compound. All of their children are well behaved and now the elders are becoming a good model for the youngers. All family members supported each other. The boys have been helping their father in farming and taking care of the cattle. The girls have been responsible to support their mother at home. F6W reflected:

After blending our families, I treated his son just like my children and he became the father of my children as well. We have been living peacefully. We did not face a major

problem so far. We are also blessed with two common children. Now, it is a big family.

The children support us and they support each other as well.

F2's family members claimed to have exercised better life since they blended their respective families. The primary benefits this family mentioned include wellbeing, quality relationship, better economic status and respect. The family believed that their daughter's (F2W's daughter from the previous relationship) confidence, communication skill and academic performance has developed after the new family is formed.

For F2H, this family has saved his life. He believed that if he hadn't established this family, he would be dead by now. He said after he divorced with his first wife, he isolated himself from all of his social relations. As he shared, he had disappeared even from his parents and siblings. He was not happy in his life and everything was disappointing for him. It was after this family's formation that he recovered from all his emotional damages and regained the power to reconnect with all his relatives. He believed that his family is his source of happiness and he feels safe and well to be part of this family.

4.4.2. *Patterns in Deteriorating Blended Families*

There is only one family that belongs to the deteriorating blended family category. A closer look at this family gives us insight on the link between its formation and functioning. The partners in this family were in problem state before the formation of the blended family. By then, both expected forming a blended family as a solution to the situation they were in. F4H was a recent widow who was badly in need of someone who can support him in raising his children particularly the infant. F4W was in need of someone who can protect her from the abusive men who were threatening her at the time. The partners formed the current blended family to curb their respective problems. They reported that the new family has met their expectation in terms

of solving the problems they used to face prior to its formation. However, the new family came with its own unexpected issues that highly disrupted the family's healthy functioning. Their sudden marriage disappointed their children, extended family members, and other community members as well.

F4W's children from the former relationship felt being rejected by their mother. These kids have been living with their grandmother, mother's side which enabled their mother to engage herself in small businesses like street vending. She was financially supporting and frequently visiting them by that time. She automatically stopped her job to take care of her stepchildren which restricted her capacity to support her birth children. This in turn, impacted her relationship with the children. The family members elaborated:

[F4W's] younger child is quite reserved. He sometimes come to our home when his grandparents send him but he never felt at ease to get in and chat with us. She [F4W] feels bad as she is not helping her children [F4H].

Once, her daughter had a kind of conflict with her grandmother and stayed with us for some time. But she returned back to her grandparents' house as the girl always ended up in conflict with her mother. I tried to advise both of them but nothing had changed [F4D]. My neighbors teased me assuming that I am a selfish woman who abandoned my children seeking personal pleasure. My daughter blamed me for divorcing their father even though she knows that he is an irresponsible person. I am in a trap and I don't really know how to get out of this situation [F4W].

Similarly, the formation of the new family made F4H to be rejected by his daughter, former in laws, and other community members. They perceived his marriage as an act of brutality. According to F4H, this is the unseen dimension of his marriage as his mere focus was

on getting a woman who treats his children and lets him do his job. The family members reflected:

Once I went to the place around his in laws residence to bring milk for the little boy.

Since they [F4H and the children] used to live in that area before we got married, they rented milk in that place. When we get married my elder brother allowed us to live in a small house that belonged to him. Since then, it was [F4D] who bring milk from their former place. One day I went to bring as she couldn't make it. They belittle me, insulted me and tried to kick me by throwing stones [F4W].

4.4.3. *Patterns in Dysfunctional Blended Families*

Unlike the other two categories who consist of partners who came from similar former state, the partners in dysfunctional blended family category consist of partners with all the three types of mix. F3 is a blend of one family that was in problem state and another family from aspiration state. Whereas the families in F5 and F8 were a mix of families who came from similar states; the former from aspiration state and the latter from problem state. There are some common features shared by these families.

