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An Exploratory Research on Stepchildren's Experiences in the Stepparent Households:

The Case of *Kolfe Keranyo* Sub city, Addis Ababa

(Case Study)

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ABSTRACT

Studying the experiences of stepchildren is very essential for both the wellbeing of child in particular and the well functioning of the family in general as a unit. The present study explored children's situation with the aim of understanding experiences of stepchildren in their own scrutiny. The study utilized data from eight convenience and purposively selected individuals through sentence completion, story writing and interview. A thematic analysis is used to analysis the data

The study clearly indicated that stepchildren appeared to experience unfriendly family environment which can impact their wellbeing. In fact, there were stepchildren who have friendly family environment. Children from stepparent household experience educational impediment as well as less contact with their nonresidential parent/families-*best interest of the child*. Stepchildren also appear to have less genuine relationship with their stepparent, which plays major role for the involvement of the stepparents for betterment of the child life. Physical abuse, less intimacy with stepparent, emotional abuse, and ignorance by stepparents are also more likely exhibited in the stepparent households. Similarly, stepchildren experience discriminatory action by their stepparents. Stepchildren live in the stepmother households appear to experiences those situations more than children from stepfather households.

Stepparents are recommended to develop harmonious relationship with their stepchild for both the wellbeing of the child and the family unit through promoting trust relationship, children emotion and positive reaction for child requests. Social workers support is essential here to promote the wellbeing of the child. Indeed, family policies need to clarify the relationship of stepchildren and stepparent in the household-what is the responsibility of stepparent for child?

KEYWORDS: Stepparent household, Stepparent, Stepchildren, Experience

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Remarriage and the formation of stepparent household is not a new phenomenon in the country Ethiopia and in other countries. Throughout history, in this contemporary world remarriage has existed as an acceptable solution to the loss of a spouse (Ihinger-Tallman, 1988). The first constructed family might get dissolution because of either the natural factors like the death of any of the spouses or personal reasons like divorce. It is universal that most people who losses their partner in any means could go on to remarry with new partner and bring children from the previous marital relationship (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Robertson et al., 2006; Tifferet, 2010). The formation of such remarriage families with children leads to the enigma of stepparent household, stepparenting, and stepchildren. Stepparent households were created primarily when divorced parents or widow/widower parents remarried after having children from prior relationship. Such families are also fairly common, due to no marital birth rate, multiple-partner fertility, and high rates of maternal mortality during child birth (Juby, Le Bourdais, Marcil-Gartton, 2001; Robertson et al., 2006, p.7; The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2006; Wojtkiewicz & Holtzman, 2005).

Seeing the prevalence of stepchildren live in stepparent households, even though there is no statistical data on the prevalence of remarriage and stepchildren in the country Ethiopia, the data below indicates the extent of divorce rate which can possibly plays the major role for the prevalence of stepparent households (Ihinger-Tallman, 1988; Juby et al., 2001; Robertson et al., 2006) is high. Tilson and Larson (2000) reported that 45 percent of marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years; 28 percent of first marriages end in divorce within the first five years; 34 percent within ten years, and 40 percent within 20 years (p. 360). Specific to Addis Ababa,

certified divorces from the year 2005/6- 2009/10 were 1504, 1701, 2095, 2264, 2258 respectively (Lideta, Office of Archives and Documentation). Those data possibly indicate the prevalence of stepparenting in the country because literatures indicate that the increase of divorce increases the prevalence of stepparent households (Barbara, 2004; Robertson, et al., 2006; Tifferet, 2010). Indeed in the country the divorce rate before having children might be higher than after. In addition to the divorce rate, other factor like no marital child birth rate, death of either of spouse contribute for the prevalence of stepparent households in the country. That is because there are high rates of maternal mortality during childbirth, death of a partner due to war in Ethiopia (Atalelegn Kebret, 1996; Jelaludin Ahmed, Angeli, Alemtsehay Biru, & Salvini, 2001) and death in other reasons.

The new stepparent households might be characterized by substantially more complex relationships (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Social institutions have not established norms regarding the roles played by stepparents and their children, ex-spouses and each other, nonresidential parents and their children, and nonresidential parents and stepparents for the well functioning of the family and child wellbeing (Vogt Yuan & Hamilton, 2006). That makes the situation in stepparent households more stressful and makes relationships more conflicted and difficult (Cherlin, 1978). Norms could be like how stepparent and/or nonresidential parents should involve in the life of the child given that stepparent and child haven't blood relationship, and child and nonresidential parent are not living together. But if it is for first married families there is a clear norm that parents has the responsibility to play all parenting roles.

As Kirby (2006) reviewed from various research results done in different countries outside Ethiopia, children in stepparent households do not fair as well as do those in first-married families across a number of important domains depicted here in the next sentence. Children who

live in stepparent households have lower grades and lower academic test scores compared to children who live in first-married families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bogenscheider, 1997; Jeynes, 2000; Teachman, Carver, & Paasch, 1997), show more internalizing problems such as depressed mood (Dawson, 1991; Hanson, McLanahan, & Thomson, 1996; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993) and more externalizing problems such as delinquency than do children in first-married families (Hoffman & Johnson, 1998). This trigger the researcher to explore really what stepchildren would experience in stepparent household environment in Ethiopia particularly in the study area. Moreover, the adaptations required of children by the structural characteristics of remarriages have received even less research attention than those of separation and divorce (Bumpass 1984). Particularly in Ethiopia, the issue of stepparent households especially about stepchildren is not given enough attention for both research and practice work. Nonetheless researches in other part of world indicated that children in remarried families are at increased risk for the development of psychological, behavioral, social and academic problems in comparison to those in two-parent, non-divorced families (Hetherington, 2003). The current study explored experiences of stepchildren in the stepparent household environment from the children's perspectives given that understanding stepchildren would help to improve their situation.

1.2 Organization of the Thesis

The thesis proceeds as follows. The first chapter gives an introduction to stepparent households and convinces the rationale of the current study. It incorporated also the research question. The next section, chapter two, reviews literatures on stepparenting and stepchildren. Similarly international, regional and national instruments on the rights of children are summarized. The research objectives are also described here in this chapter. In chapter three the

research method and the research processes of the study are explained as well. Ethical issues are also part of this section. The fourth chapter argues about the key findings of the research. The result of this research finding also discussed in relation other research findings in the section of discussion, chapter five. Finally, chapter six summarizes the major findings of the study and forwards the social work implications.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Parenting is undoubtedly one of the most challenging roles in one's lifetime. It is beyond being responsive to the child need. Parents need to be a model to their children's behavior as well as a monitor of their child's behavior and environment, to prevent problems along the way (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001). However, in stepparent households, instead of playing the above parenting roles, it is a complex task for them achieving family solidarity (Coleman, Ganong, & Fine, 2000; Johnson, et al., 2008; Strong, DeVault, Sayad, 1998; Stewart, 2005). The complexity of the stepparent household is underscored when we consider that it requires not only a reorganization of the family members but also a revamping of how the stepparent households responds to, reacts to, and resolves family conflict (Turner & West, 2002).

Bringing children into a new marital relationship can influence several dynamics of the relationship and overall family functioning (Robertson et al, 2006). When a stepparent household is formed, the members have no shared family histories or shared ways of doing things, and they may have very different beliefs (The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2006). Moreover, Hetherington and Stanley- Hagan (2002) demonstrated that in the immediate aftermath of a parental remarriage, most children experience emotional distress and behavior problems, including anger, resentment, non-compliance, anxiety and depression, as they cope

with the confusion and apprehension stemming from changing relationships in the family and shifts in their life situation.

Robertson et al (2006) illustrated about the relationship between stepparents and stepchildren that when stepparents disengage and interact very little with their stepchildren or when they use coercive or punitive disciplinary behavior, the stepparent-stepchild relationship is negatively affected. Similarly, Buehler and Gerard (cited in Seth, 2005, p.2) indicated that marital conflict in the stepparent household is negatively related to parents' involvement in their children's lives. Moreover, other researches depicted that, many who live in such families (both stepchildren and stepparent) are unhappy with the terms available to name themselves (Claxton-Oldfield & Voyer, 2001; Wojtkiewicz & Holtzman, 2005). In the same way the general society perception toward stepchild and stepparenting is unenthusiastic (Claxton-Oldfield & Voyer, 2001; Goldscheider & Kaufman, 2006; Turner & West, 2002; Wojtkiewicz & Holtzman, 2005).

Therefore, in order to understand the Ethiopian experience, this study explored the experiences of stepchildren live in that stepparent household environment. Beyond that this research covered experiences of stepchildren who are being raised in the stepparent households experience on the views of children themselves. Exploring the experiences of stepchildren in the stepparent household is highly relevant to understand children for their well being as well as their family well functioning as a unit. Besides, the importance of giving an emphasis to stepchildren and their familial experience is that, the adequacy of young children to develop independence and assume social responsibilities will largely depend upon how families bring up their children (Baumrind & Black, 1967). That is for the fact that family structure has important implications for children's outcomes via education performance, psychological functioning, health and behavioral wellbeing. Researches implicate that children in two biological parent

families are better than children living with a stepparent (Coleman 2000; Halpern-Meehin & Tach, 2006; Hofferth & Anderson, 2001; Kerr & Michalski, 2004; Parke, 2003; Wojtkiewicz & Holtzman, 2005).

Stepchildren situation and experience in stepparent parenting environment needs to be studied because children raised in married-biological-parent families are less likely to engage in delinquent and criminal behavior; which is boys raised in stepparent households are three times as likely to be delinquent (Dornbusch et al cited in Seleshi Zeleke & Sentayehu Tadesse, 1998, p.31; does marriage matter? pdf, n.d, p.24). And children who are in stepparent households also tend to leave home earlier than children who live with both married biological parents (Parke, 2003).

Even though literatures depict the different challenges and situations of stepparent households, and children arrangement problems joining of new families, it is less explored as well as discussed the issue of stepchildren experiences living in that challenging family environment, especially as to children view to the knowledge of the researcher. More specifically in Ethiopia the familial experiences of stepchildren in stepparent households and the children's own points of view and perception is not fully explored. To fill this glaring gap in research, the researcher conducted this study to uncover the experience of stepchildren in the stepparent household. The study explored the experiences of stepchildren as to the three pillars of the Child Right Convention (CRC): *Best interest of the child, Survival and development, and Non discrimination*. That is with the assumption that stepparents have different duties and responsibilities of promoting children wellbeing as what it is expected from parents to do for children life achievement once they reconstructed family and live together with their stepchild in

one family organization (Fine, 1989; Mason, Harrison-Jay, Svare., & Wolfinger, 2002; Stepfamily Scotland, n.d).

1.4 The Rationale of the Study

It could be clearly seen that the situation of stepchildren in the stepparent households in Ethiopia hasn't been studied. Research in these areas is still negligible. It is not only about stepchildren but also the situation of remarriage families in general is the neglected area in the country both on research and practice. Hence, literature about the familial experiences of stepchildren in the stepparent household environment particularly in Ethiopia has been hard to find. Therefore, this research tried to explore the experiences of stepchildren who live in the stepparent households focusing on the nurturance to children in that family environment.

1.5 The Research Question

What is the experience of stepchildren living in stepparent households in *Kolfe Keranyo* sub-city?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The nurturing family environment in the upraising of children is needed for the development and wellbeing of the child. This implies that parents in the household need to be concerned about playing their roles in the child overall development as a parent. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, little is known about what stepchildren are experiencing in the stepparent family environment given that stepparent households are complex and the relationship between stepparent and stepchildren is non biological. And there is also a negative connotation toward 'step'. The study, therefore, came up with some general situation of stepchildren living in

stepparent household environment in *Kolfe Keranyo* sub-city which would help maintaining the well being of children in particular and the positive functioning of the family as a unit in general. Furthermore, the study provided some useful direction for conducting further research in the area.

1.7 Summary of the Chapter

Households that emerge from remarriage with children are known as stepparent households, which are prevalent in Ethiopia too. But, however people have a negative perception toward stepparenting and stepparent households are complex even achieving family solidarity, situation of stepchildren in the stepparent households in Ethiopia haven't studied yet. Prior researches concentrated more on children outcomes in relation with family structures as well as the children adjustment experiences of new family formation. Particularly, coming to country Ethiopia this segment of population hasn't been studied as well. Given that this research explored the experiences of stepchildren who live in the stepparent households from the children's perspectives with the research question of 'what is the experience of stepchildren living in stepparent households in *Kolfe Keranyo* sub-city?'

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition and Characteristics of Stepparent Households

Families that emerge from remarriage with children are known generally as stepparent households (Strong et al, 1998). Stepparent household is created when two adults form a household in which one or both brings a child from a previous relationship and the new partner becomes a significant adult or parental figure to their partner's child (Juby et al., 2001, p. 2). The member of the couple to whom the child is not biologically related comes to be stepparent, specifically the stepmother or stepfather. The traditional definition of a stepparent household is a married couple where one or both members of the couple have pre-existing children who live with them. But, recently the definition is often expanded to include all cohabiting couples, whether married or not (Papernow & Patricia, 1993). The current research insisted to prior definition of stepparent households. A stepparent household can be “simple,” in which only one member of the couple has a prior child or children, or it can be “complex” or “blended”. In blended stepparent households, both members of the couple may have had pre-existing children, or the couple may have additional children together (Schultz, Schultz, & Olson, 1991). A blended family is a sub-set of the stepparent household, and refers to families that include children who do not share the same natural parents (Juby et al., 2001).

2.2. Myths about Stepparent Households

As it is summarized below from the work of Sanders (1984), there are myths that can strongly influence the way blended families see and feel about themselves. I think these myths have a role on what child could experience in the family. In fact, those are researched from European countries, not in Ethiopia. These myths may interfere with the performance of difficult

developmental tasks facing a blended family in its attempt to become an integrated and successful family unit. Those are

Stepmothers are wicked: Although this myth seems almost too obvious to have impact on blended family formation, the fact that it is so widely known and held is what is most important. Indeed, it is recited in fairy- tales and nursery rhymes for each new generation in their formative years. In fact we need to remember that it is seldom the individual who is 'wicked', but rather the relationships of these individuals which make them appear so.

Children of divorces and remarriages are forever damaged: This myth stems from society having most experience with the traditional nuclear family and its values. The primary belief in the past was that a marriage lasted until the death of one partner. However, in today's society, people no longer remain married solely for the purpose of raising children. The belief that the children of blended families and single parent families are damaged stems from this old cultural belief and not from relevant clinical research.

Remarriage after a spouse's death goes more smoothly than after a divorce: The traditional reasoning underscoring this myth is that death eliminates one person in an already complex blended family structure. However, it is useful to realize that change is change, whether it is caused by death or divorce. In fact, in some ways remarriages after death may be more difficult because of the post-death idealization of the dead parent or the different rates of mourning in various family members.

Blended family integration occurs quickly: It arises from the larger belief that once a hurdle is crossed, it is left behind forever. In the case of blended families, this hurdle may be remarriage, settlement of custody issues, or any host of other issues. Once these large hurdles are passed, the expectation that integration should now occur readily is frequently met with frank

disappointment and resentment. In fact, blended family integration occurs rather slowly; most clinicians point out that families require three to five years before stable, cohesive interaction occurs. The stability of the blended family will most often be different than members' expectations (Sanders, 1984).

