



**Godfred Gyimah**  
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences  
Bachelor's Degree Program in Social Services  
Bachelor of Social Services  
Thesis, 2021

# **FATHER-CHILD DISCONNECTION AFTER DIVORCE**

**The experiences and the subjective well-being of fathers with  
foreign backgrounds**



## ABSTRACT

Godfred Gyimah

Father-child disconnection after divorce: The experiences and the subjective well-being of fathers with foreign backgrounds after being separated or away from children.

Pages 57, 5 Appendixes

Published (May 2021)

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Social Services

Degree program in Social Services

This qualitative research explored Father-child disconnection after divorce: the experiences and the subjective well-being of 5 fathers with foreign backgrounds after being separated or away from their children in Finland. A lot of studies have been done about the effects of post-divorce father-child relationship. However, research that focuses on the post-divorce experiences and the subjective well-being of fathers with foreign backgrounds after child-disconnection are hard to find. The achieved results were through semi-structured interview and inductive content analysis approaches. The goal of the study was to understand and describe four milieus of fathers with foreign backgrounds after divorces. Including fathers' experiences, perception about fatherhood role, perceptions about their subjective wellbeing, and identified means of coping with the negative emotions, if any.

The results revealed that fathers with foreign backgrounds had quality relationships with their children and deeply involved in childcaring before divorce. However, fathers perceived the quality relationship with children, the leisure time, their role as fathers and right for visitation have been disrespected and somehow curtailed, and this has endangered their health, well-being, and life. Again, fathers with foreign backgrounds deemed children as their life, image, blood, primacy, and the most valuable aspect in their lives. It also uncovered fathers with foreign backgrounds' perception of experiencing early alienation from children, gender inequality, judicial and welfare uncertainties. Social networking was identified as the coping mechanism for fathers. Building quality environment before divorce was found essential for post-divorce relationship with children and the family. However, it was revealed that most fathers with foreign backgrounds had limited understanding about the divorce and custody mediation norms in Finland.

Based on the results this study concluded that it would be essential that divorcees, and professionals working with families, focus on supporting positive relationship between couples and simultaneously help children to maintain a quality relationship with both parents after divorce.

**Keywords:** International relationships, Fatherhood, Father-child disconnection, Subjective well-being

## CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION .....	3
2 BACKGROUND .....	6
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS .....	8
3.1 Transnational relationships .....	8
3.2 Fatherhood .....	9
3.3 Father-child disconnection.....	11
3.4 Subjective well-being .....	12
4 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS.....	14
4.1 Research methodology.....	14
4.2 Data collection .....	14
4.3 Inductive content analysis.....	18
5 RESEARCH ETHICS .....	21
6 RESULTS .....	24
6.1 Father-child Relationship.....	24
6.2 Quality environment .....	27
6.3 Early alienation .....	28
6.4 Gender inequality.....	29
6.5 Risky to health, well-being, and life .....	30
6.6 Social networking as coping mechanisms .....	33
6.7 Kela as a protective mechanism.....	34
6.8 Limited knowledge of divorce, custody, and mediation norms.....	34
7 DISCUSSION .....	35
7.1 Fathers Post-divorce experiences.....	35
7.2 Father-child disconnection and subjective well-being.....	39
7.3 Social networking .....	41
8 CONCLUSIONS.....	43
8.1 Implication of the results .....	43
8.2 Professional development and limitations .....	44
8.3 Recommendations.....	46
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDIX 1. Inductive content analysis of fathers' subjective well-being .....	53
APPENDIX 2. The analysis of father-child relationship.....	54
APPENDIX 3. Consent form .....	55
APPENDIX 4. Interview questions .....	56
APPENDIX 5. Backgrounds of the respondents.....	57

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis explored the experiences and the subjective wellbeing of divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds after being disconnected or away from their children. Globally, most fathers are often rejected and isolated from their children after divorce. The resulting effect on their lives involves multiple emotional struggles, feeling of isolation, silent pain, sadness, heart wrenching and anguish, which lay a foundation against their well-being (Kaslow, 2013).

