

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTATEA DE PSIHOLOGIE ȘI ȘTIINȚE ALE
EDUCAȚIEI



TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT
DOCTORAL THESIS

CONDUCĂTOR DE DOCTORAT

DOCTORAL SUPERVISOR

Prof. univ. Dr. DOREL UNGUREANU

Student-doctorand

Doctoral Student

INBAL VEINBERG

2015

UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ-BOLYAI CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTATEA DE PSIHOLOGIE ȘI ȘTIINȚE ALE
EDUCAȚIEI

**Improving Perceptions and Attitudes of School Staff
Regarding Dealing with Children**

Of Divorced Families:

A Pedagogical Perspective

CONDUCĂTOR DE DOCTORAT

DOCTORAL SUPERVISOR

Prof. univ. dr. DOREL UNGUREANU

Student-doctorand

Doctoral Student

INBAL VEINBERG

2015

Table of Contents

	Introduction	
	CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS	7
I.1.	Gap in knowledge	7
I.2.	Main Theories	7
	CHAPTER II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	13
II.1.	Introduction	13
II.2.	Mixed-Methods	14
II.3.	The Quantitative Paradigm	15
II.4.	The Qualitative Paradigm	15
II.5.	Research Phases	16
II.6.	Research Population	17
II.7.	Research Tools	18
II.8.	The Researcher's Role and Involvement in the Research	19
II.9.	Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods	19
	CHAPTER III: FINDINGS	21
III.1.	Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 1	21
III.2.	Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 2	22
III.3.	Findings Emerging from the Research Question No. 3	22
	CONCLUSIONS	25
	Factual Conclusions	25
	Conceptual Conclusions	26
	Practical Implications and Recommendations	29
	Research Limitations	30
	Contribution to Knowledge	31
	Future Research	31
	REFERENCES	33

List of Figures

Figure1:	The conceptual framework of this research	10
Figure 2:	A Multi- Eco-Systemic Working Model	27

List of Tables

Table 1	Findings according to the research questions and the research phases	23
---------	--	----

Abstract

In the last years, the divorce rate worldwide, as well as in Israel, has increased. Changes in family structure have called for socio-educational coping strategies both for families and educational staff. The research topic has become most relevant with the implementation of dealing with children of divorced families in education systems in Israel as well as around the world.

The research sought to examine how to improve perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families.

The research is a mixed methods research and its research population consisted of Israeli educational staff (principals, educational counselors and teachers).

The research tools were (1) document analysis of Director General Circulars; (2) semi-structured interviews with 30 educational staff members in northern Israel; (3) questionnaires distributed to 206 educational staff members from different elementary schools in northern Israel; (4) pre and post questionnaires regarding a workshop that was conducted in 3 different elementary schools in northern Israel.

The main research findings were that various opinions and ambiguities arise regarding educational staff's perceptions and attitudes towards divorce in general and towards children of divorced families in particular. In addition there is prejudice and labeling among educational staff regarding the subject. Furthermore, establishing a supportive and promoting learning environment for children of divorced families is essential; communication and collaboration with both parents is better for the children, and finally each staff member has an important role in dealing with children of divorced families.

The findings that emerged from the research allowed for developing a Multi-Eco-Systemic Working Model that can improve the perception and attitudes of educational staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families .

Thus, the research contributed to the knowledge in the area of educational approaches to dealing with children from divorced families.

Key words: Divorce, Wellness, Pedagogical Staff perception towards divorce, Stress reaction, Change processes, Children in divorced families, Educational counseling.

Introduction

Research Background

Divorce has been a growing worldwide phenomenon in recent years. The divorce rate has increased around the world as well as in Israel. Family structure has changed and these changes are reflected in children's life cycles. Part of a child's life cycle is school, which has led to the fact that schools are forced to deal with divorce and affected children. Numerous studies have been written about the ways children and parents deal with divorce; but little has been written about the patterns of action of educational staff in relation to the subject. This has led to this research.

The current research focuses on improving perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families from a pedagogical perspective. Most research on the topic of divorce, discuss children's or parents' points of view. This research focuses on perceptions of school staff in relation to their role concerning children of divorced families and ways in which school staff deal with children of divorced families at school.

Therefore, it is important to examine and understand educational staff's perceptions and attitudes towards their role in supporting children of divorced families and if these perceptions and attitudes influence their ways of dealing with these children. This was the main goal of this research.

Gap in Knowledge

This research focused on elementary educational staff members in Israel. Research undertaken to date has discussed the ways children deal with divorce and/or parents' coping strategies. In addition, research has presented practical courses of action for schools to follow when dealing with divorce. None of the research had addressed feelings and emotions among educational staff when they have to deal with the situation, hence the impacts of these feelings on educational staff were examined.

Aims and focus

The research had three goals:

- ☒ To explore school staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families.

- ☒ To examine the perceptions of school staff in relation to their role concerning children of divorced families.
- ☒ To characterize the ways in which school staff deals with children of divorced families at school.

The research questions were:

- ☒ What are the perceptions and attitudes of t school staff (teachers, counselors, and principals) towards children of divorced families?
- ☒ What are the perceptions and attitudes of school staff regarding their role in dealing with children of divorced families?
- ☒ What are the ways in which school staff (teachers, counselors, and principals) deal with children form divorced families?

Significance of Research

The research discusses the perceptions and attitudes of educational staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. It is one of a few that examines the ways in which school staff members perceive their role regarding children of divorced families and the ways in which they implement these perceptions and attitudes in the field. This was done in order to create a model that can contribute specifically to the field of improving perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families from a pedagogical perspective.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it adds universal knowledge in a field where gaps exist regarding perceptions and attitudes of school staff, thus contributing to the knowledge of how to improve these perceptions and attitudes.

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS

I.1 Gap in knowledge

Most research on the issue of divorce in families, discusses children's/ parents' points of view, the way in which children cope with divorce at school and the ways in which divorced parents deal with the situation. However, the literature offers limited knowledge about educational staff (principals, counselors and teachers); their perceptions and attitudes towards dealing with children of divorced families.

This research focuses on school staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. In addition it focuses on the perceptions of school staff in relation to their role concerning children of divorced families and the ways in which school staff deal with children of divorced families at school. The research is based on the premise that the more educational staff is aware of their feelings and emotions regarding the issue of divorce, the better they deal with the issue on a professional level. Furthermore, the research discusses family theory-the family life cycle, divorce and stages of divorce. It also discusses children of divorced families and stress coping theories such as BASIC-Ph and the Salutogenic Theory. Additionally, the research reviews stress reactions and wellness. Finally it examines educational staff's perceptions and attitudes about divorce in general, children of divorced families and their role in dealing with the issue. Thus, the topic of this research is **Improving Perceptions and Attitudes of School Staff's with regard to dealing with Children in Divorced Families: An Educational Perspective**

I.2. Main theories

This research is engaged with perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children in divorced families. It also focuses on perceptions and attitudes of school staff towards divorce in general and children of divorced families in particular, their perceptions regarding their role and the ways in which they deal with the issue. In order to study this issue three main theories were examined: Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory (Johnson 2012), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1986, 1979), and Adler's Educational Theory (Adler, 1927). This research discusses the "Family Life Cycle" (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005), and

"Children and Divorce" (Ayalon and Flasher, 2004). Additionally, stress, stress reactions and different strategies to cope with stress are discussed as well as wellness in general and wellness regarding children of divorced families in particular (Antonovsky 1979, 1987; Shedmi and Zimerman, 2010).