2.3. The Structural Differences of Stepparent Households

Impressing to the structural differences of stepparent households, scholars, according to the explanation of Strong et al. (1998) and Weisbard (2007) identified the following structural characteristics of stepparent households which differ from biological families.

1. All members have suffered important losses including relationships and dreams of what their family would be like.
2. One biological parent lives outside the current family. He or she may either support or interfere with the new family.
3. All individuals in the family come together with previous family histories.
4. Stepparent roles are ill defined. No one know a quite what he or she is supposed to do as a stepparent. Most stepparents try role after role until they find one that fits.
5. Children are members of two households if they have contact with both biological parents.
6. Little, if any, legal relationship exists between stepparents and stepchildren.

2.4. Positive Aspects of Living in a Stepparent Household for Children

Living in stepparent household potentially has the following advantages (stepfamily Australia 2010 & Weisbard, 2007).

1. Children have male and female adult role models in the household. And, the stepparent may have a more objective view of the stepchildren and may be able to initiate change or provide insights into the children's behavior.
2. Stepparents can provide friendship, nurturing and emotional support for children. The new couple provides a positive adult model for children to see that two adults can care for each other and live compatibly together. Thus, children can learn from stepparents and stepsiblings about how to get along with others and they can observe and learn from different family lifestyles and value systems.
3. Children's adaptability and flexibility can be increased by living in a stepparent household.
4. The family members may enjoy a higher standard of living thanks to combined incomes, and there is an opportunity to feel part of a two-parent family again.

2.5. Situation of Stepparent Households and Stepchildren in Ethiopia

Like other countries in the world, due to death of spouse or prevalence of divorce and then remarriage stepparent households exist here in Ethiopia too. However, unfortunately nothing has been found in organized manner via research papers, government publication, or in other way about situation of Ethiopian stepparent households. But different art works that incorporate about step (could be step mother or child) like fictions, poems, films, plays and public proverbs depict about Ethiopian stepparent households that stepparents are not genuine to their stepchildren and vice versa. Nonetheless, according to literatures in abroad, social stigmatization of divorce and stepfamilies is evident (Bumpass, 1984, Kung, Hung, & Chan, 2004; Yang & Rosenblatt, cited in Webber 2002) which I couldn't find out and think of in Ethiopia.

2.6. The Meaning of Family to Stepchildren

Lambert (2008) found that stepchildren had a variety of reasons for determining whether or not their stepparent was —family. Some stepchildren stated that they only saw their stepparent as family because they were married to the family-of-origin parent, were living with them, and/or had children with their family-of-origin parent. Other reasons still cited the legal marriage, but also an emotional component, such as seeing the stepparent as a surrogate parent. Similarly, other reasons were purely emotional, in which stepchildren described the stepparent being there for them, not trying to take over for their deceased or nonresidential parent, and treating them like their own child. The number of years living together, the stepparent being legally married to the parent, is the other factor (DiVerniero, 2010).

2.7. Effects of Remarriage on Children and Their Adjustment in Remarried Families

In the immediate aftermath of a parental remarriage, most children experience emotional distress and behavior problems, including anger, resentment, non-compliance, anxiety and depression, as they cope with the confusion and apprehension stemming from changing relationships in the family and shifts in their life situation (Hetherington and Stanley- Hagan, 2002). Seeing effects of marital transitions on children's adjustment, on average, preadolescent children in divorced and remarried families, non-divorced families show increased levels of aggression, conduct disorders, non-compliance, disobedience and decreased self-regulation and social responsibility, as well as poorer classroom conduct and academic performance (Hetherington, 2003). Children in remarried families also show an increased risk for internalizing problems, including higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of self-esteem compared to children in non divorced families. Adolescents from remarried families compared to those from non-divorced families show a two- to three-fold increase in risk for psychological and

behavioral problems, including school drop out, lower socioeconomic and educational attainment, early sexual activity, having children out of wedlock, unemployment, substance abuse, delinquent activities and involvement with antisocial peers (Halpern-MeeKin & Tach, 2006; Hetherington, 2003; Hofferth & Anderson, 2001; Kerr & Michalski, 2004; Parke, 2003; Wojtkiewicz & Holtzman, 2005).

2.8. Family Environment and Perspectives

Cherlin (1978) argues that remarriages are a shakier family structure than traditional family forms due to the lack of institutionalized roles, with their given rights and responsibilities, for the remarried partners. This also extends to non-shared children present in the union. Due to such issues as whether and to what degree stepparents have the authority to discipline stepchildren, Cherlin describes remarriages as open to the development of more stressful family dynamics than traditional families face.

Family systems perspective: it clarified that each relationship between individuals within a family unit affects and is affected by all other subsystem relationships contained within the family (Hetherington, 1999). For example, the type of relationship a stepfather has with his stepchild will affect his relationship with his wife as well as his relationship with their mutual child (Halpern-MeeKin and Tach (2006). It conceptualizes the response of the whole family system (including its boundary, the roles, relationships and functioning of subsystems), to the reorganization needed for restoration of equilibrium when the family goes through a remarriage (Tan-jacob, 2006).

The socialization perspective: Kirby (2006) summarized in his writing that the main tenet of this perspective is that the support, supervision, and models of behavior provided by parents affect the development and well-being of children. According to the socialization perspective, the

primary reason that children who experience the separation of their parents are, on average, worse off than other children is that the family types that result from parental separation are less effective at providing a secure and consistent environment for socialization (Kirby, 2006)

2.9. Stepparent Households and Family Law

However, the stepparent does not automatically gain parental responsibilities and rights towards a child, if the stepparents look after the child even on a temporary basis they are expected by law to safeguard the child's health, development and welfare when they marry with the child's parent (Stepfamily Scotland, n.d, p.5). Similarly, stepparents also provide economic and emotional support, perform child-raising tasks at home, and serve a parental role in the child's world outside the home (Engel, 2005, p.10).

Fine (1989) reviewed that family law does not presently provide clear and comprehensive rules to define the responsibilities of parties to the stepparent-stepchild relationship (see, Mahoney, 1987; Markoff, 1984; Ramsey & Masson, 1985). Similarly, in Ethiopia nothing is described about stepparent households in the federal family code except article 268 which talks about non-biological custody; "parents who are not biological has to apply to the court to get the parenting role over the child". In the eyes of the law, the status of parenthood is generally restricted to biological and adoptive parents. Stepparents are viewed as "a major category of 'third parties' who develop relationships with their stepchildren but are not regarded as legal parents (Pollet, 2010). The areas most often addressed in the area of family law and stepfamilies are: a) child support obligations during the marriage, b) child support duties following the termination of the parents' remarriage, c) stepparent custody of stepchildren following dissolution of the remarriage, and d) stepparents' visitation rights following dissolution of the remarriage (Fine, 1989).

2.10. Children's Rights in Different Instruments (Policy Frameworks)

Legally, children have the right to be loved, not to be hurt, free expression, health and the right to choose they like. Hence, different national, regional and local instruments and policies that give clear picture about situation of the child to be and others obligations for the well being and development of the child have been ratified.

International Instrument: United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNCRC is the most widely ratified convention that recognizes every child's right to a standard of living conducive to physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. Specifically seeing the articles as it is clearly summarized by Ochaíta and Espinosa (2002) Article 6 recognizes the primary condition of health, the right to life, and to survival and development of all children. Articles 2 and 3, which guarantee, respectively, the right of non-discrimination and the principle of the best interests of the child, are related to the general protection of the rights to physical health and autonomy. Subsequently, Articles 24 to 27 deal more specifically about the rights related to health satisfiers due consideration of pollution risks and education for health. Articles 32 to 39 refer to protection from physical risks related to health; they also deal with protection from psychological risks, economic/labor exploitation, and other different forms exploitation.

It is also explained in the Ochaíta and Espinosa (2002) article that, the Convention makes it clear from the outset that it considers the family as an important natural context of growth for the child, devoting several of its articles to the child's rights to a family life, as well as to the fact that children's rights should be respected within the family. In relation to it, Article 5 sets down the right of the child to be given appropriate direction and guidance from parents or other family members as provided for by local custom. Finally, Article 18 refers to the need – and the

corresponding right – of children to be properly reared by their parents, in accordance with the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Articles 19 to 21 refer to protection from physical and psychological risks deriving from the non-existence or poor functioning of the family system. Specifically, Article 19 deals with the right of the child to be protected from all forms of maltreatment, exploitation, and abuse.

Generally those can be categorized under major four pillars: best interest of the child, survival and development, non discrimination, and child participation which are defined as well in the operational definition section of this report. In fact, for the sake of attainability child participation pillar will not be incorporated in this research. This inquiry will explore the experiences of step children based up on those three pillars with the assumption that as it is anticipated just from parents; stepparents have different duties and responsibilities of what it is expected from parents to do for children life achievement once they reconstructed family and live together with their stepchild in one family organization (Fine, 1989; Mason et al., 2002; and Stepfamily Scotland, n.d).

Regional Instrument: African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Child (ACRWC)

The ACRWC is framework to protect the rights and welfare of African children which was born out of the UNCRC in order to give an African context to Convention taking into consideration African cultural values, experiences and practices. The Charter does not negate the Convention. “It has been contended that the Charter was born out of the feeling by African member-states that the Convention missed important socio-cultural and economic realities of the African experience. The point of difference between the Convention and the Charter is the focus “Whereas the Convention generally makes it clear that children are independent subjects

and have rights, the Charter stresses the need to include African cultural values and experience in considering issues pertaining to the rights of the child in Africa” (Olowu, 2002, 128).

The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

In the constitution that has come in to full force and effect as of the 21st of August 1995, it is clearly stated that all international agreements ratified by Ethiopia are an integral part of the law of the land (article 9:4). Here in the constitution, children have many rights which should be secured and protected by the government. Article 36, the Rights of the Child (1) Every child has the right: “...”d) Not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being; ... ” (2) In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”.

2.11. Conclusion

Generally this paper aims to understand the experience of stepchildren in stepparent households. Hence, to conceptualize the experience of stepchildren, the researcher plans to use the United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child, and its three pillars: best interest of the child, survival and development, non discrimination. Parents play major roles for the situation of the child in all those pillars. As it is stipulated in the CRC and other human right documents, parents are expected to build a nurturing family environment for children upbringing or it mean explicitly children have the right to be provided with affection, emotional, psychological, material support as well as be free from neglect, abuse, and any mistreatment which all are under those pillars as indicators. So, this provision will enable the researcher to use

the CRC pillars as a base to explore the experiences of stepchildren in relation with parents' responsibilities and involvement in all those issues for the child well being and development as a parent. In general these three pillars will enable researcher to understand what stepchildren experience or how the children feel in relation with the parent's role in fulfilling their best interest, the stepparent's role in the survival and development of the stepchild, and the stepparents' treatment of the child regarding discrimination as stipulated in the UNCRC.

2.12. Objectives of the Study

This research has the main objective of exploring the experiences of stepchildren living in stepparent households' environment, in *Kolfe Keranyo* sub-city, Addis Ababa. The study has also the following specific objectives

1. To explore children's perception towards life in the stepparent household.
2. To examine the way in which stepchildren view their parents' role in fulfilling their best interest.
3. To explore stepchildren's experience regarding their stepparents' involvement in the nurturing and development of children.
4. To explore, if and how, stepchildren experience of discrimination by stepparents within the household.

2.13. Operational Definitions of Terms

Families established because of remarriage with children of prior relationship have been called various names in the literatures. Terms like reconstructed families, reconstituted, stepfamilies, remarried families, combined, and blended families are often used in literatures. For

this research, the researcher preferred to use the term 'stepparent households' to represent such families for the reason of the simplicity of the term to portray the step is the father or mother in the family and its sense of belongingness, via stepfather household instead to say stepfather family. So herein this research, 'stepparent household' is used synonymously to other terms. Indeed, rarely other terms might be used in this paper as to the necessity.

A Child: "Child" is used as defined by the UNCRC, Article 1 as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier".

However, for the intention of this study children are 12 – 17 years old.

Best Interests of the child: This means that all actions concerning children undertaken by parents should center first for the benefit of the child to advance his/her life and it need to be a primary consideration.

Experience: Stepchildren experiences of parents' involvement in fulfilling their best interest, for survival and development of the stepchild, and the stepparents' treatment of the child regarding discrimination.

Discrimination: It is favoritism as well as ignorance by stepparent that might happen by having a form of stratification within the family in different circumstances.

Stepparent Household: is a family unit that evolves as a result of a marriage between two partners at least one of whom brings his/her child from previous relationship.

Stepchildren: a child who is not a biological child for either of the spouses in the household.

Survival and Development: it is the responsibility of parents to involve in the life of the child and play all roles on the nurturance and development of the child via emotional and

psychological supports as well as a protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment.

2.14. Summary of the Chapter

The chapter reviewed different research materials and documents written about stepparent households and stepchildren that give the highlight of literature available on the regard. It has is discussed the family myth that children of divorces and remarriages are forever damaged and remarriage after a spouse's death goes more smoothly than after a divorce. People have, in Ethiopia too, a negative perception toward stepparenting. Beyond the negative aspect of living in the stepparent household, getting stepparent have a positive dimension to stepchild in the household like stepparents can provide friendship, nurturing and emotional support for children. Stepchildren experience emotional distress and behavior problems, including anger, resentment, non-compliance, anxiety and depression and other many. It is also illustrated that in the stepparent household each relationship between individuals within a family unit affects one another family as a system. Stepparents who look after the child even on a temporary basis are expected by law to 'safeguard the child's health, development and welfare when they marry with the child's parent. As it is depicted in international, regional and national documents, children have rights of living in a friendly family environment. Having those ideas in to consideration this research aimed, to contribute on the regard, to explore the experiences of stepchildren live in stepparent households' environment.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. The Research Design