Some become depressive and subsequent long-term psychological impairment, disability, and untimely death. Recounting the ordeal and the massive losses, fathers are not only denied contact and access to their children, but closest relationships with family are somewhat curtailed. The absence of father involvement in divorced families has potential negative effects on the entire family. Several studies about after divorce focus on the effect, legal right, and emotional needs of children and the custodial mothers, with scathing research on fathers that desert their families. However, the dedicated and deeply attached distanced fathers are historically and considerably left unexplained and underrepresented. (Reeb & Conger, 2011; Greif, 1997; Kruk, 1994.)

Divorce is a complex life transition for nearly everyone in a family. This can be detrimental to the affected person's emotions, even in the least circumstances (Umberson & Williams, 1993). According to Tapola-Haapala et al. (2012), Dissolution of marriage is not difficult for couple in Finland with reference to the existing family and marriage legislation. Additionally, the culture of divorce and the increasing number of divorces engrain 'painful, emotional, and complicated judicial processes, disputes and conflicts that affect the well-being of both children and their families'.

As noted by Metsä-Simola et al. (2018) Individuals who encounter divorce experience worse mental health and higher level of mental distress than the married, which may relate to divorce stress that might lead to psychiatric morbidity. Earlier divorce studies in the Nordic nations have mainly focused on legal aspects of divorce and less attention is paid to public opinion and discussions about divorce (Saarimäki, 2017).

In Finland, shared parenting and equal engagement are evident in the family policy and the legislation. However, the image is not always the same in the spheres of

gender. Most Fathers are dissatisfied with the divorce procedures, child custody, maintenance arrangements and the system has been blamed of being prejudiced on fatherhood and divorce debates. Fathers are more and more strongly defending their rights and parental alienation has been a topical issue in recent times (Mykkänen et al., 2017; Mannonen & Weller, 2014; Minister of Social Affairs and Health 2013; Tapola-Haapala et al., 2012; Eriksson et al., 2005)

Recent nationally representative data on secondary school children in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, with the focus on living arrangement, after divorce, the amount of contact with the father, and the perceived quality of the relationships that children have with their father after divorce revealed, that children with foreign backgrounds less frequently see their fathers. It also showed that in the second generation, children of mixed marriages usually have little contact with the father. (Kalmijn, 2015.)

Kalmijn (2015) stresses that most of the studies about divorce fathers are mostly linked to American or Canadian demographic and social context, and very often they focus on the mainstream families. In view of this, a little about the divorced father is known to most European countries. Much has been debated in recent years at about divorced fathers and their concerns, yet little ‘good data’ is available. Several studies have recently been conducted about divorced father and adult children (Kalmijn, 2015). But research that examines what occurs to a divorced father with foreign background after being disconnected or away from their children is either hard to find or nonexistent.

The work life partner for this study was Toiminnan Avulla Työelämään (TAT). TAT is a community of participation and equality. They offer support for young adults in building their identity and future in the Finnish society. Their purpose is to improve the wellness of people with different language and cultural backgrounds and further their work life opportunities. The main tools are weekly recreational activities (sports, social and theme events), work life training, peer support groups, personal guidance and cooperation with local officials and organizations. TAT is a subbranch of HNMKY or Helsinki Young Men’s Christian Association- YMCA, which emphasizes the totality of mental, spiritual, and physical growth of children, young and adults through recreational opportunities.

The problem was identified during my internship with TAT as an issue that concerns some of their male clients. That they are finding it difficult to reach out to their children. TAT focus is to understand their clients' challenges to better provide specialized services that support them. Since then, we have had series of discussions about the implementation of this study.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and the subjective well-being of divorce fathers with foreign background after being disconnected or away from their children in Finland. The goal of this study was to understand and describe four features of fathers with foreign backgrounds' child disconnection after divorce. It focused on fathers' experiences, fathers' perception about fatherhood role, the influence it had on their subjective well-being, and identified means of dealing with the negative emotions if any. To do this I listened to fathers with foreign backgrounds' stories. Research questions were: 1. What kind of experiences do divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds have after being disconnected or away from their children? 2. How do fathers perceived fatherhood role and their subjective well-being after child-disconnection?