Consequently, the conceptual framework of this research pertains to five interrelated areas: Divorced Families, Children of divorced families, Stress reactions, Wellness and Educational staff members' roles, perceptions and attitudes based on three main theories: Carl Rogers' Humanistic Theory (Johnson 2012), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner 1986, 1979), and Adler's Educational Theory (Adler, 1927).

The theoretical foundations of Improving Perceptions and Attitudes of School Staff's with regard to Dealing with Children of Divorced Families

The theoretical foundation of this research involves five main components.

I.2.1. Divorced Families - entails family life cycles and the way in which families are structured. Family life cycle discusses the stages of family development (Carter & McGoldrick, 2010). Since family is the first group to which a child belongs, it ought to give stability and permanence in a child's life (Satir, 1994). Thus, when divorce takes place, the family structure is changed and the stages of a family life cycle are interrupted (Eldar-Avidan & Barnea, 2002).

I.2.2. Children of divorced families - discusses the effect that divorce has on children. There are long-term consequences for children's development in several aspects (Smilansky, 1991). These are reflected on an emotional, as well as cognitive and behavioral level. Many children have reservations about their parents' divorce despite quarrels and conflicts to which they have been exposed and they would prefer their parents to remain married. Children feel that the parent who leaves home, or the parent, who chose divorce, is the parent who abandoned and gave up on them. This sense of abandonment gives rise to intense feelings of anger, frustration and helplessness, accompanied by a strong desire to fix the system that had failed (Eldar - Avidan & Barnea, 2002). Children's emotional reactions at the beginning of a divorce process usually include **fear, depression, worries, anger, feelings of rejection, and**

conflicts of loyalty. Children are exposed to instability and an uncertain reality. Many children are afraid their fathers will abandon them and they will experience feelings of loss.

I.2.3. Stress reactions - are based on the idea that people react to changes in their environment or react to external changes that influence them and sometimes cause different types of reactions. Therefore, there is no stress until a stress reaction appears according to Selye (1976) and Eisen (2010). What causes stress in one individual will not necessarily cause it in another. Selye (1976) did not distinguish between external factors and personal perceptions and yet he distinguished between two kinds of stress: positive stress, eustress, and on the contrary, distress. When stress persists it can lead to a state of avoidance and/or anxiety. Ayalon & Lahad, (2000) classified stress into four categories: **Physical Changes, Emotional response, Behavioral response, Changes in thinking.**

When talking about stress among children it is important to note that children react differently to stress and these reactions should be evaluated accordingly. Children have inner emotional and personal resources to deal with stressful events. One available recourse is children's inner strengths and personality traits; **high self-esteem** (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), **resilience** (Kobasa, 1979), **strategies and cognitive, behavioral coping skills** (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), **self-regulation skills** (Rosenbaum, 1983); **self-efficacy** based on expectations to succeed (Bandura, 1977).

1. Wellness - is a transformation in relation to traditional concepts of mental health, which has been defined negatively as lack of illness or diseases. Wellness is based on the humanistic approach (Shedmi & Zimmerman, 2009) that focuses on a person's growth and expansion and the development of latent developmental and creative resources. Wellness is a holistic approach and therefore should be considered, across all stages of developmental.

☒ **Educational staff members' role, perceptions and attitudes** - traditional teaching is defined as teachers being in control of the learning environment. Control and responsibility are held by teachers and they play the role of instructors (in the form of lessons) and

2. decision makers (with regards to curriculum content and specific outcomes) (Novak, 2002). According to the Humanistic Learning Theory teachers should be creative, intelligent and caring. Humanistic education provides a context for personal growth and development of knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the world through academic learning (Aloni, 2005; Johnson, 2012). In a similar manner, the role of teachers in **ecological theory** suggests that students are “an open system,” meaning that children experience repeated exchanges with surrounding contexts (Reschly et al., 2007). Finally, Adler (1927) perceived school as a continuum of parents. **The interaction between school and parents is necessary.** Teachers therefore, should help correct children's inappropriate behavior and try to reduce harmful attitudes of parents (Cohen, 2012).

In cases of divorce, children are statistically more likely to be at risk of mental health problems (Smilansky, 1991). Therefore, the role of school becomes essential. It has to provide children with a source of support and sometimes it becomes the main place responsible for children's development (Smilansky, 1991).

In some cases a teacher is the only responsible adult to whom a child is connected (Ayalon, 1991, Ayalon & Flesher, 1991). In addition, school counselors provide a vital role in increasing children's success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). School counselors provide a safe learning environment and work to maintain the human rights of members of a school community (Sandhu, 2000). School counselors should focus on the needs of all children (Lee, 2001).

This research uses a mixed methods approach, and draws on the theories that underpin these five components. The research collected evidence to advance **the perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children in divorced families.**

A visual representation of the conceptual framework is introduced in Figure 3:

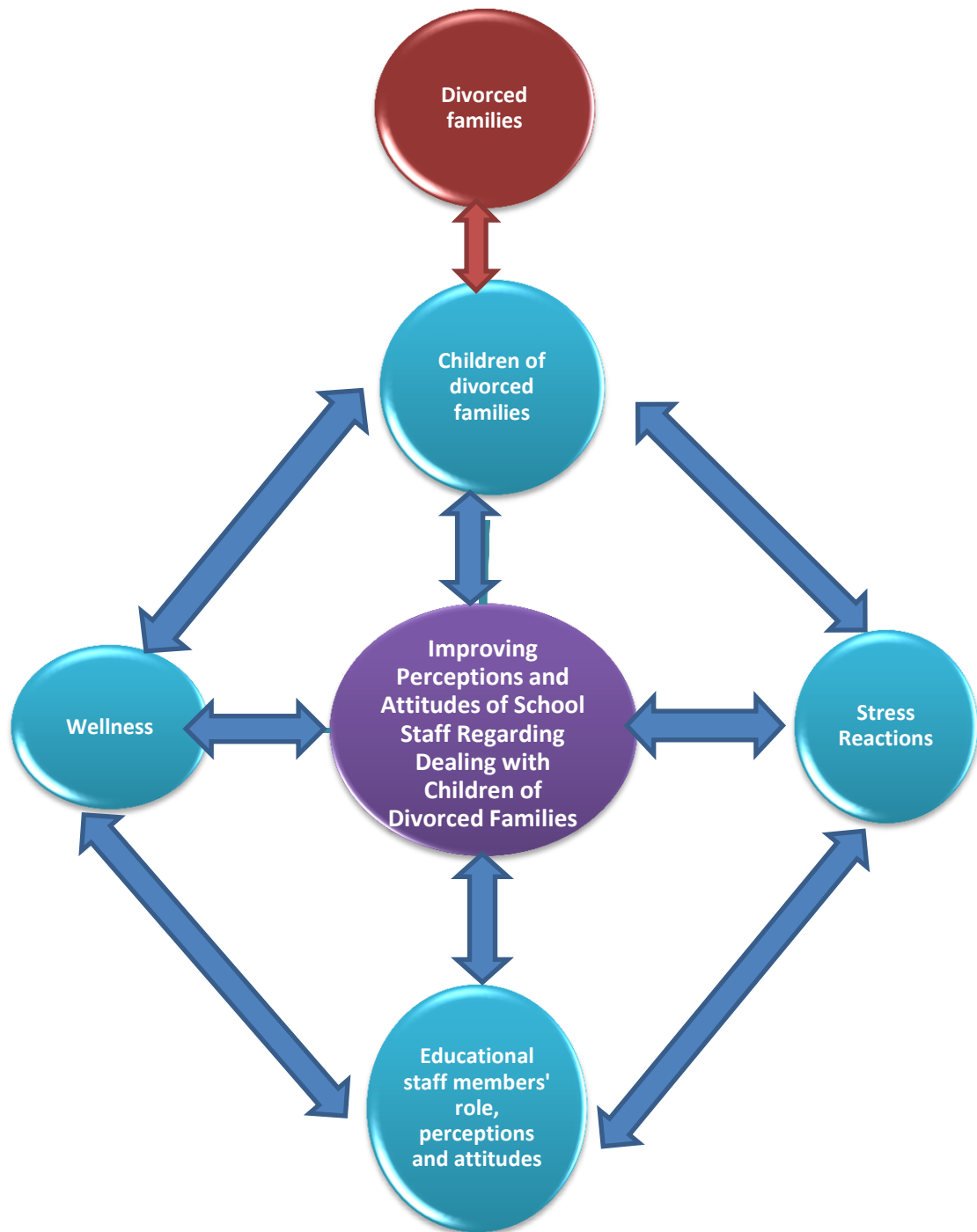


Figure 1: The conceptual framework of this research

A basic central diagram was selected to represent visually the unity of the components that constitute the process, and the way in which they interact and connected to one another. This conceptual framework model presents the process in which the five components that surround the issue and interact with one another - divorced families,

children of divorced families, stress reactions and wellness and educational staff members' role, perceptions and attitudes.

More specifically, the model shows the components involved in improving perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. Divorce in families happens all over the world including Israel. Therefore, it is important to discuss the phenomenon and its implications in general and its impact on children in particular. Thus, stress reactions are part of the consequences of the divorce. Throughout this, educational staff members' roles, perceptions and attitudes are relevant in order to achieve the most professional and effective treatment for children who come from divorced families. Finally, by dealing with perceptions and attitudes of the educational staff toward children of divorced families, the children's wellness must be discussed in depth as the children are influence by these attitudes by.

In order to improve perceptions and attitudes of school staffs with regard to dealing with children of divorced families we must discuss divorce in general and understand the family life cycle. It is important to acknowledge that divorce influences the family life cycle and as a result affects children as well. Subsequently, children of divorced families are part of the issue and their stress reactions are part of their life both in and out of the school system. Therefore, educational staff members' perceptions and attitudes regarding their role are essential in order to establish a stable environment and by that accomplish children's wellness.

CHAPTER II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

II.1. Introduction

All around the world, people tell their story. Research is carried out all over the world to study and comprehend all kinds of phenomena. In order to do so there should be a research paradigm. Therefore, a research paradigm broadly reflects assumptions that are closely connected to one another and are characterized by the reality which is studied (Shkedi, 2003). Kuhn (1962) stated that a paradigm is a worldview, a universal and broad perspective on a phenomenon. It provides a larger framework within which research takes place, and researchers work accordingly. A paradigm can be a set of beliefs, values shared by a scientific community at a given time. Weaver and Olson's (2006) definition of paradigms as "patterns of beliefs and practices that regulate inquiry within a discipline by providing lenses, frames and processes through which an investigation is accomplished" (p. 460). Additionally, Taylor, Kermode, and Roberts (2007), explain that a paradigm is "a broad view or perspective of something" (p. 5). Likewise, Kuhn (1962) discussed two periods or phases of research in science: normal and revolutionary. Research events during a normal period are like a situation where there is an attempt to complete a puzzle out of an orientation based on explicit or implicit generalizations, a known pattern drawn via the main theories in a questioned science. Basic assumptions of a research paradigm are considered obvious truths in normal periods of science. Yet, the more numerous the pieces of a puzzle, the less they may fit together. Meaning, researchers may find new pieces of knowledge, which were confirmed by conventional scientific research methods, but are not appropriate for an existing paradigm. Furthermore, Kaniel (1997) defined a paradigm as an expression of the way in which we understand a reality: "paradigm is a kind of theory, or workspace, defined with a unique language and assumptions system" (p. 44). The core of a whole paradigm has a number of main assumptions that form a worldview.

This research deals with different dilemmas that school staff (principals, counselors and teachers) faces when dealing with children from divorced families in elementary schools in northern Israel. The researcher is a vice principal and educational counselor who deals with issues of how to deal with children and what the roles of educational staff are on a daily basis. The researcher herself is a divorced mother who has had to deal with the educational system throughout her own children's school years.

Accordingly the research aims were formulated:

The Research Aims

- ☒ To examine perceptions and attitudes of school staff in relation to their role concerning children of divorced parents and characterize the way in which the school staff copes with the situation at school.
- ☒ To expand and develop insights of educational and counseling staff about their role in dealing with and supporting children of divorced parents.
- ☒ To develop coping strategies among school policy makers and educational staff with regard to children of divorced parents.

The current research wished to add to the knowledge about educational staff's point of view. Many studies have been conducted about children and the ways in which they deal with divorce; while this research seeks to present educational staff's perspectives and attitudes toward the subject. The research explored the perceptions of principals, educational counselors and teachers in relation to dealing with children from divorced families. It also investigated their perceptions of their own role and finally, the ways in which they deal with children from divorced families.

Accordingly, the research questions were developed:

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions and attitudes of the school staffs (teachers, counselors and principals) towards children of divorced families?
2. What are the perceptions and attitudes of school staffs regarding their role in dealing with children of divorce families?
3. What are the ways in which the school staffs (teachers, counselors and principals) deal with children of divorce families?