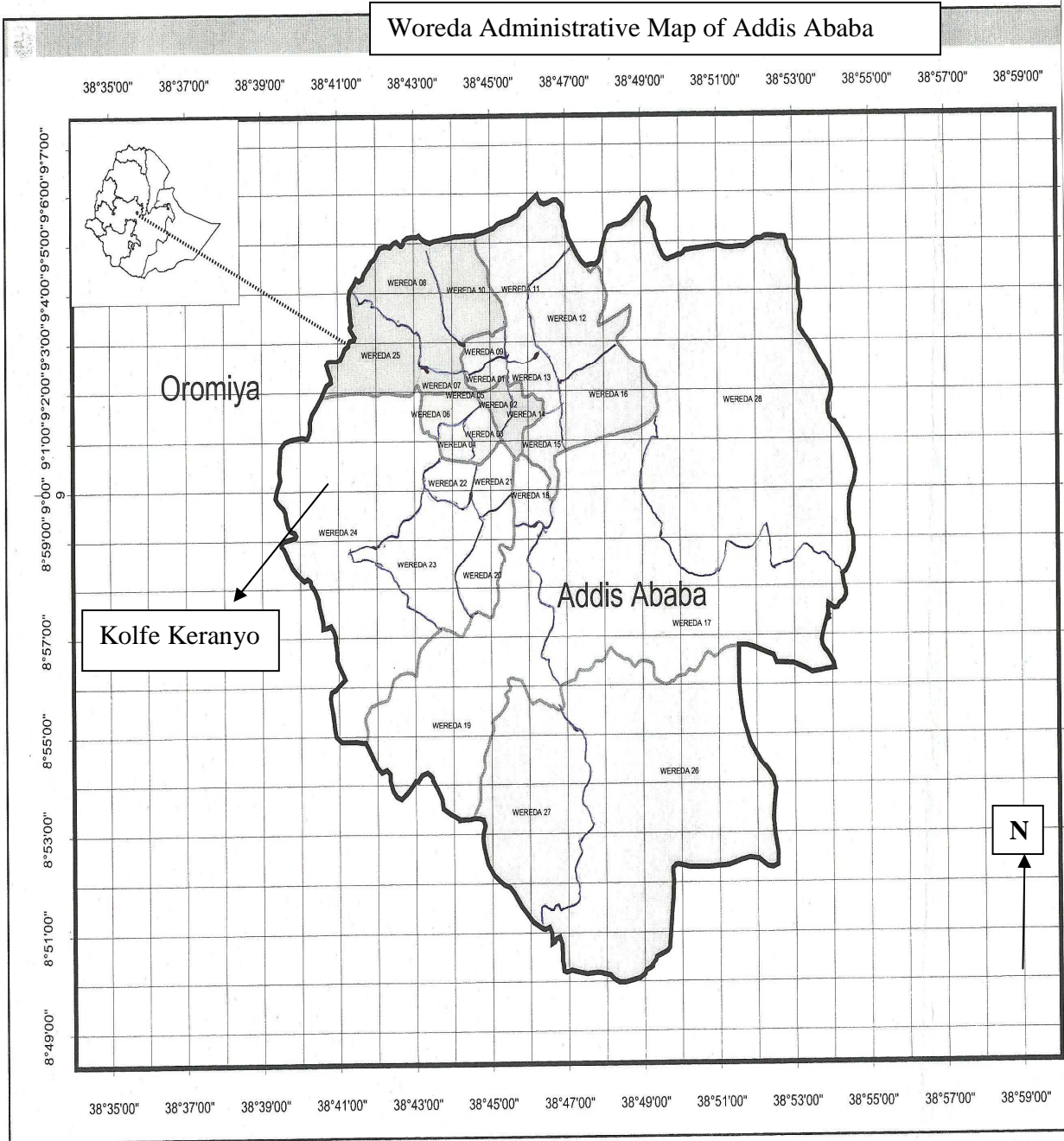
This study is conducted to explore the situation of stepchildren's lives in stepparents' households. An exploratory case study research design was used to see what stepchildren experienced and how they view their experience. Since there is no study on subject of this research, which is conducted in Ethiopia, the use of exploratory study is needed to explore the lived experiences of stepchildren. Kreuger and Neuman (2006) highlighted that exploratory studies are used in situations where little is known or written about a certain issue. They stated that exploratory research answers "what" questions whose aims are to "become familiar with basic facts, setting, and concerns" about an issue. This exploratory study also helped to generate new concepts on the issue of stepparenthood and stepchildhood in Ethiopia.

Qualitative research method is used in order to explore and gather information related to the experiences of stepchildren who are living in stepparent households. This enabled children to state their own experiences on their own words. Qualitative research approach would be used if it is sought to identify recurrent themes (Cherry, 2000). Moreover this qualitative case study was selected because it helps to understand complex social phenomena and allows the researcher to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life (Yin, 2003). A qualitative research approach was selected to be used in this study to clearly answer the research question of the inquiry by going directly to the social phenomenon under the study and observing it as completely as possible. For the reason that such type of research is especially appropriate to the study of those topics for which attitudes and behaviors can best be understood within their natural setting than investigating a predetermined experiences because one of the strength of the

qualitative study is the comprehensiveness of perspectives it gives the researcher (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Besides, Seidman (2006) explained well to the selection of this approach that people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Here exploring children familial experiences as to their context was essential because without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience (Patton, 1989).

3.2. Study Site

The research was undertaken in *Kolfe Keranyo* sub-city, Addis Ababa. It is located in the West part of Addis Ababa. It covers 63.25 square kilometer with a total population of 261, 235. The preference to conduct the inquiry in this particular district was due to convenience. The researcher has had work experience in the area, and has contact with some of the community based and faith based organization leader who did facilitate the study in the identification of informants. Here is below the map of Addis Ababa in which the study area is portrayed



Map 3.1: Administrative Map of Addis Ababa

3.3. Participants and Inclusion Criterion

The inquiry intended to explore stepchildren's familial experiences on their view or perception as an individual who experience the situation. Hence, eight individuals were taken as participants of this research. Data collection was, actually, finalized due to data saturation. One of the criteria to interview enough participants in the qualitative study is saturation of information (Seidman, 2006). From those eight individuals two from each of the following stepparent- stepchildren relationship prototypes were selected which would help to explore the situation of stepchildren in different child and parent relationship. The prototypes are stepmother- stepdaughter, stepmother- stepson, stepfather- stepdaughter, and stepfather- stepson households. Subjects were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling technique. In the concept of purposeful sampling the inquirer selects individuals because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007).

3.3.1 Selection Criterion

Participants in this study did carry out the following condition to be the participant in the study. First and for most, participation was as based on their willingness. Specifically the child participant was a child: (a) whose residential biological and stepparent were willing, (b) who explicitly knew he/she is a stepchild, (c) who was from blended and/or stepparent household, (d) age between 12 -17. The researcher used the above age limit with the assumption that a child age 12 can express his/her experience, feeling, emotion, and situation in writing as well as oral which would be appropriate with this research data collection methods because participants in the lived experience study must be who can articulate their lived experience (Creswell, 2007), and (e)

currently live in the household and at least for more than a year. This enabled to identify the recurrent experiences of stepchildren over a time.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Among the qualitative data collection techniques, for this study three kinds of data collection tools were primarily espoused to gather the qualitative data about what stepchildren are experiencing on their view. A case study routinely uses multiple data sources and data collection methods in order to attain an understanding of the case being studied (Grinnell, 2001 p.261.). This allowed a researcher to cross checking in data collection and analysis. Furthermore, these variety tools gave children different mechanisms to express their own views, experiences and perceptions with alternatives since children have different abilities and experiences (Ennew et al, 2009). The specific tools that were used

1. **Story Writing:** this data collection technique provides new insights into the activities and ideas of children, especially their own views, priorities and concerns (Ennew et al, 2009). Here stepchildren were allowed to write a story on a title of life in the stepparent household. In fact, since children have given a chance to develop their own topic as an alternative, they did write on other similar topics as to their preferences like ‘The relationship of I and my stepparent’, ‘My life in this family’ and other. The technique did help children express their internal feeling with a sense of freedom. Moreover, it was indispensable for those who prefer to express their feeling on their writing than speaking. Children did able to write me about 1-2 page of medium size note book paper. Unfortunately, one participant didn’t write, she returned me only the sentences completion. The intention of the researcher with this technique was to gather basic information (views of stepchildren) for the in-depth interview.

2. **Sentence Completion:** a particular good method for exploring sensitive issues is sentence completion, in which children were given a number of sentences to finish in their own word (Ennew et al, 2009). Such as ‘my stepparent is good at -----’. The technique is essential for the researcher to get children expression of feeling. It was given to participants to respond in written form. Children did take questions to be completed home after getting a clear guidance about how to fill, and answering to their question. The same to history writing the researcher use the data obtained by this technique as standing information for the interview.
3. **In-depth Interview:** guiding questions were developed after the thorough look at of data collected from the above techniques. This in-depth interview was recruited in this research just to explore experiences of stepchildren by learning from their life experience through asking stepchildren to reflect on the meaning of their experience. Interview questions include about their perception toward stepparent household, their relationship with stepparent, relationship with nonresident parent/relatives, stepparent parental involvement in care giving activities, discipline issues, and finally about discrimination in the family. Interviewer encouraged child participants to respond to the open-ended questions with clarification. Respondents were also queried about demographic information.

There was an interview for this research because every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 236–237) which again support to understand children experiences on their own view and word. Individuals’ consciousness gives access to the most complicated social issues, because social issues are abstractions based on the concrete experience of people (Seidman, 2006). Moreover, interviewing as a method, it is a powerful way to gain insight into important social issues through understanding the experience of stepchildren whose lives reflect those issues. At the root

of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 2006). Concurrently, here, during the face to face contact the children and researcher have had, the emotional reactions of the child like crying and other expressions are critically looked and analyzed.

3.5. The Advantage of Using Participatory, Child Centered Approach

Research with children respects the interests and rights of children and helps them to express their views (Ennew et al, 2009). A participatory research lets subjects answer in their own words instead of having to choose from a limited, predefined set of answers. Stepchildren were asked to state their experiences and perception on their own words. Moreover, the sentence completion and story writing give freedom for children to express their feeling freely and on their own word. The method is useful to this research in order to explore children situation by their statements. Data collection methods need to be found, and used, to help children to express their perspectives and opinions freely in research. Yet childhood research should not rely on the norms of factual, causal adult logic, which generally underpin applied scientific research and are used to verify results (Ennew et al., 2009). Data collection techniques used best fit to impart children perception as who experiences the situation. Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2002). The strength of participatory approaches lies in the fact that researchers will be able to bring children's own ideas about their problems to public notice.

3.6. Limitation of the Study

The finding of the research cannot be generalized for other areas. Often times, case studies provide little bases for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003). Limitations of the study also included; participants of the research may not be representative of the majority of the

stepchildren population. The inquiry lacks incorporating family members (stepparent, stepsibling, sister, brother) as a participant of this study even though one affected the other as family system unit (Halpern-Meekin and Tach, 2006). Similarly it has a gap that, unfortunately, the participants of this inquiry were only from lower income earner households, I mean who have subsistence income.

The small size of the participant assortment made it impossible to disentangle the effect of the nature of the dissolution of prior family (divorce/death or other) on the current experiences of the stepchild i.e. children who have nonresidential biological parent and who lost their parent. Shortage of time contributes for that. Again, given that shortage of time, the area the study going to cover look a bit broad to explore all situation of stepchildren in all those three broad pillars in detail.

3.7. Data Collection Process

Children are identified in collaboration with social worker staff members of *Besa Le hiywet* Ethiopia association (local NGO) and people who work with them in the community. After the identification of participants, and getting both the children and their parents' willingness to participate, the face to face contacts with children for the interview and other activities related to sentence completion, history writing and demographic data collection were held in their respective local *Iddir* offices. During the selection of participants as per their voluntariness, both children and their parents have been given a clear explanation about the purpose and importance of the research and their roles on it too. Likewise, they were also assured about confidentiality and anonymity as well. They have been told that in the report there will not be incorporation of name or any information that indentifies privacy. The names indicated in the analysis of this study are not real names. Participant children weren't asked question that could

identify them as well as their family. I have also promised them that the raw data from all tools will be kept in a private baggage till they properly discarded. The agreement for use of tapes to record data during interviews was also made in advance of data collection.

The first appointments with each participant were set in consensus with the respondents. Before the in-depth interview, children were given a home assignment to come with story and sentences completion. Indeed, in addition to giving those assignments to children in that first contact, demographic data like family composition, family bread winner, educational level, residential parent and other were also filled. Then after thorough looking at their sentence completion and story, the interview was carried having some concepts/views of children for their experiences from the information collected through the above mentioned two methods. In the interview process audiotape and interview notes were taken, and the interview is transcribed immediately. Each informant was interviewed for the maximum of one and half hours. As we could notice from the above explanations the interview in this study was conducted in a face to face and one-on- one contact and by the researcher himself.

In the pilot test of my research, I have learnt that the questions to collect data from children were some extent too broad for children to understand and react on them. On the top of that, I made my question just a kind of specific i.e. splitting the general questions. For instance, to understand stepchildren relationship with his/her stepparent, I started by asking question ‘how do you call your stepparent?’ and then other rather than asking him/her to describe his/her relationship with stepmother/father in general. Hence, in this way I did learn from my pilot experience. Although it may not seem ahead of time that the world of interviewing research takes one along strange paths or through dangerous places, the unanticipated twists and turns of the

interviewing process and the complexities of the interviewing relationship deserve exploration before the researchers plunge headlong into the thick of their projects (Seidman, 2006).

3.8. Data Analysis procedure

Data from sentence completion and story writing was methodically read and sensitized before conducting of the interview. And it is by use of that sense of the data interview was conducted. The primary work of the researcher in the analysis process of this inquiry was transcribing data from audiotape interviews. Here the transcription of audiotape data were written in the half vertical sides of the A4 paper reserving the other half for writing the theme and ideas in front while sensitized. And, it was also transcribed directly into Amharic. Data collected through direct observation techniques to analysis emotions which includes silence, sigh, crying, voice levels and all other emotional expressions besides words has been given due attention too. Then after a thorough reading of the transcribed data, data was synthesized with the intention of make order and sense of data. Thorough reading before the process of sifting and sorting data, the researcher must become familiar with their range and diversity, must gain an overview of the body of material gathered (Bryman &.Burgess, 1994)

Here there were two kind of coding in this inquiry. The first is giving different symbols to participants from each prototype in order to describe and analysis stepchildren experiences from those stepchild- stepparent relationships. So then participants verbatim, quotation as well as other concepts would indicate the participants' prototype category which enables the researcher to describe stepchildren experience in terms of the condition, situations, or context. The second coding is about arranging and organizing data which is discussed below.

Data were coded as well to categorize and sort what is obtained after a thorough sensitizing of it. Coding is a key step in the process of analyzing. The purpose of coding is “to get from unstructured and messy data to ideas about what is going on in the data” (Morse & Richards, 2002). And, which provides the researcher the link between data and the conceptualization. Then, after coding, concepts has been developed which was grouped on different theme. Form the collected data, the researcher did able to develop around fourteen major themes and other four subthemes. Finally, those developed themes grouped into categorization of perception of stepchildren to stepparent household and to the three pillars of the UNCRC: best interest of the child, survival and development, and nondiscrimination. Those categorizations were identified from literature, from the UNCRC.

When identifying and constructing thematic framework or index, the researcher would be drawing upon a priori issues (those informed by the original research aims and introduced into the interviews via the topic guide), emergent issues raised by the respondents themselves, and analytical themes arising from the recurrence or patterning of particular views or experiences (Bryman &.Burgess, 1994). In this case by using the codes given to participants the situation of stepchildren from those different prototypes and their differences of experiences in each pillar were indicated. Once more, during the analysis in this research the literal statements of participants, verbatim accounts, quotations, and almost literal and detailed descriptions of participants and situations are used.

3.9. Trustworthiness of the Study

Here the researcher has tried to avoid personal biases by tape recoding the interviews and transcribing it and other data collected through other methods without adding my

interpretation. Literal statements of participants and quotation are used in the analysis. I did present the information that I got from my participants to avoid researcher's personal bias. Multi-data collection methods were also employed to crosscheck data collected. For further trustworthiness of the research, the researcher had also prolonged and persistent field work for three different days with each participant to understand their experiences as well.

Trustworthiness can be achieved by eliminating bias and increasing the researcher's truthfulness of a proposition about some social phenomenon using prolonged and persistent field work, multi-method strategies, participant language verbatim accounts and low-inference descriptors and other strategies (Bashir et al, 2008).