One common feature that exists among these families is that their families come to this level after some time. The family members marked some family event or scenario that drastically changed their family functioning. The members of F3 recalled that their family life was vibrant during the first year and the family members relationship changed immediately after the birth of the partners' common child. Following this event, the communication between F3H and his stepdaughter turned out to be abusive which caused serious emotional and physical health damage on F3W. The family members in F5 were also leading a "better life" until F5S1, who was 14 years old when the new family formed, grew up and started to challenge the relationship

between his mother and his stepfather. Similarly, F5D joined her brother in questioning the intention of their stepfather to live with their mother. They elaborated how their concerns changed as they grew up as follows:

Before (at young age) could not see the gap or what was missing. Then as we grew up, we started to focus on his imposition on her [F5W], look into matters and evaluate whether things were right or wrong and forwarded suggestions and comments (F5D). I still want to be with him (F5H). But he is changing. He is not as close as he used to be. I don't think he is any more interested in me. Besides, my elders feel that Mommy's health will be worsen if he continues living with us. That is frightening (F5S2).

F5W feels that the children are focusing on F5H's faults and they are not understanding him well. According to her they take everything he does very seriously and they do not want to pass even the silly mistakes he did. She believed, as a family there is a need to tolerate one another but they do not understand this. She stated that her husband is a good person but the problem is with the way he communicates with the family. She elaborated,

He holds umbrage whenever conflicts or disagreements occur between us. He is not open for discussion. He keeps things for himself rather than discussing on the issue. Whenever something happens, I reacted right away. I do not hold anything. But he is not like that. He holds everything. For your surprise, he even writes down the things I said when I became angry. After the elapse of time, he read his notebook and said "you said this and that" and by then I have already forgotten the issue. (F5W)

According to F5W, the children are unrealistic as they do not have much experience in life. She believed that it is because F5H loves her that he has been living with her all these years. She feels bad as she does not birth him a child. She said her husband is living with her

withstanding the challenges that come from his parents as they always ask him to give birth. She said,

I told him to leave me and marry a woman who can give him a child. As I am not able to give birth now. It is not a problem for me as I have my own children. But I feel sad for him. My period [menstruation] was still there when we started living together, I don't know why God did not gave us a child. Now, I am not able to bear one [being in menopause]. Whenever I told him to marry another woman and start his life all over again, he says "I cannot live without you because I love you." (F5W)

F5W played the role of balancing the desires of the children and that of her husband. In doing so, she tried to set boundaries that both should play in order to avoid interference. Since she is the one who covered all financial expenses of the family, she explicitly informed F5H to avoid getting involved in issues that matter the lives of the children from the onset of their relationship. At that time her focus was on the possible problems he might cause on the children. And she never expected the children could cause any harm on the family. And she believed her family life was better before the children came to interfere with routine life issues. She feels that the children's involvement is consuming her as they always complained about F5H's behavior. She mentioned an example,

He [F5H] chews khat and sometimes drinks one or two beer and comes home, however he informs me for my consent. My children told me not to let him chew khat at home. Where does he go to take khat, as he cannot abandon it? He brings little khat and stays at home chewing. I have to tolerate such things. If I force him to abandon, I am afraid he may go to "khat house" and be accustomed to wrong life and transfer diseases [implying

sexually transmitted infections] to me that I cannot overcome. I tolerate all these things [F5W].

The family members in F8 were also in a better condition for the first few years of their blended family life. Though they started to experience frequent disagreements since then, their problem escalated when F8D became an 8th grader. At this time the relationship between F8D and her stepfather, F8H, became the center of F8W's attention. She perceived that F8H is intending to sexually abuse her daughter as she is now a grown-up girl. She expressed her feeling as:

He became a completely different person this year. He is becoming very close to her and I am not feeling good on the way he treats her. You know, even biological fathers are abusing their own daughters these days. I have to protect my daughter. She cannot understand his intention. I don't want to regret. I even went to my parents' house taking all the children. It is with mediators' involvement that I returned back home. He told the mediators that my suspicion has broken his heart. God knows the truth but I am not feeling comfortable by his unusual treatment to her (F8W).