II.2 Mixed-Methods

Creswell (2009) & Pearce (2012) state that mixed methods strategies are less well known than the qualitative and the quantitative approaches. By recognizing that each field of research has limitations, researchers understood there should be a combination between different approaches in order to prevent biases. Therefore, a

mixed methods approach is useful to combine the best of both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

II.3. The Quantitative Paradigm

Birenbaum (1993) describes two types of existing research paradigms: the scientific paradigm and the humanistic paradigm. A scientific paradigm aims to provide causal explanations and predict future behavior based on observed behavior in the present study. According Birenbaum (1993) and Sabar (2001), the scientific paradigm of reality is characterized by an external class, which is time or context dependent and can be reduced to simple components that are statistical ties. This research of reality aims to find out the information by using objective tools.

Creswell (2009) claims the quantitative paradigm is a means for testing objectives theories by examining the relationships among variables. These variables can be measured by tools of numbered data analysis. Data analysis is be done by statistical measures. Furthermore, the hypotheses and research questions are often based on theories that the researcher seeks to test. This quantitative study generalizes rules and hypotheses based on a phenomenon or theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

II.4. The Qualitative Paradigm

According Birenbaum (1993), the humanistic paradigm is concerned with understanding the holistic side with reference to the hidden manifold aspects of the environmental context of human behavior and complex interactions that characterize it. This method is mainly based on qualitative research naturalistic or phenomenological methods.

Sabar (2001) argues that the starting point of the research approach and the ultimate purpose of the researcher is to understand human actions, and interpretation. Human understanding through language, attitudes, values, beliefs and events, demands from life, expectations of the future - these are the starting points of the qualitative research approach.

The purpose of qualitative research is to develop awareness and understanding of concepts, through a description of different aspects of reality.

Qualitative processes stand in contrast to the methods of quantitative research. Qualitative research discusses different knowledge claims, strategies of research, and methods of data collection and analysis. Although the processes are similar, qualitative procedures rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of research.

Creswell (2009) argues the qualitative research paradigm has its roots in cultural anthropology and sociology. It has only recently been adopted by educational researchers. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. It is largely a research process where the researcher gradually makes sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating cataloguing and classifying the objects of study. Qualitative inquirers use theory in their studies in several ways.

II.5. Research Phases

The research is divided into four main phases:

Methodology flow diagram

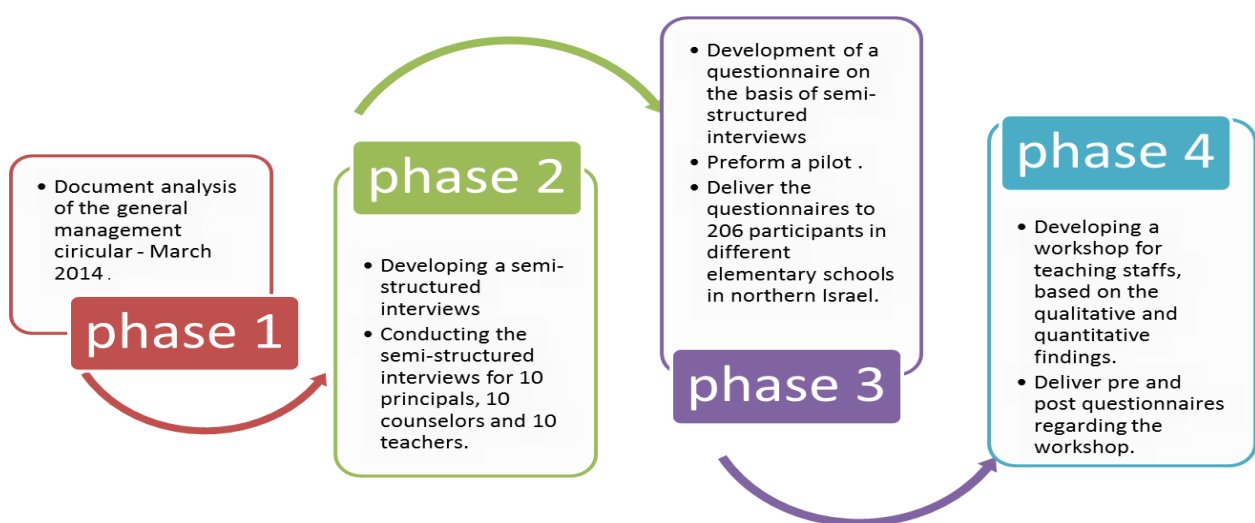


Figure 2: Research Phases

Phase 1: The document analysis phase, which refers to the director general circular , was done from the end of 2013 up to March 2014. The purpose was to check the instructions of the Ministry of Education in Israel and its demands with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. As Bryman (2012) stated, the term document covers a very wide range of different kinds of sources. This research discusses official government documents published by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

Phase 2: Semi- structured interviews were conducted from the end of 2013 to the beginning of 2014. Their goal was to examine educational staff's perceptions and structured interviews to other types of interviews. In semi-structured interviews a schedule is prepared that is sufficiently open ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and developments made, new possibilities to be included, and further exploration to be undertaken (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013).

Phase 3: Questionnaires were delivered between April and June 2014 and included different types of questions in order to check educational staff's perceptions and attitudes about the subject.

Phase 4: The workshop took place in November 2014 in 3 different schools in northern Israel. The activity included a one-time session totaling 75 minutes. During the workshop 2 close-ended questionnaires were delivered to and completed by participants (re-workshop close ended questionnaire and a post-workshops questionnaire).

II.6. Research Population

Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed research population as a process of identifying an aimed group of participants or a specific information place in order to achieve the research aims.

The research population in this research was chosen according the research methods and questions. It was divided into two parts: the qualitative part, in the second phase of the research consisted of 10 principals, 10 educational counselors and 10 teachers from elementary schools in northern Israel. The third phase of the research, the quantitative part of the research consisted of 206 educational staff in 9 elementary

schools in northern Israel. Additionally, the fourth phase of the research consisted of 75 educational staff members from 3 elementary schools in northern Israel that participated in the workshop. The reason for choosing this specific population was that there should be a holistic vision of the topic. Principals are the policy promoters in school. Educational counselors in Israel are responsible for the pupils' wellness policy and they are also responsible for exposing educational staff to problems and supporting them. Finally, teachers are the ones who should implement management's policy; they should also apply the requirements pertaining to the issue of divorce on a daily basis. Teachers are those who meet on a regular basis with children and are responsible for implementing the school's policy.