## 2 BACKGROUND

The judicial services and the societies in most parts of the world crave for women child custody. In the early part of the twentieth century in several societies, children and women were deemed belonging to the husband/father and his clan. In case of divorce or death of a wife, children inevitably remained with the father's family. Hardworking fathers used to share myriad times working closely with their children on farms in the agrarian era (Kaslow, 2013). According to Kushner (2008), it was a court decision based on the best interest of the child standard. Fathers were given absolute custody right by the court for their ability to care for the child financially, to provide occasional training to the children, children as father's property, and fathers entitlement to the support of the child's service.

Father custody after divorce or death was massively reformed by judicial instruments and shifted for mother custody. Yet the traditional belief system still exists distinctively in some non-Western societies. Since then, most judicial decisions about child custody go in favor of mothers. For instance, in United State, about 95% of all court cases favor women and child can stay with them for about 14 years (Kaslow, 2013).

During the industrial revolution with its trend of urbanization that significantly decreased the amount of time and closeness of fathers with their family. Fathers left their villages and rural areas for cities, for a long work 'shift in a factory, mine, shop, corporate or professional office' from dawn to dusk and Monday to Saturday. Mothers then spent most time alone with the children at home for decades. Over time, most of the western societies perceived children as the property of women and placed more emphasis on the importance of children establishing robust attachment to their mothers. Fathers' roles in the family were reduced to financial providers and disciplinarians. (Kaslow 2013.)

During the World War II, women did not consider home and children as the heart of this world. As men were recruited into the Armed services, many women replaced men in the workforce without return to being permanent mothers and homemakers. Similarly, the feminist revolution also encouraged discontinuity of motherhood as the only means to the fulfillment of women's dreams. It incited them to be assertive and

autonomous and to realize their potential in all aspects of life. More women sought fathers to work less hours and become involved in their children's activities such as childcaring, helping with homework, cooking, and serving a family meal in the home. Women also opted for more time working outside of the home and family and earn salary on their own. (Kaslow, 2013.)

Finland as part of the Nordic countries is prominently identified on a global scale, with their principle of shared parenting, joint custody, contact between children and non-custodial parents after divorce, gender equality and child-centeredness. This equality agenda is deeply enshrined in the legislative instrument, family and child protection Acts, and other sources of public norms. However, the image is not always the same in the spheres of gender and violence in intimate relationships, child custody and access. (Mykkänen et al., 2017; Pösö et al., 2014, 477; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013; Eriksson et al., 2005.)

A report shows that most men find it difficult for becoming a father because several issues regarding parenting traditionally consider only the mother, especially in circumstances of divorce. In the report, men are concerned for the right of the child to both parents, evenly distribution of parental benefits, child custody and access right decision for both parents in order not to alienate the child from the parent living outside the divorce. Men likewise requested for improvement of fathers' conditions and equal opportunity as mother to reconcile work and family life. They as well request for improvement in the well-being of men and examination into the reason why men do not ask for help and use health service less than women. (Mannonen & Weller, 2014.)

In Finland, it is the prerogative of the court and its own initiative to decide how child custody and right of access should be arranged between spouses, in the best interest of the child after divorce. Spouses can also request through court proceedings as enshrined in Section 31 and 32 of the Marriage Act (234/1929; amendments up to 1226/2001). Family with children need to agree during the divorce process on where the child lives, who will be the guardian, how will visitation rights be organized and child maintenance and support. This agreement can be done by the municipal appointees of the welfare board and is as official as a court decision. (InfoFinland 2019)

