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**Narratives of Mothers in Stepfamily Situations, an exploratory investigation**

**ABSTRACT**

**Keywords**

Family; Stepfamily; Marriage; Co-Habitation; Mother; Stepmother; Father; Stepfather; Stepchild; Stepchildren; Gestalt; Therapy; Therapeutic; Evolutionary Theory; Psychotherapist; Psychotherapy; Counselling.

This project explores the topography of modern stepfamily relationships through the prism of the mother, a view as yet rarely explored. Recorded interviews of eleven mothers were examined using narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory methods, within a Gestalt theoretical framework and refined into first person narratives of their experience as mothers and stepmothers.

The overall aim of the research is to develop resources for stepfamily members and inform and educate psychotherapists who work with individuals or couples with stepfamily issues or problems, an area lacking in much information on this at present.

The findings indicate that while many social scientists reject biological determinism within stepfamily dynamics, an acceptance of evolutionary theory opens out the analysis to provide greater understanding of the stepfamily landscape. Further, the study shows that some features of stepfamily dynamics have similarities to the workings of psychotherapeutic groups, and vice versa, that therefore stepfamily situations can be a useful metaphor for therapy group interventions and that the possibility exists to develop this theory further as an addition to the existing knowledge of group dynamics.

Products of the project include a series of workshops, development of exercises that illuminate stepfamily issues and the launch of an organisation StepIn ASAP, Advancing Stepfamily Awareness through Psychotherapy.