II.7. Research Tools

The research tools chosen for the current research were eclectic. Since the research method used was a mixed methods approach, the researcher chose to combine several research tools. For the qualitative part of the research, the first tool that was chosen was document analysis of the general management circulars. These are internal instructions of the education law that every member of the educational staff in Israel is obliged to follow. In the current research reference is to the general management circular that describes the relationship between educational institutions and separated or divorced parents. Periodically the general management circular is updated according to changes in the requirements of the Ministry of Education. The general management circular relevant to the current research was updated on March 2014. By analyzing the general management circular, questions were developed for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted for this research.

As indicated, the second tool that was used in the current research is a semi-structured interview. The questions were divided up in accordance with the research questions and included demographic details, education staff's general perceptions, perceptions of their role in general and regarding children from divorced families in particular and the functioning of the education system in relation to children of divorced parents.

The quantitative part of the research consisted of a questionnaire comprising mainly closed-ended some open-ended questions. The questions were based on data received from the semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, a workshop was designed based on

the data that emerged from the interviews questionnaires and another questionnaire was constructed, which examined the results of the workshop that had been delivered to educational staffs.

II.8. The Researcher's Role and Involvement in the Research

In this research, the researcher has a direct and profound connection to the research topic. The researcher is a vice principal and educational counselor who deals with the topic on a regular basis, in her school and personal life. She is divorced and remarried and her children are children of divorced parents. From the researcher's point of view, despite the difficulties, improving perceptions and attitudes of educational staff toward children from divorced families will professionalize the work of educational staff. Some of the interviewees teach at the same school as the researcher and there was concern that they would want to please and impress the researcher, and therefore tell her what she wanted to hear and impair the reliability of the research.

In order to prevail over this difficulty and try to minimize the researcher's involvement, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the researcher, encouraged interviewees to speak of their feeling and express their opinions; stick to the original issue, as well as by reminding them that their feelings and opinions were purely for the educational purposes of this research.

II.9. Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods

The qualitative part of the current research consisted of two phases. Firstly the researcher read and analyzed the Director General circular. The purpose was to explore the rules of the Ministry of Education in Israel. The researcher examined the Education Law of the Israeli Ministry of Education. In order to explain what the director general circular is, it is essential to elaborate upon the subject. The responsibilities of the Ministry of Education are established by the education laws in Israel, and the Education Minister is responsible for implementing regulations and instructions. The director general circulars are internal instructions of the law, which every member of educational staff in Israel is obliged to follow. In the current research reference is to the director general circular which describes the relationship between educational institutions and separated or divorced parents. Periodically the director general circular is updated according to changes in the requirements of the c

Ministry of Education. The director general circular relevant to the current research was updated in March 2014. By analyzing the director general circular, questions were developed for a semi-structured interview that was conducted for this research.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted among 30 educational staff members that included 10 principals, 10 educational counselors and 10 teachers in order to explore school staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. The perceptions of school staff in relation to their role concerning children from divorced families and the ways in which they deal with these children at school were also examined. The researcher asked individual participants to participate in the research. Each one had the right to choose whether to participate or not. The interviews were conducted privately, on a one-to-one basis at participants' houses or in a neutral place in order to create a relaxing atmosphere. Before the recorder was turned on or the interview started, each participant reviewed the research goals, signed a consent form, and verbally agreed that he or she was willing to participate in the research. Each interview lasted between 15 to 60 minutes, and was not interrupted. The information included collected demographic data and general responses to the questions presented to participants. The data was then organized, divided into manageable categories and sub-categories, which were then used to develop themes for the research according to the research questions. Thirdly, the next phase of the research was done according to the quantitative part, a statistical method, was carried out. A statistical questionnaire was structured as a result of data collected from analyses of the director general circular and answers provided in the interviews. Descriptive statistics were done to describe the socio-demographic profile and the professional, occupational profile of educational personnel who participated in this research. The quantitative part described different characteristics of distributions in percentages and absolute numbers of categorical variables. In addition, indices such as mean, median and dispersion tendency, measures such as standard deviation, minimum and maximum values for continuous variables were shown (Executive level).

CHAPTER III: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to explore school staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families; to examine the perceptions of school staff in relation to **their role** concerning children of divorced families and finally, to characterize ways in which school staff deal with children of divorced families at school. The findings are presented according to the research questions.

Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 1:

What are the perceptions and attitudes of the school staff (teachers, counselors, principals) regarding dealing with children of divorced families?

Integrated Finding no. 1: Varieties of opinions and ambiguity arise regarding the educational staff perceptions and attitudes towards divorce in general and towards children of divorced families in particular. (Quantitative finding) (Consists of the Qualitative findings:

1. Emotions:

- ☒ Identification
- ☒ Difficulties
- ☒ Sadness
- ☒ Wellness
- ☒ Frustration
- ☒ Pity

2. Ambivalence: Duality

Finding no. 2: Prejudice:

- ☒ Awareness
- ☒ Labeling

Finding no. 3: The perceptions and attitudes of the teaching staff in relation to children of divorced families vary according to their marital status.

Finding no. 4: The perceptions and attitudes of religious teachers are more responsible toward the children of divorced families, for the reason that in the Jewish religion the family value is a superior value.

Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 2:

What are the perceptions of school staff regarding their role in dealing with children of divorced families?

Integrated Finding no. 1: Establishing a supportive and a Promoting Learning Environment for children of DF.

(Consist of Quantitative Part findings):

1. Most of the responsibility is on teachers.
2. Providing an appropriate Education:
 - ☒ Bending the rules.
 - ☒ Source of background Information
 - ☒ Programs

Integrated Finding no.2: Communication and collaboration with both parents

(Consists of Qualitative Part: Overreach the parents: Containment the parents

(Consists of Quantitative Part: Social desirability – the school staff's relationship with the parents is imbalanced, most of them communicate primarily with the custodial parent.

Integrated Finding no.3: Most of the educational staff perceives itself as a source of support and as a significant and steady agent for children of DF.

(Consists of Qualitative Part:

Rating for the children:

- ☒ Support
- ☒ Custody
- ☒ Stable environment

Consists of Quantitative Part: Most of the teachers feel that they should be involved and influential characters regarding children from DF.

Finding no. 4: The Counseling staff is perceived as an advisory staff for teachers primarily.

Findings Emerging from Research Question No. 3:

What are the ways in which the school staff (counselors, teachers and principals) deals with children form divorced families?


Integrated Finding no.1: The role of the management


Consists of Qualitative Part:

☒ The management is the regulatory authority.

☒ Management:

 Supervision

 Leading the process

 Introduction to documents

Consists of Quantitative Part:

☒ The more the school system is oriented to the subject, the higher the teachers' awareness and understanding of the issue of dealing with children from divorced families.

☒ (in contrast) There is a contradiction in the educational staffs' perceptions and attitudes regarding the conduct of the school staff system with children of divorced families.

Finding No.2:

Counseling's Role:

☒ Support children/ parents

☒ Support the educational staff

☒ Guidance

Finding no. 3:

Teachers' Role

☒ Support children

☒ Contact parents

Table 1 presents the findings according to the research questions and the research phases.