3.10. Ethical Considerations

For this research process the consent to be participant both from stepchildren as well as from their parents were obtained orally, who fulfilled the inclusion criteria of the research. Indeed for children who were not at home while I went there with the person who introduce me, the clarification and consent was obtained separately of their parents. The clarification mainly incorporated information about the aims of the research, extent and procedures of confidentiality and anonymity and about the voluntary nature of the research even they can quit in the middle of their participation. Similarly, the time duration and number of contacting rounds children will have with me, and the interview avenue which was at *iddir* offices also explained to both children as well as parents. The process of participation has been made clear to children- story writing and sentence completion and then, later day, interview. The willingness of each participant has been obtained for the tape recording and note taking of the interview. Generally the study was indisputably carried out in line with social work research ethics.

3.10.1. Challenges Faced and Researcher's Action

A research on the issue of stepparent household especially a research with children of post bereavement and unmarried women stepparent household is vary sensitive. Some of the participant children felt uncomfortable of their life experiences. Taking that into consideration, professionals, as ethics, should act as moral and human beings, treating subjects fairly as they themselves would like to be treated (Robson, 2001). The scholar similarly described that it is children's right not to be violated in research. I was very careful in the interviewing to not touch children's emotion including the preparation of components of tools. Unfortunately, the interviewer faced a challenge that was beyond the capacity of the interviewer to preserve them from feeling bad or crying recalling their past life or situation. Thinking that would be unethical to distress participants, children were encouraged to quite. Fortunately, no one participant quitted participation. Actually there were only two participants in the distrustful situation. In fact it was not because the questions were sensitive but children's feeling of bad is extremely determined on children extent of worry about their situation and experience which is difficult to predict. To my case, it was in the case of Baraham (a 12 years old child) who is being raised in the stepmother household and feels he is being mistreated in the home; I was obligated to stop interviewing due to the bad emotions observed from the interviewee. It was when I asked him 'what does stepparent mean to him' he pause talking and cry. I was shocked too. Luckily, since the interview setting was pretty enough to relax interviewee child, I easily able to restore a child from his emotion. As to the researcher believe, I did able to normalize. The researcher was even calling to parents to ask children situation in subsequent days too. Surprisingly one child parent told to me that "he started (the child) humoring after the contact with you."

As a professional, building trustful rapport was one action that the research took to let children feel free and share what is distressing that helps them get relief of talking, and enables researcher to support them emotionally. The researcher and participants relationship was really beyond interviewer and interviewee. Nonetheless, at a glance my research might seem unethical being causing distress and intrusive. But as it is stated in Robson (2001) article and which is my case too, further interrogation is needed before attempting any conclusions. First, I could take unwillingness to complete interviews when distress occurred as a withdrawal of consent. It would appear that part of the distress arose from the conflict between 'obeying' and the young people's own feelings. Secondly, we could suggest that tears are a form of 'voice' that should be listened to. Children exhibit emotions like distress more easily than adults and do not have such strong socio-cultural taboos against crying. Thirdly, I should ask whether the experience did actual harm to them. Children can find it supportive to talk to an adult outside the family, such as a researcher who listens respectfully (Valentine (1999) cited in Robson, 2001: 138). Although many young children find assessments distressing, they often later report the experience of verbalizing their responsibilities and feelings as helpful to their personal growth and in coming to terms with their experiences (Pauline Wood, 1999). Thus, while perhaps distressing at the time, talking to a researcher about being a young subject may ultimately be therapeutic. Furthermore, it is perhaps inevitable that almost all research impose some costs on the researched (Robson, 2001).

The other ethical dilemma I faced was about children who are being physically abused by their stepparents. It was unethical leaving children in that situation as who doesn't hear. The dilemma was that disclosing it for any body to find out possible solution has had a potential harm for children interviewed as well as for the family too. That may cause family dissolution. It is

also disobeying confidentiality. Moreover, I understood that the consequence of that action will be severe than their current situations. Promoting a child future well being is also children best interest. What I did to comfort the child was just clearly discuss issues with child how it is happening, and suggested some behavioral action children shall promote. Fortunately, one child, Hikima who experiences physical punishment reported as she is going to live with her aunt some time onward because of financial problems of the family. Indeed there were two children in number.

3.11. Summary of the Chapter

In general this chapter discussed about the methods of how the research was conducted from beginning to final report writing. The case study was employed to explore stepchildren's experiences. Since it is intended to explore their experiences on their perception, a participatory research design, qualitative approach, has been used. Participants of this research were eight individuals who were 12-17 age years old, who are from blended stepparent households and currently live in. They are selected through convenience and purposively. Those subjects were identified through the facilitation of local gatekeepers--community workers of *Besa Le hiwet* Ethiopia local non governmental organization. Data from participants were collected by using sentence completion, story writing and in-depth interviews techniques. Data from the first two tools were thoroughly looked and used to develop the interview. Then next to the data collection a thematic analysis has been used to analysis data. It would be this research's limitation that subjects of this research may not be representative enough to generalize the result. The research is trustworthy that multiple data source were employed accompanied with a prolonged field engagement time of the researcher. The study was conducted as per social work research ethics.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDING AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Participants of this research were stepchildren who were living in the household till the time of participation. Participant children were eight in number. Half of them were from stepmother households and the other half were from stepfather households. Children were age between 12 to 17 years old. Five of them were 12 to 13 years old, two participants were aged 14 to 15, and the other one was 17 years old. Participants' academic level ranges between grades 3 to 10. Six of them were from grade 5 to 8. One participant was grade three and the other one was grade 10. Religiously, of the eight participants three were from Muslim religion follower families and the rest were from Christian Orthodox.

While seeing the dynamics of stepparent households in which participant children come out, they were stepparent households which were blended and in which either of the spouses at least bring his or her own child/ren from the previous relationship, and/or in which only both spouses bring their own child/ren from their prior relationship. Thus, three of participants were from complex stepparent household in which both spouses brought child/ren from their previous relationship. Of these three, the one was blended too and in the other one the child's stepsiblings don't live in the home currently in the time of data collection. And the other five were from stepparent households in which one of the spouses brought child (the participant child only) and blended. On the top of that, three of the participants had stepsiblings and the other five had half siblings. Furthermore, three of the participants did also have siblings of both parents in that stepparent household.

Participants of this research were children of post-bereavement stepparent households and unmarried mothers. Among the participants, six of them were from post bereavement

stepparent households and the rest two were from unmarried mothers. Children were in the stepparent household since their toddler age, except the one participant who was raised in single parent household till nine years old after the death of father in his infant age. Participants have lived in the stepparent household for a minimum of six years and a maximum of 14 years old. There were also two participants who have lived in the other dissolved stepparent households before the formation of their current family. Participant children both from post bereavement stepparent household as well as from unmarried mothers didn't know their nonresidential biological parent as well.

Among the eight participants, the five children's stepparents are the bread winner of the family. The other one child biological parent is the bread winner or the family expenses. In the rest two participants' case, both parents play their own role in generating incomes for the family expenses. But no one child participant was formally engaged in business running activities to support the family. Generally the current parents of participants are factory workers, daily laborer, security guard, plant guardian and petty traders. Unfortunately, since the sources of information were children, the researcher couldn't state numerically the monthly income of the family. Furthermore the current parents' educational status of participants of this research ranges from uneducated to grade twelve complete. Three of the participants of this research are from uneducated families of both parents. In the others at least one of the parents learned up to grade six. The table below depicts the detail demographic information of the participants.

SN	Code name	Age	sex	Live in the stepparent household since	Biological parent	Reason for prior family dissolution	Bread winner of the family	Sibling relationship
1	Yaniate	13	F	4 years old	Mother	Unmarried mother	Both parent	Half siblings
2	Sisay	15	M	9 years old	Mother	Death	Stepparent	Stepsibling & half sibling
3	Meskerem	17	F	3 years old	Mother	Unmarried mother	Stepparent	Half siblings
4	Seid	14	M	4 years old	Mother	Death	Stepparent	Siblings & half siblings
5	Mulate	12	M	3 years old	Father	Death	Both parents	No sibling currently in the home
6	Hikima	12	F	5 years old	Father	Death	Currently, stepparent	Stepsiblings, half sibling and sibling
7	Beraham	13	M	2 years old	Father	Death	Stepparent	Half sibling & sibling
8	Gojjam	13	F	6 years old	Father	Death	Biological parent	Half siblings

Table 4.1 Demographic data of participants

4.2. Children's Perception of Life in Stepparent Households

A. A Perception towards Stepparent

Developing either from the socially constructed, or assimilate or accommodate from their experiences, children have a kind of negative attitude toward stepparent. They perceive what stepparent means to them as a parent who mistreat and doesn't care for a child. A stepson, Mulate, explained what stepparent means to him:

Stepmother means just when the father marry with a women having children, after two or three or some years of death of a mother, after mother die through car accident or annoyance or any other while living with child, and then she is called stepmother for the child.

He explained what makes stepmother and mother different as to his perception that "...the difference is just because stepmother didn't born you holding a nine month pregnancy." I asked what he means. He explains "if stepmother born you with a nine month pregnancy as a mother, she would like you as her child and more than what she likes herself. That is way she batter you." The other child, Beraham, portrayed his animosity toward stepmother emotionally. In fact, he was touched emotionally and quit talking during our conversation. Instead he commenced a sentence and start crying. He said "since she doesn't treat children equally [pause and crying] ... it is just a kind like". Stepson, Seid, who live in the stepfather household viewed stepparent as:

A stepparent means a father who is replaced by, for instance if your father died, the father died. Therefore though stepfather is not as equal as father, he gives some form of support to a child like fulfilling certain materials, for example pens, exercise books. He play high role on such regard. a stepparent is who raised a child with a less care. In short, He [stepparent] mean who help, he is helper.

The above empirical data similarly indicated the positive aspects of living in the stepfather household for children. Living in the stepparent household has a positive aspect of getting some

sort of support in addition to one parent thanks to combined incomes (stepfamily Australia, 2010 & Weisbard, 2007).

Children perception toward stepparent is impacted by the general society connotations. Similarly participants describes that children who are going to have stepmother have a myth that stepmothers are wicked, and stepchildren who are going to have stepfather have a myth that stepfathers are wicked. A stepdaughter who doesn't know her father, Yaniate, who have good relationship with her stepfather (according to her) described:

Early, for me, stepparent meant just a person who dangers humans and something the like . . . I was hearing from people that 'stepfather sexually abuses his wife daughter. But seeing it from my stepfather, there are stepfathers who are bad and who are good. My father is good. He does, on his capacity, what I want, and doesn't want to see bad things happening on me.

The other daughter, Gojjam similarly explains "I used to hear about stepmother as she is bad, but my mother is not."

It is also children experiences and view that being raised in the stepparent household or as being step is not as biological in different arena even though stepparents and stepchildren have good relationship. A stepson, Mulate, who considers his stepparent as his mother explained the difference as to he feels and experiences:

Stepmother and [biological] mother are not equal. For instance both do a lot for me. My stepmother is concerned for me. However ---- when I quarrel with somebody or somebody hit me, my mother side with me and quarrels them or hit them for me. But, if she were my stepmother, wouldn't do that. Simply she would say me 'don't quarrel with' and the like, not hit them for me ... You know, this is because she is not my biological mother.

Moreover,

... My stepmother wants to do a lot for me but she doesn't have a capacity. However, you know, if she were my mother she didn't want me to wear plastic shoe always regardless of her capacity. She (biological parent) would buy me shoe, she would buy me clothe in the time of holyday

Indeed, it doesn't mean that data from this research indicate only the above negative attitude toward stepparent; there are children who never differently see their stepparents from their biological parents. That may be because, in addition to good stepparenting and other factor, they don't know their biological parent and/or their biological parent affection. Actually, they are more likely from unmarried women and who start living with stepparent since their early age. A stepdaughter, Meskerem who lives in the stepfather household and has good affection with her stepfather, described supporting the idea that she exactly sees her stepfather as her father. She illustrated it both in her story writing and interview. She explained her justification:

You know, as to me, if I had seen the affection of my father, I would have been regret or something. Or if I had got older in my age and if my parents had lived in one home and gave me their affection as well together, just to compare what was with this one, there would have been a kind of feeling bad and discomfort here. Therefore for me that is the reason that makes me feel good about this parenting. She [mother] didn't live with him [biological father] in a kind of formal manner. So, for me I have no way to say my stepparent is bad.

B. Acceptance

In this research children were also asked their acceptance toward their stepparent as well as their understanding of how their stepparents perceived them. Children appear to consider their stepparents as a parent less genuinely, as indicated by Sisay

I consider my stepfather as a father. When I say that it is not from the viewpoint of the benefit he gives to me. But rather, for instance if he strike me on the disagreement of one thing, I will keep him silent thinking of him as my father. Because, otherwise, if I will response him while he strike me, he out me from home. Therefore considering him as a father I will extend my life there.

One child, Beraham describes that he does see his stepparent as 'stepparent'. A stepparent for him is one who mistreats children. He explained that "since my mother doesn't see me as equal as her children, I consider her as a stepparent (*ende 'engera enat'*)" (source: history writing).

Stepchildren appear to see their stepparent as other person. No one participant responded in the sentence completion saying I love my stepparent because of he/she is my parent rather they like their parent because they support them materially, raised them since their early age, and show equal face with other children-seeing just as other person. They reflected the same in the interview. Seid describes that “I like my stepparent because, even though he doesn’t buy me shoe, clothes and other things, he buys me pen, exercise book, pencil and the like. I like him for that,” (source: sentence completion).

Children who experience some kind of mistreatment as well as experience favoritism believe that their stepparents don’t see them as their own children. Stepson, Beraham, described that “...some times my stepmother does consider me as other person because there are situation where she mistreat me which she couldn’t do on her child.” Stepparents appear also consider their stepchildren as, instead of seeing as their child, other’s child who have a coalition with. This idea is evidenced in the experience of a stepdaughter live in the stepmother household, Hikima. She explained that “she [stepmother] considered me as a person who affiliates with my father.” She is explicitly saying that her mother doesn’t see her as her child. The above participants explanation indicated that stepchildren both stepdaughter as well as stepsons have less positive experiences about stepmothering and feel their stepparent doesn’t consider them as her child.

Stepchildren who are from stepfather households differently explicated as their stepparents accept them as their own child. Likewise children themselves accept their stepparents as their parent too, except the one child Sisay who is from stepfather household and said “I considered him as my father but I don’t know how he perceived me.” As we can see the cases of the two daughter participants, Yaniate and Meskerem, in different part of this analysis,

stepdaughter and stepfather are more likely accept each other as a child and father. In fact, here we need to consider also that both daughters started living with their stepparents since their early age and were from unmarried women stepparent households.

Children depicted in their sentence completion exercise that their parents like them because, they believe, they do some thing favor for their stepparent. Hikima wrote that “she likes me because I do her whatever she say and respect her.” Likewise Beraham wrote that “she likes me because I support and do activities at home, doing my homework (school assignments) in class”. Differently the other child, Sisay describes as his father doesn’t like him. He justified that “since he exerts a pressure on me I imagine him as he dislikes me”, (source: sentence completion). He means that his stepfather doesn’t do that at him if he likes him.

C. Feeling of Stigmatization

Children being raised by stepparent appear to experience feelings of being inferior and undermined by peers. They may feel stigmatized when their families differ from society's norm (Wubb, 2003). Children recognize as the society perceive them differently. This notion is particularly evident as one stepson live in the stepmother household and who has good relationship with his stepmother describes his feeling of being stepchild:

For me being raised as stepchild is a big challenge. ... When I say it is a big challenge I don't mean that my stepparent do bad thing on me. But just, since people said he has no mother, something and something, I felt bad and people also like to do some thing on you. That is why I said you it is challenging. --- Since people say he lives with stepmother and something like that children want to hit you, mistreat you, and the like. At that time ... [pause] I thought just that is because I don't have biological mother, and because of they do have.