Recently, there has been a revision of the Act on child Custody and Right of Access, which allows each parent's access rights to live with the children in turns, under the agreement of both parents, and by court decision. The shift accommodation also allows children who are at least 3 years and above to live at least 40% of a calendar year with both parents, including holidays. The purpose of child custody is to ensure the well-being and balanced development of a child in relation to the needs and wishes of the child. Again, it aims to secure a close and affection, relationship especially between the child and both parents. Interpersonal housing would allow the child to develop a positive relationship with both parents on an equal basis. Again, it will decrease disputes between parents concerning child custody and maintenance as well as improve children's well-being and relationships with both parents when the child is constantly aware of their identity. (Act on Child Custody and Right of Access 352/2019; Association of Maintenance Liabilities 2019)

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

This chapter review the literature based on the topic theory and key concepts used in this study, which include transnational relationships, fatherhood, father-child disconnection, and the subjective well-being of fathers with foreign backgrounds.

#### 3.1 Transnational relationships

Transnational relationships have increased because of the rise in geographical mobility around the world. While much attention is paid to the quality of Transnational marriages, lesser attention has been paid to after divorce lives of transnational divorcees and their families. Those available mainly focus on European context. Transnational divorce refers to divorce following the transnational marriage of a couple who does not share the same nationality at the point of marriage'' divorce is characterized by hope and despair, shifts between chaos and stability, and include periods of distress and confusion as well as periods of clarity and renewed strength. (Quah, 2018.)

The world has become a global village where individuals from diverse ethnic and racial background live together because of the influx of globalization, migration, and integration. This trend of change comes with a complicated and enduring history of intercultural relationships and families. Family system has gone through a series of role, structural and social transformation that have significant influence on the current parenting or child rearing roles and responsibilities. These social changes have also influenced the social construction of fatherhood, the legislation, and the social policy frameworks of many nations. This is evident in Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 and transgender couple law in Australia (Sullivan, 2003) and recent child custody Act amendment in Finland, (Mannonen & Weller, 2014)

It is evident that marriages across international borders have been in existence from time immemorial and has recently been in ascendency many nations. For instance, in Finland mixed marriages are a common phenomenon. Nevertheless, it has the highest rate of divorce than native marriages (Angle' et al., 2014; Lainiala & Säävälä, 2013; Jalovaara, 2007). These crosses racial and ethnic affections continually meet some challenges such as violence, coercion, and statutory impediments. And this has influenced re-searchers to interrogate, reconsider and restructure the long-held traditional attitudes, focus, and negative perceptions toward mixed relationships. Recent work of Bhugun on intercultural parenting and relationships shows that even though the mixed marriages are increasing globally, there is little contemporary work that addresses the experiences, challenges and advantages faced by such families (Bhugun, 2019).

### 3.2 Fatherhood

Greif (1997) underlines that fatherhood goes beyond the traditional and prevalent defined role as breadwinner and disciplinarian to include spending time alone with their children. It cannot be exclusively defined by one's biological role since any man can undertake a fathering role of a child, he has not biologically begotten such as a step-child, a foster child or adopted child. It also goes beyond child rearing to include a state of mind at both the conscious and unconscious level (Obholzer, 2002). However, this study adopted Tanfer and Mott's (1997) traditional definition of fatherhood, as 'a biological status attained by having a child, and fathering, which include the procreative act and all the childbearing roles that fathers may fulfil' (Sullivan, 2003).

Research concurs that fathers' involvement in parenting has a significant, long-lasting dividend for the entire family's well-being. A father plays imperative roles in families and in his children's cognitive and social development and subsequent adult position and behavior. These roles are often manifested in the time father spend playing and interacting with their children. This playing time provides an opportunity for children to develop emotion regulation skill in understanding themselves and others. Fathers' roles are more evident as a 'nurturer, mentor, disciplinarian, moral instructor, and skills coach, among other roles' can never be undervalued. Father involvement even after divorce is an imperative foundation to quality outcome of children and fosters the wellbeing of fathers (Mykkänen et al., 2017; Whitehead & Bala, 2012; Leyton, 2011)