No.	Research Question/Phase according to research tools	First phase – director General Circular	Second phase semi- structured interviews data analysis	Third phase questionnaires data analysis	Fourth phase questionnaires regarding the workshop
			Theme 1: School staff's perceptions and attitudes towards children of Divorced Families is flooded with emotions and emotional ambivalence		
1.	What are the perceptions and attitudes of the school staff (teachers, counselors, principals) with regard to dealing with children of divorced families?		1. Prejudice: 1.1. Awareness 1.2. Labeling	1. Different opinions and ambiguity arise regarding the educational staff's perceptions and attitudes towards divorce in general and children of divorced families in particular.	
			2. Emotions: a. Identification b. Difficulties c. Sadness d. Wellness e. Frustration f. Pity	2. The perceptions and attitudes of the teaching staff in relation to children of divorced families vary according to their marital status.	
			3. Ambivalence: Duality	3. The perceptions and attitudes of religious teachers are more responsible toward children of divorced families, because in the Jewish religion is family is a superior value.	

No.	Research Question/Phase according to research tools	First phase – director General Circular	Second phase semi- structured interviews data analysis	Third phase close-ended questionnaires data analysis	Fourth phase questionnaires regarding the workshop
			Theme 2: Supporting children of Divorced Families.		
2.	What are the perceptions of school staff regarding their role in dealing with children of divorced families?	3. Most of the responsibility is the teachers.	1. Providing appropriate Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Bending the rules. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Source of background Information 1.3. Programs 	1.Social desirability – staff's relationship with parents is imbalanced, most of them communicate primarily with custodial parent.	1. Most teachers feel they should be involved influential characters regarding children from divorced families
		2. The Counseling staff is perceived as a primarily advisory staff for teachers	2. Rating for the children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Support 2.2. Custody 2.3. Stable environment 		
			3. Reaching out to parents: Containment of the parents		
			Theme 3: One unified system to dealing with children of divorced families		
3.	What are the ways in which the school staff (counselors, teachers and principals) deals with children form divorced families?	1. The management is the regulatory authority.	1. Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Supervision 1.2. Leading the process 1.3. Introduction to documents 	1. The more the school system is oriented to the subject, the higher teachers' awareness and understanding of the issue of dealing with children from divorced families.	1. Contradiction in the educational staffs' perceptions and attitudes regarding the conduct of the school staff with children of divorced families.
			2.Counseling: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. Support children/ parents 2.2. Support the educational staff 2.3. Guidance 		
			3. Teachers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Support children 3.2. Contact parents 		

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes and explains the conclusions that emerged from the discussion of finding of this research.

The conclusions will be discussed according to research questions.

Factual Conclusions

Conclusions regarding research question no. 1: **What are the perceptions and attitudes of school staff (principals, counselors and teachers) towards children of divorced families?**

The conclusion that emerged from the research about improving perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families is that their opinions and feelings of ambiguity depend on the their self-perceptions, their feelings and emotions towards and the issue. In other words, the less ambiguity they experience and the more self-awareness they have, the better they will deal with the subject. Dealing with children of divorced families is characterized by prejudices and judgment, which may affect educational staff's functioning in relation to children from divorced families. Therefore, greater awareness, sensitivity and label avoidance will improve their perceptions and attitudes toward divorce and children of divorced families.

Furthermore, the findings showed that divorce does not necessarily imply weakness, perceptions, and attitudes of teachers can have a major impact on children's performance. According to the Jewish religion, family values are extremely important and therefore religious educational staff members feel more responsible for children of divorced families because they feel these children's families are incomplete and they wish to embrace them.

Conclusions regarding research question no. 2: **What are the perceptions of school staff regarding their role in dealing with children of divorced families?**

With regard to role perceptions of school staff concerning children of divorced families, the evidence showed that the more relevant information and sensitivity educational staff in general and teachers in particular have, the better they are able to

deal with divorce situations and create an optimal environment for children. The more educational staff understands the importance of holistic, extensive and good relationships with both parents, the better their children will function at school. Educational staff's professional perceptions are characterized by their educational world view. Greater awareness of their education professional perceptions and not just their pedagogical role perceptions enables them to develop in-depth relationships with children and create a supportive, consistent and stable environment for them. Teachers need constant support, direction and guidance on the subject. Lack of counseling guidance can result in teachers' unprofessional conduct.

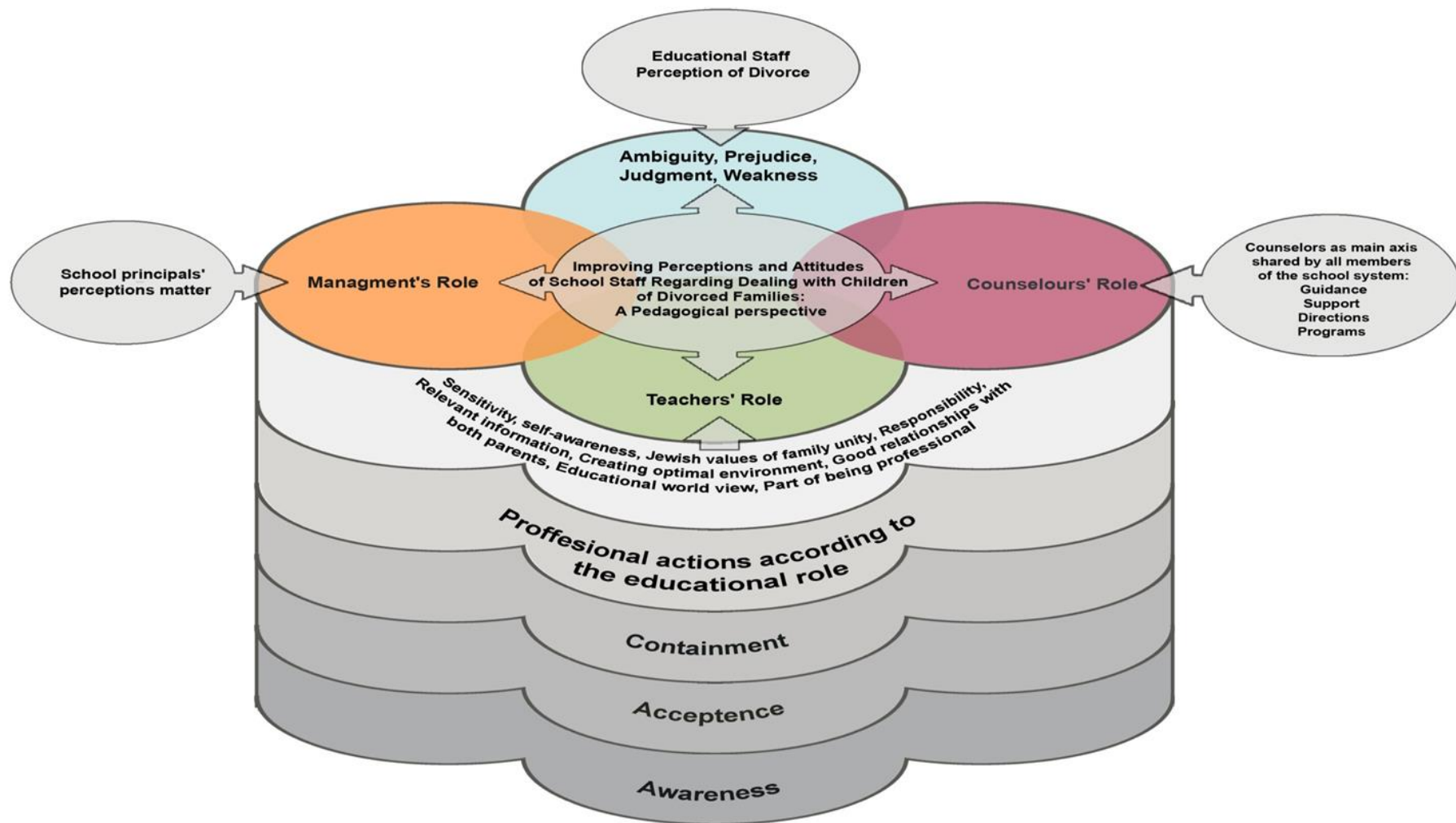
Conclusions regarding research question no.3: **What are the ways in which school staff (principals, counselors and teachers) deal with children from divorced families?**