The above finding reveals that children being raised by stepparents are more likely to feel less secured, just feeling of nobody on their side. Similarly, another child, Sisay, explanation of his

similar feeling supports the idea. He describes as “I thought as I am different. For instance in class I feel as I have no father among students” (Source: sentence completion).

4.3. Best Interest of the Child

A. Educational Impediments

Stepchildren in stepparent households are more likely exposed to educational dropout as well as low educational attendance. That appears to be existent might be because of stepchildren develop harsh relationship with their stepparents or stepparents’ mistreatment of a child. The idea is evident at one participant, Sisay, who started to live in the stepfather household after a long stay in single parent household describes his educational accomplishment in different class years.

I was outstanding in my education. Before my mother remarry, my uncle did support me. But latter (after joining stepparent household) he left me. Then I started learning by my effort without any body support. When I was grade five I scored 99.8. But, then after for subsequent three years I become weak and reduce in my education performance due to my stepfather pressure. (Story writing)

He explained why he reduce on his educational performance in the interview that

I started weakening in my education performance because my stepfather exerts a pressure on me. For instance if there is my schooling and he (the badgering), I think of about him not to my education. I can’t concentrate on my schooling. Peculiarly I [desperate speech], I do forget about the schooling while I am altercating with him.

Unfortunately, regardless of the gender relationship of stepparents and stepchildren five of the participants of this research experienced such arguing relationships with their stepparent. That implies that if children have a kind of arguing relationship with their stepparent, they will be more likely reduced and weak on their schooling performance.

Likewise children in the stepparent household are susceptible to school dropout and class missing. This will be more likely happen due to stepparents' carelessness/ignorant about the child. The experiences of participants of this research supported the idea. A stepdaughter who lives with stepmother, Hikima, explained her related experience that "... I was grade two when my parent was imprisoned, at that time I was taken to *Jimma* to live with my neighbor's mother." "There, I was working as payment collector on bathroom service. I come back after two year of stay and continue learning." Why weren't you in your home with stepmother? "Because we [she and her mother] wouldn't be in agreement each other." what makes you disagree? "At home, just she [pause], I don't know" She described her other situation:

It was once up on a time, few months back, my father was hospitalized. At time he said to stepmother as I shouldn't miss class. But, I missed classes for a month. She [stepmother] wanted me to take caring of her child.

The other participant, Sisay, experience also shows the exposure to educational dropout. He explained his situation

... If he strikes me in disagreeing of one thing, I will keep him silent thinking of him as my father because, otherwise, if I will respond to him when he strikes me, he will let me to leave from the home. Therefore considering him as father I will extend my life there.

B. Children Relationship with Nonresidential Parent/Relatives

The relationship children might have with nonresidential parent/ relatives is highly dependent on the pattern of relationship residential parent has with ex-partner/relatives (child's uncles, grand parents of nonresidential parents). If the residential parent has no harmonious relationship with nonresidential parent families- child's uncle, aunt, and grand parents, child will not have a chance to build a relationship with his/her relatives. Children in the stepparent households would experience a difficulty to know their relatives including half siblings born in the other household by their non residential parent however it is their interest to know. It is

challenging for children to visit their nonresidential parent ties (child's uncle, aunt and grandparents). Likewise, it is hard for those relatives to visit the child coming in the home the child lives in. In general, that is because of the child's residential biological parent unwillingness. It is the experiences of participants of this research that residential parent doesn't want children to go there and relatives to come in home. Moreover residential biological parents don't want to introduce children with them because of the unharmonious relationship they had with ex spouse as well as relatives. They also tend to tell to the child negatively about those persons. In such environment, even though a child may visit, at least nonresidential parent and/or relatives wouldn't be able to visit the child. It is depicted from participants of this research that among those participant children only one has good relationship with nonresidential parent families. Hikima, described her experience that she wants to know and have relationship with her mother's relatives but her residential biological parent is not willing for her to visit her relatives of mother as well as permitting them to come home and visit. She illustrated that:

Since they [mother's family] prohibited him [father] to not being present in his wife grieving sacrament, they are disputed each other. Due to that he doesn't want us (her and her little brother) to go there and they to come in.

Another stepdaughter participant, Meskerem also described the same that even though she wants to know her half siblings of her father, currently due to the animosity she has with her other relative (father's sister) and her mother's unharmonious relationship with nonresidential parent families, she doesn't. In fact, she does know her aunt but have negative attitude toward her for the reason that her mother hates her [aunt] and their family in general. She elaborated her experiences:

....since my mother doesn't have good relationship [quit] ... I don't have good attitude toward them (father's sister, brother). Why because, the benefit of one child will be noticed while only gets matured and starts knowing about things. I mean, you know a

baby has different challenging behaviors. They were reluctant to upbringing me hating those challenges while my mother asked them to live with. So that, for me this is not good person who wants you for good as well as bad while you matured and starts knowing bad and goods. Therefore, whether it was good or not, my mother raised me with severe problem for two years working as a daily laborer. You know it is much even for two days. I don't have good attitude to them. But now while I become matured they started saying 'why doesn't she come home something-something. ... While my mother told me about, I started retreat from them. ... But now I need the relationship with my half siblings [father children], but not with my aunt.

She also explained the visitation pattern that “since they [mother and non residential parent families] have harsh relationship, no one comes home.” Her aunt uses envoy to communicate with her. The other participant, Yaniate who doesn't have any kind of relationship with her father so far since her birth, even though she doesn't want to build a relationship with her father hearing the prior moment from mother, explained the situation and her relation to be that

... My mother told me that, at that time when my mother was pregnant of me, instead of accepting God's gift, he told my mother to throw me in dust can. But this one, my stepparent, at least accepted me and raised me. Therefore I don't want to know him.

Nonetheless, her father is currently living in the same town. It is her mother and father relationship hinders her to contact with her father and half siblings. Another participant, Sisay who lost his father due to death, similarly describes that he wanted to know his father relatives (aunts, uncles), but no one is willing to do that. Amazingly, he said “I don't think she [his mother] does know them (child's grandparents, uncles and siblings).”

4.4. Survival and Development

The right to survival and development is a general principle of the UNCRC and therefore informs the interpretation of all the articles in the convention. This means that a wide variety of rights and obligations in the UNCRC is related to the issue of survival. Child survival is inextricably linked to child development. Children therefore have the right to survive under conditions that enable them to develop to their full potential (Dutschke & Abrahams, 2006).

Parents are expected to provide and promote all forms of physical protection, mental protection (proper use of languages: non-abusive and non-hurting), moral protection (dignity: not be humiliated and caused pain because of their background), and safe treatment. It is stated in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that children need to be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

A. Stepparent- Stepchild Relationship

The relationship of stepparents and stepchildren is not as such an intimate and friendly in the stepparent households. Children develop more affectionate relationship with their biological parents differently in the home. A stepson lives in stepfather household, Sisay, described his relationship with his father that “it is not this much. Since he doesn’t accept my thoughts, the approach I have with my mother is different from what I have with him [stepfather].” In fact, overall, as we can see the cases stated in this theme below, both stepson and stepdaughters live in the stepmother households are more likely to develop less relationship with their stepmother than the relationship stepchildren will have with stepfather in the stepfather households. Generally, the stepparent- stepchild relationship appears to be less genuine. Among the participants of this research, three of them address their stepparents by their name. Their stepparents similarly address them by their name. But, even in one home which is bad for their relationship; they differently address their biological parents by using respectful way of addressing (the case of Hikima, Sisay and Baharan). Stepchildren view their relationship with their stepparents in the home is not affectionate as like as two biological ties in the household. This idea is evidenced as stepson, Seid, who lives in the stepfather household explained why his stepfather likes him:

More or less he likes me. He likes me even less. Because, sometime, he likes me very much while I do different works. I mean while I do satisfying him. But there are some times he dislikes me, for instance while I asked him repeatedly if I have no exercise book, he proceeds hating me.

Another stepdaughter participant, Hikima, described a similar reason why her stepmother likes her:

Since I do her what she commands me, she likes me. But in the other way, I do know. ... [Pause] now, while we are seen, I and [her child] aren't equal.I like her but she oftentimes argues. For instance, what ever work I do, she doesn't thank. But, instead, if she comes home tired of something, she insults me doing nothing bad on her. [Tsihay layi besiye metich tilegnalech]

What the above empirical data informed that stepdaughters in the stepmother households happen to cover the home chores to build good relationship. Differently, it is not witnessed in the stepfather and stepdaughter relationship.

As children illustrated from their experience, stepchildren and stepparents have a problem of understanding each other in their relationship. The pattern of stepparents' reaction to the stepchildren message makes children uncomfortable on their relationship. Their internal feeling of being a step plays a role for not to be genuine each other. This idea is described by a stepdaughter, Hikima, on explaining her experience of unauthentic relationship:

I like her. I respect her. Nonetheless she doesn't know that. She doesn't understand me. For instance if you say her something, she will say 'it is not my concern'. It was last time; while I asked her to buy me an exercise book, she said to me 'it is not my business.' But I [pause]... I understand her

Stepchildren and stepparents develop unharmonious relationship because of the stepparents' action which explicitly implicate as he is a stepparent or a child as stepchild. Stepdaughter, Gojjam who lives in the stepmother household and believe that she has good relationship with her stepmother differently explained why she has harmonious relationship with current stepparent:

I did have a stepmother before this. Seeing that problem I was challenged with this one, she [the current stepmother] is well. The previous stepmother didn't want me to eat, to drink. I used to eat out of home. My father used to put my launch shop and I ate. And she also used to strike me while I go back home. But this one, doesn't

Stepdaughter, Meskerem who has a kind of biological father-child relationship with her stepfather explained similarly about the idea that

I thank my stepfather. Even though he did know as I was not his child he didn't do any thing bad on me, via mistreatments on me that manifest as he is not my father. If he had shown me different actions as he is stepfather or not my father, that would have not made us agree

➤ **Mistrust**

Children view themselves as they are not trusted by their stepparents in their day to day activities. Participant evidenced that due to this trustless relationship stepchildren experience less acceptance by stepparents in convincing of their situation as well as position. Such lack of allegiance relationship or unfaithful attitude toward each other makes stepchildren-stepparent relationship unfriendly. Moreover, stepchildren are more likely exposed to mistreatment as well as unfair punishment in home due to stepparents' inability of accepting (understanding) what stepchildren share to them. According to the experiences of participants of this research such experiences are more likely to appear in complex stepparent households regardless of the gender relationship of stepparents and stepchildren. In fact, as data indicate below children from stepmother households appear to experience it more badly. Participants of this research explained their experiences in the regard by comparing their stepparents' attitude toward them and their stepsiblings. A stepson participant, Beraham, who lives in the stepmother household, describes his experiences as:

In the home my stepmother considers me as I deliberately do things. She blames me having nothing truth. She makes it habit. She shouts at me saying 'you did that' which I didn't do. 'And why didn't you do this? and something- some thing' [Long pause]. But,

when her child did some thing not well, for instance if she put [a plastic water container] some where after using it, she [stepmother] will get angry at us [he and his sister of both biological parents] and say “who does this?” ... I responded her as I wasn’t. At that time, she inflames. While I told her as she was [her child], she [her daughter] denied it up. But my stepmother will not inflame at her [stepmother’s child].

The child has also disclosed his other experiences of not trusted by stepmother which engendered him physical punishment, which is much to write actually. “ I told her where I brought. But she didn’t trust me. Since she didn’t trust me she thrashed me using electric wire.” The other stepdaughter lives in stepmother household, Hikima, described her similar experience that her mother doesn’t oftentimes trust her. And due to that they conflict in the home. She discussed that she experienced a lot mistreatment by stepmother which is caused by the mistrust relationship she and her stepmother have. Hikima exemplifies that

It was one time that our two sheep was sold and she (stepmother) did put the birr in the dresser. I don’t know whether she forgot putting it in the dresser or not, she did say I didn’t see it while father asked her to bring. As that time [father] hit us [I and brother]. It was 50 birr. While I say I didn’t see it, they said who else was in the home other than you and strike me. However he [stepmother’s child] wasn’t hit. But latter I don’t know either [father] or [stepmother] put it, it was found there in the dresser. But we didn’t take it.

Is that only you who are suspected? “They [parents] noticed and talk as he [stepmother’s child] doesn’t do such thing. But, indeed, he steals. If he gets cents in the house, he takes it and runs to shop. At that time she hits us saying who took it.” While you told her as he took? “...he denies up. And then no body will be trusted.”

Stepdaughters who are from stepfather households are less likely to experience the conception of this sub-theme. But more likely appear and become severe in the stepmother households for both stepdaughter and stepsons. We could notice it above in case of Hukima and Berahan. The reason could be stepmother and stepchildren contact more in the home and pass time together than stepfather and children. The demographic data presented in the beginning of the analysis has indication with it.

➤ **Reluctance of Stepparents on Children Request**

The empirical data from stepchildren's experiences depicts that, regardless of the gender relationship of stepparents and stepchildren, stepparents often times appear to respond less likely or negatively for the request of stepchildren. Due to that children prefer to share his/her own issues to his/her biological parent in the home despite whose parenting role is it. A stepdaughter, Hikima who lives in the stepmother household described her experience on the regard:

I share my issues to my father, not to her. Because she often times say it is not my business while I tell her.” “... I told her only what I have been ordered or on the behest. If it is my concern, I tell to my father. ...for instance, when I asked her berr for school, she doesn't like. But he [her father] pays saying she shouldn't be undermined from other students even he doesn't have.

Similarly a stepson, Beraham described

Some times, if it is a kind of tricky thing, I share to her. But if it is a kind of easier issues I will not to tell her. She shows me aggressive behavior, due to that I afraid of her. ...for instance if I raise issue of shoe, 'chama lante ayiberekitilhim [pause] [crying] new emtilegn'.

If stepparents are willing for the child favor genuinely while they are requested, stepparents and stepchildren will have more harmonious relationship and accept each other as a parent and child.

This idea is brought out by a respondent, Seid, reflected on why he has good relationship with his stepmother.

Like her child my stepmother does whatever I want if I asked her to do for me. For instance if I am supposed to take money to school and asked her, she will. If she doesn't have money which is reserved to school, she will leave her one day family expenses and give to me.

Likewise, he described that “I perceive my stepmother as my mother. Because she wishes good for me, she never did any bad thing on me even one day.”

What the above empirical data reveals is that children's experiences and perception of growing up in stepparent households are mixed. They have both positive and negative dimensions as their current experiences.

➤ **Stepchildren's Perception about how their Stepparents Accept their Issues**

Stepparents are reluctant not only on responding on children requests but they are also less likely to show interest to accept as well as understand stepchildren feelings and thought in their interaction. Sisay described his experiences on the idea that he doesn't explicitly talk to his stepfather. That is not because he fears his stepparent rather it is because of his stepparent unwillingness to accept what he told to him, especially like dos and don't dos. A child stated that "he [stepfather] is not comfortable while I tell him about his blunder." He mean that while a father do favoritism or ignorant on him. "... I tell him just in the middle of talks, for instance by saying 'you did fault' in a kind of consultation but he doesn't hear me."