Father involvement in child rearing varies significantly among cultures. Different societies have different ways of supporting their children's development. In some communities, fathers are mainly concerned with the necessity of life needs like food, shelter, and safety of their children. For instance, in United State Mexican-America children's success is embedded in familism which encourages close and extended family member support in times of needs, interconnection of members in relation to physical and emotional support, members assuming responsibility and protecting the family's integrity and being submissive to member and respecting family rules. (Saracho, 2013)

Many immigrants see immediate family as a key supporter in times of child rearing. Yet, in Finland parents deal with their situation without the support of immediate family. The interference of relatives is not accepted in the family's decisions. Parents want to rear their children in a manner acceptable and valued by the social norms, stressing on good behaviors, guiding principles, and setting limits for their children. However, the concept of parenting roles is most often different. And this place immigrant spouse in Finland in an obscured position in understanding 'Finnish parent's attitude towards their children' (Vaestoliitto)

In Finland, mother and children are valued, whereas the father is seen as the independence of the main family (Vaestoliitto). Mykkänen et al. (2017) stated, that "in Finland, fathers are perceived as creators of welfare problems in child welfare". Issues about fathers are openly discussed, however, more attention is mostly focused on the father's role in early childcare and their take-up of parental leave. Other writers focused on the drinking fathers and their sons, father with violent behavior, violent fatherhood,

working with violent men, crisis work with men or support groups divorced men. Father with diverse problems in life management have been neglected. However, the share of the childcare gap between fathers and mothers is significantly reduced. Caring, active fatherhood and engagement with father in equally shared parenthood are supported by legislation and the policy framework of families (Mykkänen et al., 2017.)

Obholzer (2002), explains that the 20th century psychoanalysts work relentlessly and precisely focused on the importance of mothers and of early bonding relationships. Also, the mid-21st century women's liberation movement stressed on equality and the import of women. These have resulted in an increasing loss of confidence in the value of the normal sense of a man and of fatherhood. Again, the heightened rate of divorce and the inevitable rise in single-parent families have added up to a society in which the consistent and stable role model fathers do not exist for the unborn generation.

### 3.3 Father-child disconnection

Father-child disconnection in this study refers to fathers who through legal or other means are cut off or away from or no longer live with their young children after divorce. There are other related terms in the literature which most mostly links to adult children cut off from parents. For instance, Agllias (2015) explains in many countries, most marriages end in divorce and higher percentage of them involve children. In most of these divorce issues, women become the dominant custody of the children and father are often granted visitation or rejected after divorce. Besides, fathers are made to pay child support obligations to their children, which often strain the relationship between divorce father and children. A larger number of noncustodial fathers progressively lose contact with their children (Umberson & Williams, 1993)

Divorce is a complex life transition for nearly everyone in a family. This can be detrimental to the affected person's emotions, even in the least circumstances. When fathers are separated from their children, they encounter loss of role, anger, frustration, anxiety, and depression. They are likely to engage in risky health behaviors and exhibit poorer mental health score than those living with their children. Father and the children are those who usually struggles to sustain meaningful relationships as the mother become the custodian of the children. (Umberson & Williams, 1993)

In Finland, the current family and marriage legislation make it easy for a couple to divorce. The divorce culture with its increasing rate of divorce, ‘tend to cause painful, emotional, and complicated judicial processes, disputes and conflicts that affect the well-being of both children and their families’ (Tapola-Haapala et al., 2012). Report from statistics Canada analyzed men and women's depression rates and revealed, that all things being equal, men have higher depression rate than women. It was likewise revealed that loss of social support and loss of contact with their children was the key determinant forces to men’s depression. Most men grieve for the loss of children and family and psychologically struggle to differentiate their role as father from their role as a husband after separation. ‘Most fathers understand the importance of their role in their children’s lives and the rewards and pleasures of having a relationship with their children both within and outside a partnered relationship’ (Whitehead & Bala, 2012.)