The conclusion that emerged from the research about improving perceptions and attitudes of school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families is that the ways in which schools operate is based entirely on their principals' perceptions and vision. School principals' perceptions and attitudes affect the entire school. Educational counselors are the axis shared by everyone who operates in a school. Teachers' roles in supporting children of divorced families are crucial and school policies that are oriented to the subject of divorce will produce teachers who are aware of the nuances of the subject and are committed to it.

Conceptual Conclusions

The conceptual conclusion will be discussed after presentation of the Multi-Systemic Ecological Model.

Figure 3: A Multi- Eco- Systemic Working Model



A Multi- Eco-systemic Working Model to improve perceptions and attitudes of the school staff with regard to dealing with children of divorced families

The uniqueness of this model is the Multi- Eco- systemic observation that it enables, and the bidirectional flow that exists between the internal processes among staff members and their surroundings. This bidirectional flow that is presented in the model exists in the interactive space between different educational functionaries and their perceptions, thereby allowing professional improvement and advancement of the various stake holders regarding children of divorced families.

The Multi-Eco-systemic working model reviews the different styles school staff employs to deal with children of divorced families.

The four components of the model, educational staff's perceptions of divorce, and the roles of management, counselors and teachers in dealing with children of divorced families, are integrated and form personal, holistic, ecological and bidirectional processes. In order for the four components to work together educational staff must be aware of ambiguities, prejudices, judgments and weaknesses that the issue of divorce awakens in them. They should try to accept their feelings and emotions and contain them. By so doing, they can take professionally and cognitively concerted actions regarding children of divorced families.

Perceptions emerge, are founded, and can be changed to a new ways of thinking. From the multi-systemic – ecological perception when there is a paradigm change in each component of the system; there will be an inevitable impact on other components in the system.

All four components undergo four graded processes that enable, at the end of the process, professional work by all educational role holders. First, staff members need to identify their feelings and perceptions in relation to children of divorced parents. Then have to be aware of these emotions and feelings, accept them and contain them. This process will lead to professional actions by every office holder.

For example, removing ambiguities by providing staff with all relevant information related to divorce and children of divorced families, should increase awareness of the issue and allow rethinking on the subject.

It is expected that by inviting educational staff to engage with the prejudice regarding the subject, they will be able to deal with their feelings and emotions by containing and possibly processing them.

Exposing educational staff to the judgmental aspect of the issue as legitimate and understandable allows them to deal with their thoughts and feelings and thus increases their awareness of the issue. As a result, staff members are more likely to act cognitively rather than emotionally. On the conceptual level, the findings of this research allow the emergence of a new theory with regard to dealing with children of divorced families which is based on the holistic, ecological and Adler's approaches/theories. The way to improve perceptions and attitudes of school staff is **integrative**, which includes different functionaries in schools. It is also a systemic approach that includes the systems of which educational staff members are a part.

The findings indicated that in order to deal with children of divorced families in school in the most professional way, educational staff should embrace an **ecological perceptive** that incorporates all the systems in which children are involved. This means that school staff should be aware of children's and their surroundings. School staff members who are involved in children's lives and aware of their feelings and emotions regarding divorce in general and children of divorce in particular; are able to address the issue in a sensitive but professional way.

By dealing with children of divorced families in an integrative, ecological manner, school staff creates **personal - holistic relations** with children as well as their parents. Consequently, perceptions, attitudes and the manner of dealing with children of divorced families is a **bidirectional approach**. Bidirectional processes speak, on the one hand, of internal processes that influence external actions of staff members and, on the other that external processes affect internal processes that educational staff experience. These are concurrent processes that often happen in parallel.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

In order to reach full and efficient results in dealing with children of divorced families, educational staff should first implement the following the ten principals (see in addition to the Multi-Eco-systemic working model:

1. Examine feelings and emotions regarding the subject (identification, frustration, pity, wellness, difficulties, and sadness).
2. Try to avoid prejudice;
3. Raise awareness
4. Try not to label or judge children, parents or yourself.
5. Be aware of conflicting emotions (ambivalence) that the subject awakens
6. Know the background of students and choose the way to deal with the situation accordingly.
7. Remember that providing an appropriate education will help a child.
8. Honor parents by developing relationships with both of them.
9. Follow work procedures and related documents upon the subject.
10. Contact relevant appropriate functionaries to obtain guidance, support and direction.

Research Limitations

The limitations of the research are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the research findings. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are a result of the ways in which the research design was chosen initially and/or methods used to establish internal and external validity.

- A. Qualitative method** - To achieve a degree of limited sample generalization about a larger population is one of the boundaries of qualitative research. The greater the number of cases investigated, the greater the potential to claim generalization on the population. If a researcher can show, that some characteristics of the many investigated cases are similar to other cases, then generalizability will be certain (Shekdi, 2003).
- B. Research tools**- qualitative research tools used in this research are divided into three categories: content analysis of documents, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires in two phases.
- C. Research Population** – In the research 30 educational staff members were interviewed, 206 educational staff members responded to questionnaires in the third phase of the research and 75 educational staff members responded to questionnaires in the fourth phase of the research, all from northern Israel.

D. The Researcher's Position - Possible bias in this research may be due to the fact that the researcher belongs to the researched population and as a divorced mother herself the possibility of researcher involvement was high.