In certain situation, due to stepparents' reluctance to help children understand why their actions are all about via why they do buy clothe to other children differently, why they do actions differently and the like, children appear to perceive their stepparents do that and this just because of he/she is a stepparent or because he/she is a stepchild to him/her even though that was not a reality, as indicated by stepson, Sisay, who said my stepfather doesn't follow up me as like as his child: "...yes! My stepsibling is weak in his schooling than me, may be that is why he [stepfather] gives more emphasis to him. I don't know. He [father] didn't tell me." But the child expressed that he feels resentment thinking that the father does that just because he is stepfather to him and a father to that one child.

➤ **Post Disagreement Experiences of Stepchildren**

Stepchildren experience bad feeling after a disagreement happens with their stepparents. Children would experience that bad feeling because of stepparents less willingness to excuse their stepchildren soon the happening of the disagreement, and show good face in the aftermath of the disagreement. In fact children want it to be just like what two biologically tied father and child do after their quarrel. Who ever did fault, stepchildren have internal desire to be back into a friendly relationship soon and see their stepparents' free of conflicting face. Participants of this research explained that such experience really hurts children's emotion. Stepparents stay conflicting with their stepchildren for a long. Usually parents want their children to excuse or initiate children to overlook the past happening, via punishment. Children show a conflicting face to their parents. But in the stepchild-stepparent relationship, the reverse is true. It is children experiences and feeling that they feel bad and stressed while they wait a while being conflicting with their stepparent. A stepson, Beraham, describes his experiences of the above idea that even though he doesn't want his stepmother to be like that his stepmother keeps silent talking with him for a long while they quarrel each other. He expressed his emotion the moment after the quarrel that "it is a hating." The participant explained how they interact in the moment "when we conflicted, she calls in me saying 'come!' [a kind of command and hateful sound], then I go and do what I am ordered saying nothing." Another child participant Hikima, similarly described her situation about the idea:

She [stepmother] sorely keeps conflicting me. While you talk her soon after the inconvenience, she doesn't respond. She doesn't want to come in agreement soon. While she calls in me, I say yes. But if it is she, she said 'don't call me!' She stays conflicting for long period

Indeed those empirical data about children experiences explicated that it is more likely cruel in the stepchildren and stepmother relationship.

B. Stepchildren and Stepparent Interaction

Children in the stepparent households usually interact more with their residential biological parents than with the stepparents for their daily issues. A stepparent and a stepchild approach each other less firmly in the home. Children are less likely to interact with stepparents. They are less initiated to interact with their stepparents as well because of their stepparents' reluctance action. Respondents' experiences evidenced the conception. Sisay who lives in the stepfather household described his interaction with his stepparent that "since he [stepfather] doesn't hear what I tell to him, I don't talk with him. We (the child and his stepfather) do talk nothing."

The other stepdaughter respondent, Hikima, explained her experience of interaction with her stepmother supporting the conception that: "... I talk only with him [father]." She explained how it is with her stepmother that "With her [pause], she doesn't chat with me a great deal. We (she and her stepmother) don't talk each other anything. My stepmother doesn't tell to me anything." The participant further explained what they (she and her stepmother) talk each other while they will be home together alone that "Just saying do this and that, she sleeps. Or otherwise she opens TV or Radio and watches, no playing or talking each other." She similarly reported that they don't even chat each other just a kind of gossip/ordinary thing happening in village. "No, she doesn't tell to me." The child explained how her biological parent is willing to play with her differently of her stepparent that "... if my father ordered me some job and I finished, I will sit

with him. He is willing to enjoy with me. But my stepmother [pause], she doesn't want me to sit with her" why do that? "I do know."

The above discourse informed that stepchildren experience less interaction with stepparent. That implies that there is no as such close/intimate relationship among stepparents and stepchildren. Likewise stepchildren don't appear to talk with their stepparents about their daily experiences. It is also depicted that children don't have a kind of humor with stepparents. Only child and biological parent expressed affections toward each other. As it is indicated above most interaction of stepchildren and stepparents is not beyond a kind of order and request. If it is beyond that, stepparents often give an emphasis on talking the wrong doing of the child at home. Stepchildren feel that negative interactions, as stepson lives in the stepmother household, Beraham, described his often time interactional issues with his stepmother:

Usually, we talk about stuffs in the house. For instance, if a cup is incidentally broken while [my sister] is washing and a stepmom see it broken by chance, since some time she herself boil coffee and put cups after she count, in the other day, oh [pause]... we talk about the broken staff and just like that... who broke that, what make it like this and something-something..." or "If my sister[both biological parent relation] forgot washing one thing while washing staffs, and she [stepmother] found that forgotten staff unwashed by chance, she talks about that.

Generally all the above is dependent on the pattern of relationship stepchild and stepparent have each other. The experiences of some of participants of this research, who have a good relationship with their stepparent, look more interactional pattern with their stepparent.

Supporting the idea Meskerem, explained her experience:

We talk about what I would like to do in the future. As you now, people have no positive inference while they see two different sex persons together, and a fantasy that contemporary children are hurrying for romantic actions. We often time talk about those kinds of issues. We discuss as I shouldn't have a kind of boyfriend as well as other commitments in this age and as it should be in its appropriate time.

Similarly, Gojjam who has good relationship with her stepmother explained her affectionate interaction with her stepmother:

We (she, her stepmother) laugh; snort recalling what we did in the night. I deliberately record what my father speech on her (stepmother) mobile apparatus, and make them laugh, I cause them to laugh. ... I tell her what I do from school, I tell her what I conflicted with my friends.

The above respondents cases make explicit that children who are in the well functioning stepparent households appear to have good socialization as well as protection from potential threats as like as children from two biological parent households because it is really a matter of sincere interaction. The inverse will be true for stepchildren who don't have harmonious relationship with their stepparents. Generally, those children experiences indicated that stepdaughters who live in the stepfather households appear to experience well interactional relationship in the stepparent households than children of any gender with stepmothers.

C. Interactional Tension

Stepchildren are perceived by their stepparents as they have a kind of coalition with their biological parent and as a kind of person who reports what has done to his/her biological parent. One stepdaughter participant, Hikima who lives in the stepmother household expressed her experience of it:

She [stepmother] doesn't share to me anything what ever it is. My stepmother perceived me as I talk every thing of her to my father. Due to that fact I often time share my issues to my father, not to her. While I do that she stares at me and say 'why did you tell him before not telling to me and the like?' One time, she gave 'engera' for [neighbor]. In the moment my father was at his bed just taking a kind of nap. You know, habitually, even though my father looks he slept, he hears what is going on the surrounding. At time [father] and [neighbor] had a kind of quarrel each other. Due to that fact my father said her (stepmother) 'who the hell orders you to give her? Then when that happened, my stepmother wrongly considered me as that was me who told my father, and now she sees me as her arch-enemy. Then that time onward, even though that was not me, she doesn't give anything in front of me thinking of me as like that kind of person.

Stepparents who perceive their stepchildren as they have some sort of coalition with their biological parents don't like to be with their stepchildren in their action. The above child epitomized how it is that "... for instance, oftentimes, I and she don't go market together. She doesn't want to go with me. She goes alone. ... Or she goes with [neighbor]".

Nonetheless, since children experience a stressed relationship and worry often times about it they get a relief on the occasion while they play and talk affectionately with their stepparents. This idea is evidenced as stepson, Beraham who is in the stepmother household described his pleasant while he affectionately talks with his stepmother: "I forgot up all about the mischief. Oh! I feel happiness." Mischief, he means bad actions she would do on him. "... I feel happy while she (stepmother) feels happy [pause]" [a kind of recalling]. Likewise, Sisay described that he feel pleasant while he see his stepparent get contented.

D. Parents' Disputes and Situation of Stepchildren

Spouses in the stepparent households may dispute on issue of their own and/or related to children. It is participants of this research experiences that spouses may quarrel each other on the treatment the partner gives to stepchildren. Seid who lives in the stepfather household described the reason his parents quarrel:

Fore instance, my mother quarrel with him repeatedly saying why you...while he [stepfather] outs me from home. ...They quarrel when he [stepfather] differently treated me from his child. For instance, you know, since he buys me only pen, exercise book, and something. Due to that my mother buys me clothes for school (school uniform). That led them to quarrel each other.

Another stepdaughter respondent, Hikima who lives in the stepmother household indicated a similar situation:

Some times, they quarrel just because of us as a cause. Once, they were separated just because of us (because father saw while she (stepmother) mistreated her and her brother)). They were divorced even before that for two years long. He said her 'don't do' while she ill-treated us (she and her brother), but she was not willing to. There are times he hit her.

Generally both two situations, parents' conflict by their own reason or child/s issues, negatively affect the genuine treatment stepchildren will get from stepparents. Stepparents will develop unenthusiastic attitude (a kind of hostility) toward stepchildren while they have some sort of disagreement with their partner and are more likely to mistreat stepchildren. It could happen in both stepfather and stepmother households, but it is severe and different, as it is manifested in the experiences of participants of this research, in the stepchild (both gender)-stepmother relationship. A stepdaughter respondent, Hikima who lives in the stepmother household, described how her stepmother mistreated her and her brother while she disagreed with her spouse:

When he out from home and went some where (soon after the quarrel) she threaten us [she and her brother of both biological parent] saying 'today you are not going to leave from this home with out disclosing what you have told to him'. Even she used to also let us miss classes. For instance, we didn't go school when she quarreled with our father about the issue I told you about [neighbor women] (a story reported some where in this writing). She did let us miss class.

Here a sense of untiedness of each other (among stepparent and stepchild) is manifested.

The other stepson respondent, Sisay who is from stepfather household, described his similar experiences as his father changes his behavior at him while he (father) conflicted with his mother. He expressed how his father acts in the moment that “[*koster malet minamin*].” A stepdaughter, Yaniate who comes from stepfather household also described her experiences related spouses' conflict that she does have good relationship with her stepparent but there is time she will be in bad situation while her stepparent has a kind of conflict with his wife (the child mother). She illustrated her experience

When they quarrel, my mother leaves the home taking all her baggage. Unfortunately if we (she and her half siblings) didn't sleep and he sees me incidentally, he commanded me to leave the home saying 'you are her race, you will do nothing for me.' At that time I feel discontented vary much- (story writing)

E. Ignorance by Stepparent

Stepparents appear to be careless for the well being of stepchildren. As to participants of this research, it is children experiences and view that their parents don't care for them in one way or other. A stepdaughter, Hikima who is from stepmother household, explained her experience about the notion that her stepmother doesn't bother for her in many aspects. She exemplified her experience:

.... she [stepmother] started go and passing nights at Kerima[neighbor] home leaving me alone in the home (pause). It was in this time Metadel [neighbor man] (who see the situation) asked me to take me Jimma to his mother. And I said ok and went. -It was when her father was incarcerated.

Likewise another child respondent, Beraham who lives in the stepmother household indicated his experiences of stepparent's ignorance:

Perhaps, when my stepmother brings me clothes (a dress to substitute) from where it lays, she brings me my childhood dress and said to me this one fits with you something and something. At time I feel nothing and go to friends wearing that. My friends tease at me and say 'oh! Whose cloth is it?' Then as that time I ashamed of myself and back to home ...but when it was my sister who do that she bring me what I want and some times she bring me my clothe which was bought for holyday.

Another child participant, Sisay who comes from stepfather household, illustrated also the same about the conception. He discussed his stepfather carelessness in the involvements of his life in general in the arousal of different issues during our interview. The child expressed his feeling as "his brothers [stepfather's brothers] are better than him. At least they don't ignore me like him (*biyance endesu taltal ayadergegnime*).” He further described as his stepparent doesn't give attention to him differently of his stepsibling:

For instance, he [stepfather] does have knowledge. He learnt up to grade twelve. But, he doesn't answer me while I asked him about my education. He is not willing. But he follows up his child. However, he does nothing about mine.

All the above empirical data of children experiences depict that, stepparents carelessness for the wellbeing of their stepchild is likely seen to exist in both stepfather and mother households regardless of the gender relationship of stepparent and stepchildren, except stepdaughter-stepfather relationship.

F. Emotional Abuse

Stepparents are expected to support stepchildren emotionally for the well being of the child. However data from this research depicted differently. Stepchildren from stepparent households appear to be abused emotionally in different aspect. Stepchildren experience emotional abuse by their stepparents when stepparents' use invectives which have a deal with child prior relationship. They are really emotion touching for children. A stepdaughter participant, Hikima described her experiences about the notion as she experienced it and feels bad. She expressed her emotion "while he [brother] do some thing wrong, '*enathi afertibila tilewalch isum yinaded ena enate hulet gizz afer atibalm yilatal*', but I don't, I afraid of... '*gin baka kir yilal*' (aggrieved) (heart touching speaking)." The child further witnessed her experience of emotional abuse:

*...it was last time, my aunt [father's sister] heard, by chance, while my stepparent insulted me saying '*dikala*' (literally it is an offense by saying 'bastard'), and she became greatly annoyed. She saddened at [father] too and said him 'you shouldn't come to my home then after, you aren't my brother'.*

The other stepson participant, Beraham who lives in stepmother household expressed how he is emotionally abused that "'*yeman zer gomenzer tilegnalech*' [angry, crying]." Seeing it from the

experiences of participants of this research, such experience is severe for stepchildren who are from post-bereavement stepparent households and stepmother households.

Stepchildren are also abused emotionally while stepparents negatively talk about their nonresidential parents in any pattern or show a kind of abnegate directly or indirectly. Stepchildren appear to experience it while a stepparent come into disagreement with the child or feel discomfort in some regard about the child. This sentiment is expressed by a stepson participant, Sisay who is being raised by stepfather:

Since he [stepfather] always boasts about his kin (family), I hate him. I am not comfortable with. He relates things with kin (while something wrong (for the view stepfather), happen in the home)). He always takes his families high.

The child similarly expressed in the other way as he is not emotionally protected: “he [child’s stepfather] insults my mother saying as she raised me arrogantly. ‘*Enatih indezih batachemalikh nro minamin*’ [Pause], ‘*baka ayimechegnim*’ [uncomfortable face]. I don’t like.” Beyond the word abuse in the home, stepchildren appear to experiences humiliation due to stepparents’ carelessness for the emotion of stepchildren. Hikima who lives in the stepmother household poignantly captures this notion:

One time in the past, she [stepmother] came to school and told ‘she stole me money’. But, I swear I didn’t see any birr. I didn’t steal any money. She told to the school director and the director told in the class.

This participant was really touched by the action. She was discussing that as her stepmother did unpleasant on her and which is the moment she never forget. She was on and off in the home as that time. She was living with her aunt.

In addition to all the above as it is indicated in literature emotional abuse incorporates all form of nonphysical hostile treatments via discrimination, rejection and others (chapter 3. child

abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers. n.d, pdf) which are discussed in different themes of this research. And stepchildren appear to experiences those.