According to Case-law (2013), ‘Children bond original biological parent couple together’. Kaslow cautions that though ending of marriages and child separation is usually done through judicial proceedings and professional process, those involved should ensure that a divorced family goes through less cumbersome, traumatic, debilitating, punitive and stressful’ situations. This is because, till death do them part it is never over, especially where children are involved. (Kaslow, 2013)

The role father play in relationships, parenting, and in children’s development before and after divorce is often forget. Rather, we paint a negative picture about their absence from the family. They are extensively discussed, vilified, and hastily blamed on televisions, radios, newspapers and other social medial every now and then for dodging child support, and abandoning their children after divorce. In Canada, its observed that post-separated fathers who live apart from their children are mostly tagged with uncomplimentary images and have been unfairly treated. Child-separation has significant impact on the family and the entire society. (Whitehead & Bala, 2012; Greif, 1997.)

### 3.4 Subjective well-being

In this study, subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as ‘‘people’s overall evaluations of their lives and their emotional experiences’’. It comprises of broad considerations such as life and health satisfaction judgements, and specific feelings that reflect how people are reacting to the events and circumstances in their lives. The term happiness

is used loosely with numerous interpretations (Diener et al., 2017). The meaning of happiness varies with different languages. Others understood it as idea of luck or good fortune, intimate satisfaction of one's desires or wishes, goals and enjoyable experience, intense feeling and excitement, and as calm, peaceful feeling and a sense of equilibrium. A study has emphasized focusing on quality of life in societies that go beyond economic indicators and point towards guidelines that can enhance societal well-being around the world (Lilja, 2018).

Cited Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2016), SWB is a broad umbrella term which refers to all different forms of evaluating one's life or emotional experiences such as satisfaction, positive affect (PA), and low negative affect (NA) (Diener, et al., 2017, 1). Negative indicators of emotional well-being include depression, anxiety, poor mental health, anger, feeling of guilt, shame, and loneliness. The positive indicators include self-esteem, contentment and happiness and absence of negative emotions. It reflects how individuals feel about themselves or perceive of their own self-efficacy. The evaluation component denotes how satisfied individuals are with their life. The evaluative element of well-being is life satisfaction. It refers to how a people are satisfied with their life and how happy and fulfilled, they feel. (Sodermans et al., 2015.)

Diener et al. (2017) the aspects of SWB exist independently in factor analyses with a distinctive connection with other variables. They are also found to be independent in relation to 'what influences them, and what they, in turn, influence' Therefore, 'they should be assessed individually'. In this regard, individuals can assess their satisfaction with life scale through self-report or even single-item measure. For instance, social relationships are found to shape positive emotions and in turn increase sociability. Conversely, internal, and social conflicts as well as the perception of problems are found to influence negative emotions. In effect, SWB is influenced by situations and circumstances. For instance, Longitudinal studies by Luhmann and colleagues (2012) found that changes in circumstances such as marriage and unemployment, continued to influence both satisfaction and affective well-being long after they occurred.

## 4 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study is supported by qualitative evidence garnered through semi-structured, one-to-one interview approach. This study explored the experiences and the subjective well-being of 5 divorce fathers with foreign background after being disconnected or away from their children in Finland. The main aim was to understand and describe their experiences of child-disconnection and its influence on contacts and their role as fathers. It further stressed on the negative influence of early childhood disconnection from fathers and described the coping mechanisms fathers have adopted in dealing with the situation. To address the situation, I listened to father's stories. Conducting research involves different possible design approaches for consideration (Leavy, 2017). This chapter is centered on the research methodology, the study goal, the plan to execute the goal, the techniques used for data collection and data analysis.

### 4.1 Research methodology

Qualitative content analysis was adopted using inductive coding to generate code from the raw data. A qualitative research was chosen due its ability to provide a holistic understanding of specific social and human phenomena in the participants' lives. It pays key attention to an individual's experience and perspectives to provide a meaningful understanding out of them. It permits the construction of a robust understanding of the topic and the meaning individuals ascribe to their lives. (Leavy, 2017)

The goal of qualitative approaches is mostly to explore or describe human experiences and perspectives, even though they can be used for other research purposes. This approach is applied when a researcher does not have knowledge or has limited knowledge about the phenomenon or if the existing knowledge is fragmented. This approach allows for revision in relation to new knowledge acquired as the research unfolds. It avoids generalizing the results. (Kyngäs, 2019; Leavy, 2017.)