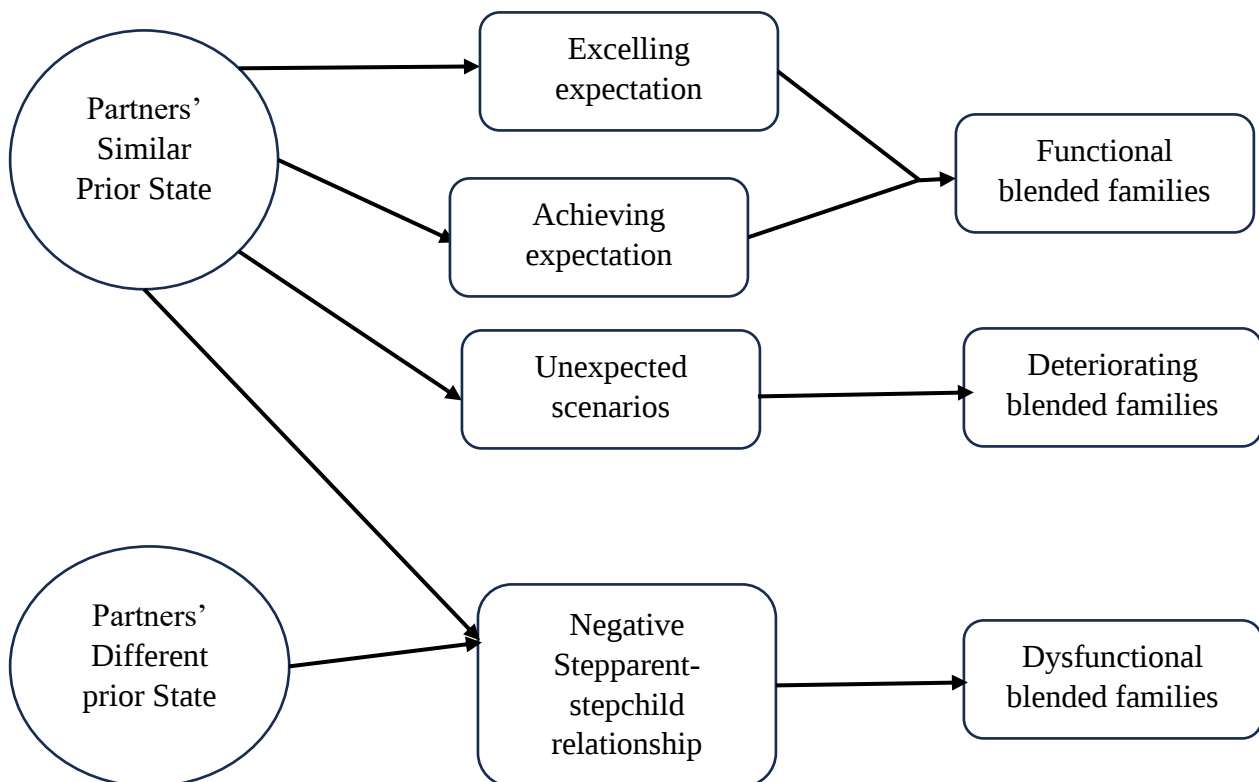
This perception of F8W created a turmoil that affected the communication pattern of the family members; particularly the parents and their daughter. He said her suspicion has already broken his heart and he has become very conscious and reserved in the way he approached his stepdaughter. He has also openly raised this issue in front of the mediators so that they could understand the challenge he is facing. already disappointed he has already communicated this

She [F8D] is my daughter. I still feel that she is that little girl I know six years back. I have never observed her growth. I am the one who support the children in their education, as a teacher and a father, I am very much concerned about their academic

performance. I am also the one who mostly communicate with their teachers regarding their performance. This is what I do for all of them; she is not an exception. This year she [F8D] is in grade 8; she is taking national exam. But her performance is declining. I also discussed about it with her teachers. So, I want her to prioritize her education. It is nothing if her mother supports her in reducing the home chore; I even suggested hiring a house maid for some months. But this is interpreted negatively by her mother (F8H).

Figure 4. 3

The Link Between Family Formation and Family Functioning



Key points inferred from the model:

1. Similarity in prior state is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to form functional blended families.
2. Families who were in similar prior state need to achieve their expectation in order to make their blended family functional.
3. Families who are exposed to unexpected scenarios tend to deteriorate regardless of their similar prior state.
4. Blended families could be dysfunctional regardless of the state the independent families were in prior to blending.
5. Perceived or actual stepparent-stepchild relationship is the major factor that leads blended families to dysfunction.

Chapter Five

5. Discussion

In the current study, I employed the constructivist grounded theory design to develop models that describes and explain the family formation and the family functioning experiences of blended families in Ethiopia. Regarding blended family formation, partners form blended families for two basic reasons; to mitigate the problems they faced or to fulfill their aspirations. The decision to blend families was facilitated by partners' networks and family members. In all the cases, the decision to blend was followed by an immediate action of blending. The study developed a model that describes and explains blended family formation in Ethiopia. The models were developed based on the principles and analytical tools of the constructivist grounded theory which were described in Chapter Three. As depicted in the model of blended family formation (Figure 4.1), previous experience of partners in general and the state they were in before blending their families in particular contributed for the decision and action of blending.