G. Physical Punishment

Stepchildren in the stepparent households experience physical punishment. It appears to be more common on stepchildren in the stepparent households even differently of other children in the home regardless of the weight of children wrong doing. Indeed, children don't say we are being physically abused by stepparent, but they explained the physical punishment they experienced is really different, severe and repeatedly than biological children in the home. The experiences of participants of this research depicted that stepchildren who are being raised by stepmothers are more likely to experiences it. Children were depicting as they are being hit at home in the different section of our (I and the interviewee) interview. A stepdaughter being raised by stepmother, Hikima described her experience of physical punishment by stepmother

There was a time my stepmother damaged my eye. I was fetching water with 20 litter plastic container. Incidentally my aunt saw me carrying that and shout at her [stepmother] saying 'why do you order her to fetch water, her waist is hurt'. Assuming that is me who told to my aunt my stepmother hit me. But I never told anything to anyone

She exemplifies her similar experience that "One day ... a police has seen her while she was hitting me and he (the policy) warned her." This child indicated multiple times as she physically punished by her stepmother and sometimes by her father by the order of the wife (stepmother) on her wrong actions (regardless of the weight of the wrong action). She explained that only she and her brother are hit in the home. She said "so far I have seen only one time while she hit her child [stepsibling]."

The other child who lives with his stepmother, Beraham, described the same that his stepmother physically punishes him frequently and differently from his stepsibling. He described

in the history writing that “she does have a temperament of angeriness and hitting,” He expressed his experience of physical punishments and its severity:

In fact, she strikes me. However she is not as such to hurt me. But, while she ordered my brother to hit, some time she asked him to punish me while she exhausted of, oh it is really bad, ‘beka zim bilo new emiwerdibign’. He drags me on the ground.

Hikima also described how it is hurting:

If you do wrong, why not it is a glass she uses it to strike ... one day she commanded me and my brother to bring oil (that to be used for cooking food). Unfortunately the bottle was broken. We took her the oil by plastic container and told her as the bottle is broken. ‘Beka bemidin new yetematachew yehon yegrawa enchet wefram new besu new yetematachiw.’

Siblings’ relationship in stepparent households

Though it is not the intention of this research I prefer to state the relationship witnessed among siblings in the stepparent households based up on the empirical data obtained here in this study. Siblings in the stepparent household appear to have harmonious relationship in the home regardless of they are half siblings or stepsiblings each other. No one participants of this research explained they have negative relationship with there stepsiblings or half siblings however stepchild experiences differential treatment by stepparent in the household. It doesn’t mean actually, they like each other genuinely. Children were not manifesting an affectionate attitude toward their stepsiblings while they described their experiences that are related to their stepparents’ discriminating actions.

4.5. Children's Perception and Experiences of Discrimination

A. Stepchildren's Views of Discrimination

Discrimination in stepparent household means, for children, a prejudiced treatment by the stepparent thinking of blood tie. It is the favoring action of the stepparents to their own child and the exertion of less effort to support the child who is not their own. A stepdaughter, Yanaite, who lives with a stepfather, described her view of discrimination in the stepparent household:

Discrimination means when just a stepfather favors for his child or while he supports more to his child. He wants his children to reach high, and who leave back his wife children (child who is not his) and see them just like other thing.

The other stepson participant, Seid who is being raised by stepmother explained his meaning of discrimination in the stepparent household:

Discrimination means when she, as being a mother of children, gives more to one child and shows bad face to the other child. While she does so, it is called discrimination. Just she did badly for that child, and does good and great thing for this one child. And thus, she doesn't see the two children in the same eyesight. So it mean that she favors for the child she born than seeing the child she born and doesn't equally.

B. Stepchildren's Experiences of Discrimination

Having that meaning and weight for discrimination by stepparents, children explained that they experienced a discriminating action by their stepparents. Stepparents appear to do favoritism to their biological child in different aspects of their daily undertaking as a parent. A stepdaughter, Hikima from stepmother household and who has brother of both biological parents live in the house, described her experiences of discrimination: "my stepparent discriminates at home exceedingly. She doesn't show the same face to all of us. She gives match for her child." She exemplifies her experience of discrimination by her stepparent at home that "last time, when

bread is baked at home, she gave half of the bread for my little brother, and so does to me, but for her child (strong voice), she gave him full of the bread. There is such thing.”

The child similarly explained her experiences of discrimination by her stepparent:

..... Now! She buys clothes to her child, but she doesn't for us. However Dad! [Their father], If he buys for me he will buy to all of us. For instance If you see all our dress (her and her brother), they are bought by our father. But for her child she is who bought in addition to clothes my father bought to him.

Likewise, the other stepson who is being raised by stepmother, Beraham, explained as he experienced discrimination by his stepmother severely. He described his experience of discrimination:

We aren't (he and his stepmother child) treated equally in the home [showing a kind of crying]. for instance if her child do some thing/ breaks staff and she [her Mom] looks incidentally while that is happening, it is not that much. She warned her, and then hit a bit. But if it was we [worried voice] [stepchildren (he and his sister)], she would hit us harshly.” When she pinches us it is by her nail but while it is for her child, no like that

He also depicted in the sentence completion that “she does have a temperament of not looking equally due to that I said she is not good”. The child illustrates his experiences of discrimination further:

Now, for instance, let we say she [stepmother] bought us [he and his stepsibling] shoe via 'ergendo' (slipper kind of plastic shoe). Then after it is bought for both of us, if that was not her [stepsister] preference and wants other her choice shoe, her mother [participant's child stepmother] wants to buy her. But while I asked her for me she said ok and does nothing. I asked her for the second time thinking of she might forget as I asked her. She said ok I will, and does nothing. While I repeated her for the third time, she has a kind exasperation behavior ... [pause] at that time I leave it. I tell her two three times, if she is not willing to do I leave it [a kind of desperate face]

Children feel like as such unpleasant really because they badly experience it, they could understand situations. Hikima explained as she understands situations that

... My father used to buy dress to all of us (both two his child and his wife child) once together. But one day he bought for her child and my little brother, not for me. At that

time I didn't displease at him. I knew, he did that because I had. But while it is she [stepmother], she doesn't care whether I have or not just simply buy only to her child.

The other participant, Yaniate who did not experience discrimination in her household explained similarly as she understand her stepparent that "It doesn't mean my stepfather hits me. He hits me. But it is because of my fault. It is not just because of he is stepparent. And it is not also differently of other children."

In fact, I don't mean that all participants of this research experience discriminating action by their stepparent. Stepdaughters who come from stepfather households are less likely to experience it. A stepdaughter participant, Yaniate who comes from stepfather household, explained as she doesn't experiences a discriminating action by her stepfather that "he doesn't show me some thing different face. He looks us equally. He buys us at once together. He buys for others too if he buys for me, he buys for me too if he buys for others" what if he has no capacity to buy to you together? "No! If he has to buy, he buys for all of us." Why? "I think he is aware that, if he buys for me, they may feel bad and they will say why not for us. If it is bought for them only, I may say why not for me." The other child, Meskerem who doesn't experiences discrimination by her stepfather describes her father action that "he buys me close even differently of other children saying she is elder than other."

However children explained their experiences of discrimination comparing themselves with their stepsiblings and half sibling in the household, they don't clearly know why it is. Participants of this research who believe they experience a discriminating action by their stepparent didn't speak beyond moving their head of I don't know except one stepdaughter participant, Hikima who tried to relate it with their patterns of relationship. She explained: "I and [her stepsibling] are not seen equally. If you said why, it is because, you know, he calls care as

ma'am (respectful form of addressing). But I don't. I call her name. [My brother] also use her name to address her.

4.6. Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I addressed the research question- what is the experiences of stepchildren live in the stepparent households? And the four envisioned objectives to be achieved. In response to this research question or specifically to objectives, the following general perceptions and experiences of stepchildren are explored. I found three categories of children perception towards stepparenting and feeling of being a step: (a) A perception toward stepparent (d) Acceptance of stepparent, and (c) Feeling of social stigmatization. I was also able to delineate two situations on best interest of the stepchild: (a) Educational impediment, and (b) Children relationship with nonresidential parent/Relatives. Exploring the situation of stepchildren in relation with the stepparents' involvement in the child survival and development was one among the objectives. Accordingly I found seven categorizations (a) stepparent- stepchild relationship- has sub concepts that mistrust, reluctance of stepparents on stepchildren's request, and post disagreement experiences of stepchildren, (b) children's interaction in the stepparent households, (c) interactional tensions, (d) parental disputes and situation of stepchildren, (e) ignorance by the stepparent, (e) emotional abuse and (f) physical punishments. In the whole experiences of stepchildren, stepchildren from stepfather households appear to less negatively experiences stepparenting. Finally, stepchildren meaning of discrimination by stepparent and their experiences of discrimination is also explored. Stepchildren appear to experiences a discriminating action by their stepparents in the household.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This research found out that children in the stepparent household are very cognizant that their original families are dissolved and now they are dissimilar of other families. For that fact they will have some sort of perception toward. In fact, according to the participants of this research, stepchildren appear to commence the life in the stepparent household with a kind of negative perception toward stepparenting (stepfathering/mothering) because of the schema they have developed from the society. Children perceive stepparent as a parent who raise his spouse child with less nurturance. However, children who are from unmarried women and join the family in their infancy more likely easily accept as their parent. As to the participants of this research children have other reasons to like their stepparent despite them as a child or the parent as a father/mother. They depicts that they like their stepparent because their stepparent upbringing them; they don't out them from home or other reason, holding inside in their mind as they are other person. Children in the stepparent households appear to experience unharmonious and less genuine relationship with their stepparent. Ganong and Coleman (1994) contend that the stepparent/stepchild relationship can be one of the most complicated relationships within the stepparent household. The stepfather–stepchild relationship is unique because it occurs in the context of two other parent–child relationships. Father/mother is not biologically linked to the child (Vogt Yuan & Hamilton, 2006)

Stepchildren exhibit a less intimate relationship with their stepparent and interact more with their biological parent on their concerns. This again stressed the relationship they will have with stepparent. Their intimacy of relationship in turn affects the treatment given to the child and the over all functioning of the family. Due to that fact then children oftentimes likely experience the malfunction of their stepparent. Children who have less relationship with their stepparent

appear interact less with them. This less interaction and relationship is accompanied with distrust relationship. Stepchildren who experience that kind of relationship would be more likely to experience ignorant, mistreatment, physical and moral abuse, and other malfunctioning of stepparenting.

The other situation that leads stepchildren to experiences less stepparenting involvement is spouses' relationship in the household. Stepparents have less positive attitude toward stepchild while they have disagreement with their partner in any means. The quality of the marital relationship affects how involved the stepparent is with the child (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). Furthermore, higher mother-child relationship quality has been shown to be related to higher stepfather-stepchild relationship quality (MacDonald & Demaris, 2002 cited in Vogt Yuan, & Hamilton, 2006).

Children from stepmother households more likely experience those maltreatments because stepmothers are wicked (Sanders, 1984). Since stepchildren oftentimes pass time with stepmother in the home those maltreatment would be severe. Again, experiencing that malfunctioning leads children to less function for their daily activities via education. Children appear to give much worry to their experiences or stepparent action than to their education. Children who live in stepfamilies have lower grades, higher school dropout rates, and lower academic test scores compared to children who live in first-married families ((Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Bogenscheider, 1997; Jeynes, 2000; Teachman, Carver, & Paasch, 1997) cited in Kirby, 2006)). As to stepchildren view, the repeated argument stepchildren have with their stepparents contribute for their weak academic performance.

It is this research finding that stepchildren will also have less relationship with their non residential parent/parent's relatives. According to this research the major factor for the less relationship they have is the residential parent unwillingness. If the residential parent has no harmonious relationship with the ex-spouse as well as relatives, he/she will not be willing to introduce a child with relatives as well as permitting the visitation both for the child and the nonresidential parent/relatives. Literatures support the idea that the nonresidential parent's family, though still blood and/or legally related, may face barriers in their attempts to continue a relationship with the stepchild, particularly if the residential parent moves them away, has a poor relationship with the nonresidential parent ((DiVerniero, 2007a; 2007b; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984) cited in Diverniero, 2010)). Beyond that, children implicitly or explicitly will be exposed to situation to hate their nonresidential parent because of their residential parent appears to badly inform children about the nonresidential parents. Residential biological parent speaks negatively to their child about the stepchild's nonresidential parent/families.

Studies that examined the severity of physical abuse (Hermann & Martin, 1988; Malkin & Lamb, 1989 cited in Adler-Baeder, 1999) found the most severe abuse was not necessarily the result of abuse by a stepparent. Instead, biological parents were more likely to commit the most severe abuse. But in this research finding that however the results of this research may fails to be generalized as stepchildren are physically abused; it is children's view that stepchildren experiences physical abuses by their stepparent differently of other children live in the same households. Stepchildren experience it severely and repeatedly.

The other thing, as in previous studies ((Anderson, Kaplan, & Lancaster, 1999; Daly & Wilson, 1999; Marlowe, 1999; Zvoch, 1999 cited in Tifferet, 2010, p. 64): Tifferet, 2010)), this research found that stepchildren would experience is a discrimination action by their stepparent

in their parenting roles. Tifferet (2010) reviewed that stepparents exhibit discriminative parental solicitude that they allocate their resources differentially, preferring genetic children over stepchildren (Daly & Wilson, 1999). They show higher levels of play, communication, feeding and proximity towards genetic children in comparison to stepchildren (Marlowe, 1999).

Likewise, stepparents invest fewer resources in their stepchildren's education (Anderson, Kaplan, & Lancaster, 1999; Zvoch, 1999), and show less overall investment in stepchildren (Anderson, Kaplan, Lam, & Lancaster, 1999). Children in the stepparent household appear to be treated or get affection differently of other children in the home by their stepparent. Participants of this research depicts that stepparents explicitly favors to their own children. Moreover, even though it is also evidenced in house where half siblings are there only, it is highly manifested if the child has stepsibling. This discriminating action makes the stepchild-stepparent relationship less genuine and children hate their stepparents. Stepchildren are very sensitive on this regard.

Generally it is this research finding that stepchildren who are from stepmother house households appear to badly experiences stepparenting than stepchildren from stepfather households. Stepmothers emit more negative behaviors toward their stepchildren than do stepfathers (Clingempeel et al 1984, Hetherington 1987, Santrock & Sitterle 1987 cited in Ihinger-Tallman, 1988). They justified that considering the greater attachment of children to mothers than to fathers, this attachment may make it more difficult for stepchildren to accept and relate to stepmothers than to stepfathers. Children may have more trouble adding another mother to the family than they do adding another father.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1. Conclusion

The intention of this research was to explore the life experiences of stepchildren in the stepparent households from their own points of view. In order to achieve the above objective, the research was conducted in the case of *Kolfe Keranyo* sub city, Addis Ababa.

The research achieved its objectives. The finding result from each objective is summarized below in the subsequent paragraphs. The first was to 'explore children's perception toward life in the stepparent household'. Children view stepparenting negatively in general. They have a negative attitude toward stepparent that is developed from the society contention of stepparent and from their experience. Stepparent mean for children that a parent who mistreat children who is not his own. It is children feeling that their stepparent ill-treat them just because he/she has no blood tie. Due to that they less likely appear to accept their stepparent as a parent. Even children who believe they have good relationship with their stepparent see their situation as good comparing with the negative myth they have about stepparents.

Among the objectives of this research the one was exploring the way in which stepchildren view their parents' role in fulfilling their best interest. Education is the best interest of the child. Participants of this research explained their experiences that due to their stepparents carelessness to support as well as oppression (inflict stress on, or they as a source of worry, stress or trouble) in different manner, they experiences low education performance, school attendance as well as exposed to educational dropout.