E. The generalizability of the research- this research discusses educational staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. In order to deal with limitations of research tools and population; a small sample that was used in the qualitative part had a high level of validity and a low level of reliability. Whereas, in the quantitative part a large sample was investigated and had a low level of validity and a high level of reliability

Contribution to Knowledge

Theoretical contribution – **A Multi- Eco- systemic Working Model** that explains the processes educational staff undergo when they deal with children of divorced families.

1. Practical contribution – the model can serve as a guideline of how educational staff should deal with children of divorced families.
2. Changes in policy with regard to dealing with children of divorced families and improving the ways in which school staff introduce these changes and thus improve the ways in which they act at present.

The theoretical contribution of knowledge is in increasing theoretical knowledge through the model developed in the light of the three main theories: according to the humanistic theory, the ecological theory, and from Adler's theory. Most importantly it is to improve educational staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children of divorced families. Changes in perceptions and attitude may lead to changes in policy. The research's originality lies in its combination of research tools and theories and is innovative for educational staff because it required self-observation and examination of their perceptions and their roles regarding children of divorced families.

Future Research

The field of educational staff's perceptions and attitudes towards children of divorced families is a multi-dimensional and a varied domain. Therefore, future research might examine perceptions and attitudes of educational staff regarding children of divorced

families in junior high and high schools in Israel. A comparative research examining perceptions and attitudes of male compared to female educational staff members may be undertaken. Research into educational staff's perceptions and attitudes with regard to dealing with children from complex and unconventional families may be carried out. Finally, research that deals with educational staff's perceptions and attitudes towards children of divorced families in the Israeli Arab sector.

References

- Adler, A 1927, *The Practice and Theory of Individual Psychology*. New-York: Nervous and Mental Disease Pub. Co.
- Aloni, N 2005, 'Distress and Challenges of a Humanist Educator in the 21st Century'. in: *Education and Challenge of Time*, ed, E Paladi, Israel: Teachers Union- Teachers Association of Promotion Teaching and Education, vol.2 pp. 35-53.
- Antonovsky A 1979, *Health, stress and coping*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Antonovsky A 1987, *Unraveling the mystery of health. How people manage stress and stay well*'. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ayalon, O & Flasher, A 2004, *Children & Divorce Chain Reaction*. Israel: Nord Publications.
- Ayalon, O & Lahad, M 2000, *Live on the Edge- Stress and Coping in High Risk Situations, Reducing violence and towards peace -2000*. Israel: Nord Publication.
- Bandura, A 1977, 'Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change'. *Psychological Review*, vol.84, pp. 191-215, in Milgram N. 2004.. In *Children under Stress*, eds, A Klingman, A Raviv & B Stein, B. eds. *Children in Stress and in Emergencies – Characteristics and Psychological Interventions*. Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education Psychological and Counseling Service.
- Birenbaum, M 1993, *Who's Afraid of a Research Paper? Planning and Writing a Research Proposal and Research Report Behavioral Sciences*. Tel - Aviv: Universities Enterprises Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U 1979, *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*', Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U 1986, 'Ecology of the family as a context for human development research perspectives', *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 22, pp. 723-742,
- Bryman, A 2012, *Social Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Carter, B McGoldrick, M & , Garcia-Preto, N 2010, *The Expanded Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives* 4th Edn. United Kingdom: Pearson Pub.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L, & Morrison, K 2013, *Research Methods in Education*. 7th edn. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Cohen, L, Manion, L & Marriuson, K 2007, *Research Methods in Education*, 6th edn. London: Routledge.
- Creswell, JW 2009, *Research Design – Qualitative. Quantitative, and Mixed methods approaches*. California: Sage publication.
- Eisen, D 2010, *Journey to Internal Kingdoms*. Israel: Health Promotion synapses optimistic publication.

Eldar-Avidan, D & Barne'a, H 2002, *Children and Divorce*. Israel: Ministry Of Education.

Kobasa, SC 1979, 'Stressful life events, personality and health: an inquiry into hardiness'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.37, pp. 1-11, *Children under Stress*, N Milgram 2004, in: *Children in Stress and in Emergencies – Characteristics and Psychological Interventions*, eds. A Klingman, A Raviv & B Stein. 2004, Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education Psychological and Counseling Service.

Lazarus, RS & Folkman, S 1984, *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer, in: *Children under Stress*. in: *Children in Stress and in Emergencies – Characteristics and Psychological Interventions*, ed N. Milgram 2004, in: A Klingman, A Raviv & B Stein. 2004, Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education Psychological and Counseling Service

Novak, JD 2002, 'Meaningful learning: the essential factor for conceptual change in limited or appropriate propositional hierarchies (LIPHs) leading to empowerment of learners'. *Science Education*, vol. 86, no.4, pp. 548-571.

Pearlin, LI & Schooler, C 1978, 'The structure of coping'. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol.19, pp. 2-21, in *Children under Stress*, N Milgram 2004, in: *Children in Stress and in Emergencies – Characteristics and Psychological Interventions*, eds, A Klingman, A Raviv & B Stein. 2004, Jerusalem, Israel: Ministry of Education Psychological and Counseling Service.

Reschly, A, Coolong-Chaffin, MA, Christenson, SL, & Gutkin, TB 2007, 'Contextual influences and RTI: Critical issues and strategies'. In SR Jimerson, MK Burns & AM VanDerHeyden (Eds.), *The Handbook of Response to Intervention: The Science and Practice of Assessment and Intervention*. pp.148-160. New York: Springer.

Sabar, N (ed.) 2001, *Genres and Tradition in Qualitative Research*. Israel: Dvir Publication. Sabar, N (ed) 2001, *Genres and Tradition in Qualitative Research*. Israel: Dvir Publication.

Satir, V 1994, *Peoplemaking*. Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing Group

Selye, H 1976, *The Stress of Life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Smilansky, M 1991, *The Challenge of growing - needs, stress and coping*. Tel Aviv: Ramot.

Web-Refernce

Cohen, N 2012, 'Adler in the classroom'. *An echo of Education Journal*. Israel: Ministry of Education. Available from:
<<http://portal.macam.ac.il/ArticlePage.aspx?id=5298>>. [14 December 2012]

Johnson, AP 2012, 'Humanistic & Holistic Learning Theory'. Minnesota, Minnesota State University. Available from: www.OPDT-Johnson.com [7 December 2012].

Pearce, LD 2012, 'Mixed – Methods Inquiry in Sociology'. *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 56 no. 6, pp. 829-848. Available from: Sage Journals. [17 October 2012].

Shedmi, H & Zimmermann, S 2010, *Wellness – A Theoretical Rationale*. Available from:
<<http://cms.education.gov.il/educationcms/units/shefi/kishureichaim/meytaviyut/yeda/revachanafshit.htm>>.[17 October 2012].