As the findings of this research revealed, partners who were in problem state prior to the formation of their blended family chose a marriage partner who they perceived is capable of curbing the problems they had back then. Those who were economically struggling married a person who could solve their economic challenge, those who were struggling in child rearing married a person who could support them in child rearing, those who were facing abuse chose a person who could protect them from the abuse and so on. This finding is in line with the theory of complementary needs in mate selection. According to this theory mates tend to select each other based on their complementary needs (Winch, 1955).

With regard to the blended family functioning experiences of the participant families, the analysis resulted in three categories of blended families; functional blended families, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families. Features that describe each category have emerged from the data. The model could be used as evidence to design and develop intervention strategies to improve the family functioning of blended family members in Ethiopia. It can be used by educators, trainers, social workers, counselors, developmental psychologists and social psychologists to raise the community's awareness regarding the nature of blended families. Besides, blended family researchers could use the model as a spring board to develop instruments that assess the functioning of blended families in the context of Ethiopia.

Finally, a model that depicts the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning experiences has been constructed. As shown in Figure 4.3 all couples in each of the functional blended families were in a similar state prior to blending their families. That is, both partners were either in problem state or in aspiration state. The model revealed that achieving expectation is a vital condition for making one's family functional. This is strengthened by the data that revealed exposure to unexpected scenarios leads to deteriorating blended families regardless of the similarity in the state the families were in prior to blending. The model also showed that families could be dysfunctional regardless of their similarities or differences in their prior state.

The data revealed that couples with similar life experiences tend to blend their families. Accordingly, F1, F2 and F7 valued the similar life challenges they encountered and believed that has motivated their decision to blend. The family members described similarities based on their experienced before blending their families such as partners in F1 were widowed single parents of their respective daughters of similar age. The couple had been struggling to balance work and life.

The couple in F2 have a daughter each from their former marriages which ended in divorce. Both experienced emotional disturbances and hassles in dealing with former spouses. The couple in F7 were single parenting their children for twelve years and above. They have feelings of achievement as their children were in secondary schools at the time they decided to get married. The couple wanted to relax and enjoy the years ahead.

The current study resulted in three models in relation with the formation and functioning of blended families in Ethiopia. The first model, the blended family formation model. Presented scenarios that lead families to blend. It showed that, in the context of Ethiopia, family members and community members considered blended family formation as a way out to a challenging situation a family encountered. The family members who were in problem state due to various reasons such as economic and child rearing, blended their families with this intention. It is also evident that families could blend for the sake of maximizing pleasure and to have a complete sense of familyhood.

The blended family functioning model has three dimensions namely; functional blended families, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families. Each of these dimensions has their own core characterizing features as presented in the findings section. In this section, we are discussing our blended family functioning model in light of the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning.

Functional blended families. Blended family members who belong to this category have demonstrated healthy family functioning. The members have accepted their membership in their family, they demonstrate positive interaction with their steps and have sense of sustainability in the family. The step-sisters in F1, who were eight and nine years old at the time the families blended, easily identified themselves as friends and sisters. They enjoyed the company of one

another, one supports the other in their learning, collaborate to outnumber their parents in television channel selection and the like. The stepsiblings in F7, who were aged between 16 and 20 at the time their families blended, have positive interaction, collaboration in household chores where the girls appreciated their stepbrother's cooking skill, they also felt safe and secured to walk at night because of their stepbrother's company. The children in this category felt good for their parents as they now have someone who companies them and shares their responsibilities. Similarly, the parents and stepparents in functional blended families have feelings of getting someone who supports, loves and takes care of their children; which is boldly reflected by parents who were rearing their respective single child before the formation of the blended family. They also have feelings of dignity, respect and stability. The features that characterize functional blended families are in line with the features mentioned in optimal and/or adequate family groups in Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning (Hampson, 2002).