It is also the experiences of the participants of this research that, even though it is their best interest, stepchildren appear to have less relationship with nonresidential parent/ parent's

families. According to this research result, residential biological parents are not willing for the child and the nonresidential parent families' relationship if they have/had a kind of disagreement each other. Due to that children are less likely to visit their nonresidential parent families (half siblings, uncles, aunts and others) as well as the inverse. Likewise, because of the above reason children also face challenges to know each other with their nonresidential half siblings.

The other objective was to uncover stepchildren's experience regarding their stepparents' involvement in the nurturing and development of children. This research come up with different issues that stepchildren might experiences in the home in relation to stepparent involvement for child well being. Even though it is not for all participants of this research, stepparents in the stepparent households are less likely to involve themselves for the child survival and development. Despite, they also appear to mistreat stepchildren. Form the very beginning; stepchildren appear to develop less intimate relationship with their stepparent to get the supports. Furthermore, stepparents and stepchildren have little interaction in the home too, because children's stepparents unwillingness to answer stepchildren's request in a positive pattern. The other reason for children experience of less intimate relationship was that stepparents consider children as person who has some sort of coalition with their biological parent. Due to that stepchildren share their daily experiences to only one parent who is biological regardless of the issues has to be told to. Similarly, children appear to experience lack of affection from their stepparent as a parent, keeping there are also stepparents and children who are affectionate each other. In fact those will be more prevalent in the stepmother households.

It is also children view that they would experience a kind of hostile attitude by their stepparent while spouses have disagreement caused by children issues and/or their own. And also they are more likely to be mistreated at home in the moment. Family systems theory supports the

idea that each relationship between individuals within a family unit affects and is affected by all other subsystem relationships contained within the family (Hetherington, 1999; Caldwell, 1982 and Caldwell and Caldwell, 1992). For example, the type of relationship a stepfather has with his stepchild will affect his relationship with his wife (Halpern-Meekin and Tach (2006). However it is expected from stepparents to follow up and support children in different aspects, this study reveals that stepchildren appear to experience ignorance by their stepparent. The participants of this research explained that their stepparents are careless in different issues concerning children's development. Stepparents less likely support and properly answer for children questions. Indeed, there were research participants who experience it positively. The other experience of children is that stepchildren appear to experience emotional abuse by their stepparents. Again the finding of this research regarding the survival and development of children depicts that stepchildren being raised in the stepparent household are more likely to experience physical punishments too differently of other children in the household. Stepchildren view their experiences of physical punishment that it is severe and repeated than biological children in the home. In general, stepparents appear to be less effective, consistent, active and attentive parent in the responding, preventing, mentoring and modeling of the child in their day to day activities which are essential for children survival and development. However, the research also found out that some stepchildren have positive experiences with and receive care, love and support from their stepparents. Generally, children who are from unmarried women stepparent households appear to have negative experience in stepparenting.

The last objective was to explore, if and how, stepchildren experience of discrimination by stepparents within the households. It is found out that children in the stepparent households appear to experience a discriminating action or a differently treatment in the home by their

stepparent. They feel bad emotionally about their experiences what ever the weight it has. Children view discrimination by stepparent in the household as unfair treatment of the stepparent. Children expressed their experience that their stepparents do favoritism on their action of parenting to their own children.

6.2. Implications to Parents

Actions undertaken by stepparents to different tie children in the home are vary sensitive to displease stepchildren. So, for the well being of the children as well as the well functioning of the family in general stepparents shall help stepchildren to understand why stepparents do action differently. It is also in this way children will trust their stepparents and accept positively, and develop genuine relationship. If parents can do, stepparent shall do action for children in home similarly and simultaneously for both stepchild and other. That is because children experiences less free contact/interaction with their stepparents and less likely understand stepparents.

Stepparents and stepchildren have less intimate relationship each other. One of the reasons that make a child has less intimate relationship with their stepparent is the pattern of stepparents' reaction to stepchildren requests which resembles to unwilling kind of response. In order to promote their relationship well, stepparents shall explicitly and positively react to stepchildren request in a manner that stepchildren would understand it is his/her stepparent genuine response. Moreover, instead of biological parent only fulfill the child's request, both parents shall explicitly show the child as, who ever do the action (via buying something for the child), they do the action on the agreement or willingness of the stepparent too.

6.3. Implication for Social Work Practice

It is depicted in the different section of this research finding that children experiences different malfunctioning of the family differently of other children in the home specially that is

related to stepparenting. Stepchildren experience ignorance, both physical and emotional abuse, unfair treatment among children in the family that emotionally danger children, antipathy kind of relationship with stepparents, and other. This implies that social workers need to give an emphasis for such segment of families given that its' motto is promoting people wellbeing.

It is stepchildren experience that one that cause stepchildren wellbeing disturbance is the relationship of spouses in the home. In fact inversely too the relationship of children with stepparents affect spouses relationship, just family as a system unit. It is this research finding that due to that children are exposed to maltreatment and banged up emotionally, and experience malfunctioning via on their education. Social workers who work with children may apply here system perspectives considering family as system unit to overcome children problems or promote children wellbeing. In addition it is implicated in the experiences of participants of this research that the harsh relationship of stepparent- stepchildren leads spouse to conflict or unharmonious relationship. That is because relationship doesn't occur in isolation (DiVerniero, 2010; and see Bochner & Eisenberg, 1987; Galvin, Dickson, & Marrow, 2003). It is only the well functioning of stepchildren and stepparent promotes the wellbeing of the child as well as the family in general.

6.4. Policy Implications

The government of Ethiopia has implemented policies and, signed major declarations, and conventions like UNCRC to protect children from any unfriendly family environment or any other situation. But, however the finding of this research explicates the complex relationships of stepchildren and stepparents; nothing has been clarified in the family code about the duties and responsibilities of stepparents in the child survival and development once they marry acknowledging the presence of stepchildren. It is evidenced in this research that parents in the

stepparent household appear to support their own respective children than to their stepchildren regardless of the fathering or mothering role they ascribed. Again that action leads children experience discrimination. A stepparent expects the biological parent in the household to be responsible for child survivals even though all material or non-material support is generally from the household. That in fact hamper the genuine relationship of stepparents and stepchildren which again dangers the well functioning of the family in general and child wellbeing in particular. So policies should support such segments of families through clarifying the relationship of stepparents and stepchildren that promote the wellbeing of children. Just like what are the duties and responsibilities of stepparents for their stepchildren in such stepparent households? What are his/her rights?

It is only Article 268 of the revised family code state a bit about guardians who are not biological parent. It says that “Where the functions of guardian are exercised by a person other than the father or the mother, one of the parents, any interested person or the public prosecutor may apply to the court against the decision taken by the guardian regarding the upbringing of the child.” “In the eyes of the law, the status of parenthood is generally restricted to biological and adoptive parents.” Stepparents are viewed as “a major category of ‘third parties’ who develop relationships with their stepchildren but are not regarded as legal parents.” When the custodial parent of a minor child marries another adult who is not the child’s biological or adoptive parent, that is when a residential stepparent-stepchild relationship is created, but there is no definitive definition of the stepparent status (Pollet, 2010).

6.5. Implications for Future Research

Further research should be carried out to build upon the findings of this study and incorporating its limitations. This study concentrated on stepchildren who are from post

bereavement stepparent households and unmarried women. Similarly, future researches need to give attention to children attitude toward stepparent to find out the impacts of children schema toward stepparent on accepting their stepparents as well as develop a genuine relationship. This study found out that children join stepparent households with a negative attitude toward stepparenting or stepparent. The study also reveals that children who become stepchildren in their early age and during early adolescence will possibly have different wellbeing in the home and acceptance of stepparenting/stepparent as a parent, that to be further studied. Future researches need to explore the specific and complex contexts within which stepchildren grow up. This kind of research has great potential to both strengthen and come with empirical evidence that paves for social work practice.

6.6. Summary of the Chapter

The chapter summarized the major finding of the study and the research implications. The study revealed that even though there might be children who positively experiences stepparenting, stepchildren appear to experience different unfriendly parenting situation for their wellbeing. Considering the finding of the research stepparents are recommended to discuss issues with children while they want to differently do for children in the households. That will be relevant for their genuine relationship and which will be base for all well survival and development of the child. Having that it is also discussed clearly the need to social work practice for such segments of population. The need to have a clear policy on the stepparent households especially on the relationship of stepparents and stepchildren is implicated based up on the result of the study. Finally in addition to building up the finding of this research it is indicated that future researches need to concentrate on children perception toward stepparent and its impact on the relationship they will have with their stepparents.

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APPENDIX A: Data Collection Instruments

I. A Child Demographic Data

Sex _____ Age _____ Religion _____

Education level _____

Who is the residential biological parent? (Mother/Father) _____

How long are you in this stepparent household? _____

Reason for prior family dissolution (Divorce, Death, or other reason) _____

Child's Current Parents/Family Background Information

- Educational level: Mother _____ Father _____

- Who is the breadwinner of the family? _____

- What is your father occupation? _____ And income per month _____

- What is your mother occupation? _____ And income per month _____

- Family composition

SN	Siblings	Age	sex	Relationship (Half sibling by mother/ father/other)

II. Story Writing

A topic for story writing - *Life in stepparent household*

Note: since children have been given a chance to develop their own topic on the regard, they wrote a composition about their own topic of

- The relationship my stepmother has with me
- The bad and good attitudes toward stepmother
- My life, &
- I and my family

III. Sentence Completion

1. I like my stepparent because _____
2. I don't like my stepparent because _____
3. My stepparent is good at _____
4. My stepparent is not good at _____
5. I describe my stepchild life as stepchild in this stepparenting as _____
6. I describe my relationship with my stepparent as _____
7. My stepparent often wants to help me on _____
8. He/she doesn't want to help me on _____
9. I always worry about _____
10. My stepparent is careful about me on _____
11. He/she is often careless about me on _____
12. My stepparent likes me because _____
13. My stepparent doesn't like me because _____
14. What comes to me while I think of stepmother/father is _____
15. I want to pass most of my time at home because _____
16. I don't like to stay at home because _____
17. I want my stepparent to help me on _____
18. My stepparent perceives me as _____

IV. Interview Guiding Questions

Children's Perception toward Life in Stepparent households

- ✓ What does being raised by stepparent mean to you?
 - What does stepparent mean to you? What makes him/her different?
 - Do you feel/think of your stepfather as father/stepmother as Mother?
 - How do you describe your stepparent perception toward you?
 - How do you see being a stepchild?
 - What did you feel about getting a stepparent?

Best Interest of the Child

- ✓ How is your relationship with your nonresidential parent/relatives?
 - How do you feel about your nonresident biological parent/relatives?
 - How do you describe your nonresidential parent involvement in your life?
 - How do you contact with your nonresidential parent/relatives?
 - How willing the residential parents are?
 - Which of grand parents/aunts/uncles (relatives) are you close to? Why?
- ✓ How are decision/ actions concerning you passed? Are they for the sake of you?
 - Was there action/parents decision that dangers you?

Survival and Development

- ✓ How is your relationship with your stepparent?
 - How do you address him/her? How does your stepparent call you? Is there differently among siblings?
 - Do you think your stepparent likes you? Why?
 - How much your relationship with stepfather/mother is based on love and respect?
 - How do you describe the affection you have each other?
 - Do your stepparent enjoy talking and playing with you? And you too?
 - Do you think your relationship looks like two biological ties one?
 - Do you feel as you have father/mother indifferent circumstances (via, quarreling with peers or any)?
- ✓ How do you interact with stepparent?
 - Do you ask your stepfather/mother what do you want?
 - How do you share ideas with stepparent?
 - With whom you interact as well, biological parent or stepparent? Why? What are the major interactional issues?
- ✓ Have you experienced a disagreement with your stepfather/mother? If yes why is that?
 - What oftentimes causes you (both you and your stepparent) to disagreement (conflict)?
 - How do you deal conflicts with your stepparent? (how long the conflict stay)
 - What is the role of your biological parent?
 - Do you excuse each other?

- ✓ Have you experienced punishment by your stepparent?
 - How do describe the physical punishments at home?
 - How do you describe the punishments by your stepparent on the wrong doing?
(Physical punishment (battering)
 - Have you experience verbal abuses or emotion touching offenses by your stepparent? If yes, How and when?
 - How about reward for good doing? (appreciation, encouraging)
- ✓ Do you think your stepparent mistreat you? If any, How and why?
 - Does your stepparent do actions on you that make you angry/which are bad to you?
 - Do your parents quarrel each other? How often such situations and other happen among your parents?

What do you face at time? Why do they quarrel?

How do you describe your stepparent attitude toward you while he/she quarrel with your biological parent in the home? If any
- ✓ How do you describe your stepparent's involvement for the betterment of your life?
 - How did you get all the nurturance, follow up and support by stepparent as Mom/Dad?
 - Do you think your stepdad/mom is reluctant to do action to your good deed?
 - How do describe your stepparent's involvement in your activities to motivate you?
 - How much she/he exert her/his effort to lead or help you as your biological parent?
- ✓ How do you express your stepparent support to your schooling?

- ✓ How does your stepparent care for your diet?
- ✓ How does your stepparent genuinely worry on your closing, hygiene, emotion, engagement of activities, answering for you?
- ✓ What is your work after school?
 - How do you describe your work for the family bread winning and activities in the home?

Discrimination

- ✓ What does discrimination by a stepparent mean to you?
- ✓ What is the discrimination you experienced in the family you as stepchild? Why and how
 - Does your biological parent know the favoritism? If any, how?
 - What is your stepparent reaction to protect you?

APPENDIX B: The Amharic Version of Data Collection Instruments

I. (Demographic Data)

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II. Story writing

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III..... (Sentence completion)

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IV.

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EXPERIENCES OF STEPCHILDREN

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- 16. ●●●●● ●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●●●? ●●●●● ●●●?
- 17. ●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●●? ●●● ●● ●●●●?
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●●●● ●●●● ●●●●● (Best Interest of the Child)

- 2. ●●● ●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●?
- ●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●● ●●●●●●? ●●●●●? ●●● ●●● ●●●●●?
- ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● (●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●) ●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●?
- ●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●? ●●?
- 3. ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●● ●●?

●● ●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● (survival and development)

- 4. ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●●/●●●●●/ ●● ●●●● ●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●●? ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●● ●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●?
- ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●●●●●● ●●● ●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●● ●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●● ●●●●●●●/●● ●●●●
- ? ●●●●● ●●●●?
- ●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●● ●● ●●● ●●●●●?
- ●●● ●● ●●●●● ●●/●●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●● ●●● ●●● ●● ●●●●●?
- 5. ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●?
- ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●●● ●●●●●?
- ●● ●● ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●● ●●? ●●●? ●●●●● ●●●●●●●●●●● ●●?
- 6. ●●●●● ●●●●● ●● ●●●●●●/●●●●●●●/●●● ●●●●●● ●●●●? ●● ●●●●●●●●●?

EXPIENCES OF STEPCILDREN

101

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- 8. ?
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- 10. ?
- 11. ?
- 12. ?
- 13. ?
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●●● (Discrimination)

- 14. ?
- 15. ?
- 16. ? ?
- 17. ? ?
- ? ?
- ?

●●●● (note) ::

Declaration

I, the undersigned Muleye Tarekegn Dires, hereby confirm that this study in the title “An Exploratory Research on Stepchildren’s Experiences in the Stepparent Households: The Case of *Kolfe Keranyo* Sub city, Addis Ababa” is carried out by me, and any material used in this study is duly acknowledged.

Name: Muleye Tarekegn Dires Signature_____

Date: June 2010