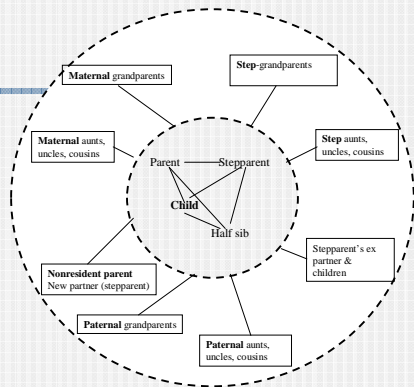
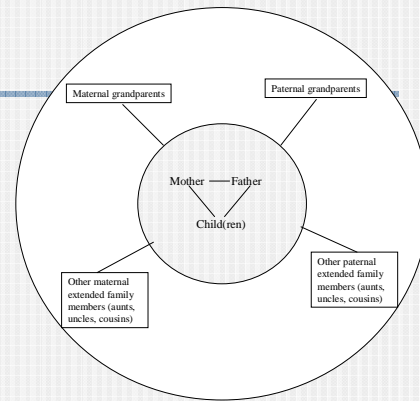


## Relationships in Stepfamilies: The Power of Children's Perceptions

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## The Resilience in Stepfamilies study

- Three members of 90 families interviewed (biological parent, stepparent, and child) plus where possible the non-resident parent (32).
- In 38 cases teachers also completed the SDQ plus assessments of classroom behaviour.
- Assessments of all dyadic relationships were measured in multiple ways (single-item and measures).
- Assessments of child wellbeing and family cohesion and expressiveness also made by all family members.

## Measures used:

- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman): prosocial behaviour, anxiety, peer problems, behaviour problems, hyperactivity.
- Cohesion and expressiveness subscales of the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos).
- Perceptions of Strengths Questionnaire (Williams & McGee).
- Security scale (Kerns, Klepac et al).
- Warmth and hostility scale (Melby, Conger, et al).

## Characteristics of sample:

- Children aged between 9 and 15
- 50 girls, 40 boys in final sample
- 60 stepfather families, 30 stepmother families
- Recruited through schools
- 66% of families had been together longer than 2 years
- Income and education higher than for New Zealand overall

## Key aspects of the study:

- Multi-informant
- Comprehensive examination of children's perspectives
- Focus on affective aspects of relationships as well as behaviour

## Predictors of children's assessments of family dynamics

### Family cohesion:

Child: quality of parent-child relationship  $\beta = .306$

Child: quality of child-stepparent relationship  $\beta = .115$

### Family expressiveness:

Child: happy with parent-nonresident relationship

Child: security in child-stepparent relationship

## Predictors of child's assessment of strengths and behaviour

### Prosocial behaviour:

Child: closeness to maternal grandparents  $\beta = .286$

### Strengths:

Child: happy with child parent relationship  $\beta = .298$

Child: closeness to stepparent  $\beta = .254$

## Predictors of children's assessment of their behaviour 1

### Anxiety:

Child: quality of relationship with non-resident parent  $\beta = -.239$

Child: happy with child-parent relationship  $\beta = -.236$

### Hyperactivity:

Parent: parent-stepparent conflict  $\beta = -.313$

Child: Happy with parent-child relationship  $\beta = -.234$

## Predictors of child's assessment of their behaviour 2

### Behaviour problems:

Child: closeness to maternal grandparents  $\beta = -.316$

Child: quality of child-nonresident parent relationship  $\beta = -.192$

### Peer problems:

Child: close to non-resident parent  $\beta = -.415$

## Predictors of resident parents' assessments of family cohesion and child pro-social behaviour

### Cohesion:

Parent: parent-stepparent conflict  $\beta = .242$

Child: happiness with frequency of contact with non-resident parent  $\beta = .175$

### Pro-social behaviour:

Parent: nonresident parent involvement with child's school  $\beta = .276$

Child: closeness to parent  $\beta = .250$

## Predictors of parents' assessment of child behaviour

### Behaviour problems:

Parent: quality of parent-child relationship  $\beta = -.317$

Child: security of relationship with non-resident parent  $\beta = -.246$

### Hyperactivity:

Child: parent-stepparent conflict  $\beta = -.306$

### Peer problems:

Parent: parent-child closeness  $\beta = -.269$

Parent: child-stepparent closeness  $\beta = -.205$

Child: closeness to maternal grandparents  $\beta = -.187$

Child: closeness to non-resident parent  $\beta = -.181$

## Predictors of non-resident parents' assessments of children's behaviour

### Prosocial behaviour:

Child: frequency of holidays with non-resident parent  $\beta = .543$

### Behaviour problems:

Nonresident parent: involvement in discipline  $\beta = .579$

Child: happy with biological parents' relationship  $\beta = .527$

### Anxiety:

Nonresident parent: happy with relationship with resident parent  $\beta = -.445$

Child: happy with resident-nonresident parent relationship  $\beta = -.107$

## Predictors of non-resident parents' assessments 2

### Hyperactivity:

Child: happy with child-nonresident parent relationship  $\beta = -.664$

Nonresident parent: happy with child-nonresident parent relationship  $\beta = -.214$

### Peer problems:

Nonresident parent: involved with discipline  $\beta = .349$

Child: frequency of holidays with non-resident parent  $\beta = -.299$

## Summary

- Children's assessments of their relationships with biological parents and maternal grandparents tended to predict behavioural assessments.
- Their assessments of their relationships with stepparents tended to predict family dynamics and their perceptions of their strengths.
- The relationship children have with their non-resident parents is consistently associated with wellbeing, especially behaviour.
- Children's perceptions of relationships were predominant in predicting their assessments of outcomes, as well as those of their resident and non-resident parents

## Conclusions

- It appears that dyadic relationships in stepfamilies contribute differentially to aspects of wellbeing for children and families. Much more research is needed into this.
- Children may be particularly accurate observers and assessors of dynamics in their families.
- The *affective* quality of relationships are powerful associates of wellbeing in stepfamilies.
- Longitudinal designs would help to clarify many of these dynamics further.