The reasonable time functional blended families gave to get along each other prior to blending their families might have helped the family members to work out with the challenges the marital/parental loss caused and to move on. Lack or absence of communication with the non-resident biological parent has been observed in three of the functional blended families due to death of the parent, and absence or lack of contact with the parent. This might be one factor that limited the negative influence of former spouses and nonresident biological parents on the new blended family.

Deteriorating blended families. The formation of the blended family has resulted in extreme confusion and disorder for the deteriorating blended families. The situation of families who belong to this group is similar with the border line families in Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning as they are neither as bad as the dysfunctional blended families or as health

as those in functional blended families. Yet, unlike the chaos in the border line families (Hampson, 2002) of the Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning where it is basically with members of the family, the chaos in deteriorating blended families is dominantly with non-residential family members, extended families and community members. Regardless of the parental coalition, and stepmother-stepchildren attachment and positive interaction, the rejection and complaints that come from “outsiders” have psychologically and socially affected the family members particularly the parents. The effect may be significant due to the fact that Ethiopia is a collectivist culture where social support tremendously impacts the success of particular families. The crisis in this deteriorating blended family can be also explained using the ABC-X family stress model. The formation of the blended family by itself was a stressor (labeled as “A” in the model) for the family members in F4 as they were not well prepared to the family event. The couple in this family blended in less than a week’s time from the first day of their introduction. The event caused hardship that demand the family’s crisis meeting resources like the family’s competence or incompetence to overcome the challenge (the “B” in the model). For example, F4W quit her job as and when the new family is formed. This caused economic, social and psychological hardship on the family. She was no more able to financially and emotionally support her non-resident biological children. The new blended family also required her fulltime presence at home as she was fully engaged in child rearing and home management responsibilities. Examples of the hardships she (F4W) faced due to the blended family formation include her inability to afford the 200 Birr her son needed for school contribution and the hostile communication she experienced with her daughter. The challenges she faced after blending (the stressor event), guided her perception of the event (Labeled as “C” in the model). She felt the marriage had exacerbated her situation, she developed guilt consciousness, community members

are blaming her for getting married abandoning her children. At times, she thought her decision to blend was wrong but she had no option now as “getting out is not as easy as getting in”, given this is her third marriage.

Dysfunctional blended families. Blended families in this category share several features demonstrated by the severely dysfunctional families (Hampson, 2002) stated in Beavers Systems Model of Family Functioning. For example, the behavior manifested by F3H, F5H and F8W are unusual for neighbors and other community members. The dominant problem in these families is lack of effective communication. The family members commonly experience extreme chaos and have poor problem-solving skill. They lack a common goal and are highly engaged in activities that stir up family breakups. They have experiences of spontaneous separation and they feel that the family would end up in divorce at some point. The families consist of violent, vulnerable, and/or excluded members.

Simple Vs Complex Blended Families. What does the terms simple and complex imply? I suggest using more neutral terms such as a single stepparent blended family and a double stepparent blended family. Because single and double refer to the mere number of stepparents in the given blended family; nothing more. However, the terms simple blended family and complex blended family go beyond that. Normally, these terms are related with the level of difficulty. One may logically assume managing a simple blended family to be simpler/easier than managing a complex blended family. Or having two stepparents in a family make the issues in blended families more complex and complicated? The findings of this research revealed the opposite. There are three complex blended families and they are all functional. From these three two have a common child; one has no common child. From the five simple blended families three are dysfunctional, one is deteriorating and the other one is functional. This might be because of several

reasons such as experience in parenting and the desire to set positive setting for one's own children. In the former's case, the prior experience of the marriage partners in child rearing may make their stepparenting role easier. They know similar contexts so they could easily adapt with their new family setting. The later might be a factor in such a way that parents strive to create a conducive environment for their biological children. One possible way of achieving this could be being nice to their spouse and stepchildren. This is also explained by reciprocity theory in social psychology. You do good for others expecting the same whenever you needed. Mustapha and Shamsudin (2020) described reciprocity as a social context where people pay back whatever they received from others.

