

I'm getting married...again! Exploring children's understanding and experience of parental remarriage

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Abstract

The research on children in stepfamilies was conducted so as to provide insight into children's notions of stepfamily and stepfamily living, the induction process that they experienced in facing a parent's remarriage and the adjustments they faced after parental remarriage. Particular focus was given to the stepparent-child relationship and ways in which this could be strengthened.

The study had yielded both reach and depth of information on children's experiences with stepfamilies before and after remarriage.

The findings revealed several key points:

- Children were typically left out in the decision-making aspect of a remarriage
- Children formed their opinions about stepfamilies from their observations of their stepparent's behaviours
- Children modelled terminologies according to traditional nuclear families (e.g. using the labels 'daddy/mummy', relating to stepparent as 'parent'), however, they differentiated stepfamily functioning from a nuclear type
- Children were largely ready to integrate their stepparent into their notion of family
- Parents lacked insight into children's concerns and expectations about the remarriage
- Stepparents assumed immediate disciplinary roles upon marriage that required mediating
- The stepparent-child relationship could be strengthened by the cooperative roles of parent, stepparent and child

Following the above, recommendations for intervention at the preventive and remedial levels were made.

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