Additional points: How is punishment perceived in the context of Ethiopia? As a woman with emic perspective, I can say the perception of considering both verbal and physical punishment as instruments of child disciplining is wide spread in Ethiopia. Accordingly, there is a tendency of understanding the intention of punishment among family members and it is commonly practiced in several families. Similarly, the family members in F6 and F5 viewed the punishment enforced by F6H and F5H as mechanisms of disciplining the children. The family members tend to value the intention and took the punishment as appropriate way of exercising "parenthood". In this regard, F5S2 stated "He [stepfather] used to follow up and control me when I was a child. He used to check my exercise books, supported me in my home works and assignments. He beat me, took me to game zones and supported me in my education. We were very close and I still love him." This child listed "beating" along with his positive experiences not because he enjoyed beating but because it showed his stepfather's concern to his wellbeing. He is letting us know how responsible his father was in his child rearing. F6 is a patriarchal family where major family decisions such as the stepchildren's marriage and issues related with children's education were made by F6H. Though it is customary for F6H to express his anger in yelling and shouting at the target person whoever they are; the family members interpreted that

as “a typical fatherly behavior”. The children and F6W validated his behavior and devised a way to deal with it. Accordingly, whenever the children [step or biological] have some serious issue, first they discussed amongst themselves and then they consulted their mother. Then, F6W took the case to her husband for final decision. What works in this family seems to be the impartial treatment of the parents to their children and stepchildren. Impartial treatment of both stepchild and biological child seems to be accepted by family members even if the behavior is apparently abusive. F3W said, “...now, I learned that it is his behavior as he is treating his own son similarly [in the way he treats his stepdaughter]. I excused him; it is not because he is her stepfather...”

Chapter Six

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

This study explored the family formation processes and the family functioning experiences of blended family members in the context of Ethiopia. Three different but interrelated models emerged from the data using the techniques and procedures provided by the constructivist grounded theory design. The models provide detail information regarding blended family formation, blended family functioning and the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning in Ethiopia. The first model described the relevance of similar prior experience in helping partners to easily get along and understand each other. It also identified the state partners were in namely problem state and aspiration state as one of the major factors that informed partners decision to blend. The second depicted three major categories of blended families which are functional blended families, deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families based on their reported family functioning experiences and the third model described the link between the former two models.

From the findings of this study, particularly after constructing the third model which is the link between blended family formation and blended family functioning, I came up with some critical concluding remarks. As depicted in Figure 4.3, similarity in prior state is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to form functional blended families. All functional blended families appeared to have similar prior state but all families who had similar prior state do not necessarily belong to the category of functional blended families. Families who

were in similar prior state need to achieve the minimum expectation they set in order to make their blended family functional. Families who are exposed to unexpected scenarios tend to deteriorate regardless of their similar prior state. Blended families could be dysfunctional regardless of the state the independent families were in prior to blending. Perceived or actual stepparent-stepchild relationship is the major factor that leads blended families to dysfunction.

6.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings, I suggest the following recommendations. I am planning to translate the major findings and the recommendations of this research in Amharic and disseminate it to the blended families who participated in this study. As a family researcher and a trainer in social issues, I am also planning to develop a training module based on the findings of this study and to deliver trainings to interested families and other community members.

- Families who decided to get blended should be thoughtful about the changes the new family would bring such as changes in residences, incomes, expenses, stepparent-stepchild relationships and other relevant family issues. This, would help them to set realistic expectations and to accept the family they formed and to work towards its positive functioning. The dynamics in blended families might be quite tough to be anticipated. However, creating a mental image on how the new family will look like might give the opportunity to identify the major issues that deserve prior consideration. These might include consideration of economic issues, community values, relationship with steps and extended family members, when and how to blend the families and the like. Every blended family comes with its own peculiar features. So, what works for one family may not work for the

other. Hence, blending a family requires in-depth investigation on the challenges and opportunities that the new family could potentially bring. Thus, family members particularly marriage partners should plan ahead of time on how to manage the ongoing and emerging issues that the new family might encounter.

- Blended family members should devise strategies that enhance interdependence between and among the family members. Interdependent relationship among family members strengthens mutual support, understanding and attachment. Assigning carefully designed roles to each family member and/or strengthening existing ones would enhance one's feeling of responsibility and create conducive family environment. These roles might be tutoring little siblings or stepchildren, engaging in daily chores, shopping, taking care of stepchildren or newborns.

- Blended family members should work toward managing conflicts in the best possible way for the betterment of the family. Conflicts are common occurrences in human interactions. If well managed, conflicts could be sources of learning differences to build amicable relations by recognizing differences among family members. Otherwise, conflicts might lead to family disruption.

- Partners in problem state should give due consideration while deciding to form blended families. They should exhaustively consider alternatives and weigh the cost and benefit of their decision rather than merely focusing on solving their immediate problems.

- Social workers, counselors, social psychologists and developmental psychologists should enhance family and community support systems through promoting the characterizing features of functional blended families.

- The government of Ethiopia should strengthen its law enforcement mechanisms to protect single mothers and their children from harassment and violence. Besides, the government, in collaboration with the community should provide family support services that address the unique challenges such as economic and child rearing struggles of single parents and their children. For example, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) is responsible for the Affairs of Women, Children, Youth and the overall Social Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, the Elderly, urban destitute, the poor, vulnerable and marginalized segments of the Ethiopian Population. The structure runs from the minister to the woreda and kebele levels (the lowest level in the government structure). Through my organization, I can reach out to these government officials and bring to their attention the complex and complicated issues of blended families. Since they are already working on related issues such as women empowerment, child wellbeing, poverty, and gender-based violence, the findings of this research would be a great input for them. For example, the research findings revealed that women blend their families due to poverty, for the sake of their children's wellbeing and because of gender-based violence. So, they can easily intertwine the issues. It may not become a policy issue right away, not because it does not deserve but because it was not a tradition, but at least we can bring the issue to their attention.

- Blended family members in Ethiopia should assess their blended family condition and identify where they belong based on the model of blended family functioning in Ethiopia and work to improve their situation accordingly.

- Organizations that work on family services should arrange programs where functional blended family members share their experiences to deteriorating blended families and dysfunctional blended families.

- Social workers, counselors, social psychologists, and developmental psychologists should help deteriorating blended family members to explore and apply positive coping mechanisms that might help them to promote their family to functional blended family.
- Quantitative research should be conducted to assess the magnitude of blended families in each category to develop evidence-based family intervention programs. Besides, we need to know more about the relationship between blended family type, simple blended families and complex blended families, and family functioning categories.

6.3 Limitation

This research encountered four practical limitations. One is related with achieving categorical saturation. I collected detail data that helped to optimally describe and dimensionalize the categories that emerged. Despite the effort I exerted to ensure the development of a well saturated theory through collecting data that described and explained the categories from different perspectives, and yet the decision I made to terminate data collection might have minimal effect on the data quality. This might have affected the quality of the models grounded on the data. The second is that The School of Psychology has no clear guideline on how to integrate publications with the monograph which may have shadowed the effort I exerted in integrating the two. The third limitation I faced was related with the challenge of getting sustainable consent from members of blended families. Three families had declined after providing me their initial consent; particularly the two families declined after I invested a lot. One of this happened as I was interviewing a family member in the family's compound. An adult child who lived elsewhere came to visit his family on that same day and warned his parents to stop participating in any type of study. So, I terminated the interview right away. Another

happened as I reached in the town the family lives after travelling 140 kms as the husband changed his mind assuming that the interview might threaten the family's security. The final limitation is related with the publication process which was very challenging for me and it also affects the timely completion of the monograph.

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Appendix A. Participants' Consent Form

Dear Family Members,

My name is Kumneger Fikre. I am a PhD. Candidate at Addis Ababa University, School of Psychology. Currently I am doing my doctoral dissertation entitled: “Family Functioning Experiences of Blended Families in Ethiopia: A Constructivist Grounded Theory”. The purpose of this study is exploring the experiences of blended families for the purpose of understanding the factors that enhance family cohesion, flexibility and communication. The research is also aimed at developing a model that describes and explains balanced family functioning scenario in blended families.

I would like to request you to take part in my research. The reason why I am inviting you is because you are a blended family with a minimum of two years' experience after establishing this family. If you agree to participate in this study, you will attend a family interview that will take from 45 to 90 minutes. With your permission, the interviews will be recorded using audio recorder and the interviewer will take notes as well. After completely transcribing the information on paper, the audio records will be deleted. All notes will be anonymized to protect your identity. The information you provide will be confidential.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, you may find an indirect benefit in knowing you have participated in an important study which aims to promote the wellbeing of blended families. The information you provide might contribute to inform future social network interventions to support families like you.

The information that is collected during the interview will be kept private, safe and secure. I will protect your privacy and maintain the confidentiality of all the information that you provide (e.g. name, contacts' details, etc.). Your data will be anonymized. This means that any information

about you will have your name and address removed and your data will have a code number instead. Interview notes will be anonymized. Names of people and places you might mention in the interview will be removed.

Your participation in this study is completely on voluntary basis. If you decided to take part, you can choose not to answer specific questions. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. The study results, including your family experiences will be published in academic journals, and will be disseminated as policy briefs and conference abstracts. Your personal information will not be included in any of these publications and there is no way that you can be identified from it.

If you need further information about the study, you should contact me using the address given below.

At this point, do you have any question or concern that needs clarification? [Questions/ Concerns will be clarified by the researcher]

Do I have your consent to proceed? _____

Contact Address:

Kumneger Fikre,

PhD. Candidate at Addis Ababa University, School of Psychology

Phone: +251 919 495557

Email: kfkumnegerf@gmail.com

Appendix B. Couples' Interview Guide

Topic	Interview Questions
Family Background	General Information: • Family size • Age and sex of family members • Age of family members at the time the family was formed • Educational background of family members • Occupation • Monthly income • Years since blended
Pre-Blended Experience	• Please tell me about the family experience you had before establishing this family?
Family Transition	• Tell me about how you met? • What were the reasons for blending your families? • What were your expectations from the blended family? • What changes did you made in your family as a result of blending?

Family Functioning	• In your opinion, what do you think are the most important features of a family? • Please tell me more about the major family issues you encountered so far. • How did you manage family issues? Could you please give me examples?
Family Benefits	• Please share with me the benefits you get as a result of blending your family?
Family Challenges	• Please share with me the challenges you faced as a result of blending your family?
Protective Factors	• What are the factors that promote your family functioning? • What are the existing blended family support systems in your community? • What are the family support services available in your community? • What special services do you need from the community? • Where and how do you get help from on family matters?

	• What should be done to enhance family functioning of blended families?
Risk Factors	• What are the factors that hinder your family functioning? • How are stepfamilies portrayed in your community? [Probe: Fairy-tale stories, movies, proverbs, etc.] • What should be done to mitigate the factors that affect blended family functioning?
Aspiration	• If you are given a chance to change something in your family life, what will it be? Why?
Anything else	• Is there anything else that you would like to say about blended families?
Closing	• Please share with me the general impression of participating in this interview. • Thank you for giving me your precious family time to participate in this study!

Appendix C. Stepchildren's Interview Guide

Topic	Interview Questions
Pre-Blended Experience	• What comes to your mind when you think of your life before the formation of this family? What else do you recall? • How did you learn about the formation of this family? • Please tell me more about your reaction at that time?
Family Transition	Now, let's talk about your experiences during the initial times of the family formation. • What changes had you experienced when the new family was established? (prob: residence, school, family member...) • How did you adapt the new family environment? • What were the most interesting experiences you encountered? • What were the most challenging experiences you faced?

Family Functioning	• In your opinion, what do you think are the most important features of a family? • Please tell me more about the major family issues you encountered so far. • Please tell me about your role in managing family issues? Could you please give me examples?
Family Benefits	• Please share with me the benefits you get as a result of being a member of this family? • What are some of the things you like about your family?
Family Challenges	• Please share with me the challenges you faced as a result of being a member of this family? • What are some of the things you dislike about your family?
Protective Factors	• What are the factors that promote your family functioning? • What are the existing blended family support systems in your community? • What are the family support services available in your community?

	• What special services do you need from the community? • Where and how do you get help from on family matters? • What should be done to enhance family functioning of blended families?
Risk Factors	• What are the factors that hinder your family functioning? • How are stepfamilies portrayed in your community? [Probe: Fairy-tale stories, movies, proverbs, etc.] • What should be done to mitigate the factors that affect blended family functioning?
Aspiration	• If you are given a chance to change something in your family life, what will it be? Why?
Anything else	• Is there anything else that you would like to say about blended families?
Closing	• Please share with me the general impression of participating in this interview.

	• Thank you for giving me your precious family time to participate in this study!
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Appendix D. Article 1

Fikre, K. & Minaye, A. (2023). A model of blended family (stepfamily) formation in Ethiopia: a constructivist grounded theory. *African Journal of Social Work*, 13(6), 303-311. DOI: 10.4314/ajsw.v13i6.4

Appendix E. Article 2

Kumneger, F. & Abebaw, M. (2024). Blended family functioning in Ethiopia: A constructivist grounded theory. *Scope*, 14(1).