### 4.2 Data collection

Semi-structured interview provides a range of possibilities and is characterized by unique flexibility. Its structure can adequately address specific dimensions of the

research question and simultaneously provide space for the interviewee to offer new meaning to the study topic. Again, it generates opportunities for a narrative to unfold and allows other question informed by theory. It always provides space to discover with interviewees the contextual influences evident in the narratives, but not constantly told per se. It also provides researchers a means to attend to lived experience and pursue questions from extant theory. (Galletta, 2013)

This method could be utilized as a single method in the research design, or it could be one of the many methods. It could also be structured to produce considerable and often multi-dimensional streams of data. It could also be organized into segments moving from fully open-ended questions toward a more theoretically driven questions as the interview progresses. One of the advantages of using this method is that it pays critical attention to lived experience while also addressing theoretical driven variable of interest. It also allows for interviewee's engagement at different sections of the interview process. It permits substantial reciprocity between the interviewee and the researcher and this 'creates space for the researcher to question an interviewee's response for clarification, meaning making, and critical reflection'. (Galletta, 2013)

Again, this approach influences the kind of research questions, and research purpose, access to participants, time constraints, and researcher skills. It also determines strategy for analysis, interpretation, and representation (Leavy, 2017). Consistent with Galletta (2013, 45), the construction of the research questions and its administration requires considerable time and trial and error through testing of the protocol. During the development of the study, two central research questions and three ancillary questions under each central question were set. 1. What kind of experiences do divorced fathers with foreign background have after being disconnected or away from their children? 2. How do fathers feel about their subjective well-being? The open-ended interview questions assisted in administering the similar instrument to all participants during the interview. It also helped in creating space for participants to tell their experiences and elicited data that I could not anticipate in advance. (Galatea, 2013)

The literature review, thesis supervisors' review, and the work life partners' reviews played a significant role in formulating and ensuring a well-developed interview protocol in terms of language, leaner, clarity, and openness in the research questions. In line with Galletta (2013, pp. 11-16), the strength of research design is dependent on

the clarity of the research questions and the scope to which the primary variables of interest are connected. Again, the research questions (see Appendix 4) serve as guiding principle or a compass throughout the study and shapes the framework of the data collection and data analysis. The questions used in the interview protocol, or guide were based on the research question and the analytical framework.

The recruitment and selection of the study respondents were done by the work life partner (TAT). However, I engaged in deliberations with TAT over the specific method for selecting potential study participants. The discussion was important for me because of its significant impact on the data collection and analysis. The criteria were to look for divorced TAT clients (divorced fathers with foreign) who could narrate more recent experiences of child-disconnection and provide a balanced representation in terms of contents relating to the study topic and willing to share. All participants should have at least one child under 18 years and have participated in one of tat's activities. In our discussion plan, TAT was as well responsible for conveying the value of the study goals accurately and clearly to the selected respondents. (TAT)

Based on the above descriptions, we agreed on *convenience sampling* as the best option for this study. Kyngäs (2019) explains convenience sample as 'a set of people that are related to the research topic and easy to reach'. The researcher can set additional measures to ensure that the participants will have the knowledge and experience that is relevant to the study topic. We proposed 4-8 respondents for this study due to the time constraint and the study limit. Explained by (Kyngäs, 2019), the unspecified size, of the participants was due to the intention to stop the data collection once saturation occurs. Saturation is where repetitive information is given by the participants and nothing new is gained from further collection of data.

After securing all the necessary documents and the participants informed about the purpose of the study by work life partner, I received the contact numbers of the participants to schedule an interview time with them. I must admit the difficulties I passed through in reaching the participants, especially with the influx of the deadly Covid-19 and its influence on the people. Most of the phone calls were turned down. I then send text messages explaining where I got their phone numbers, the purpose, the missing experience of divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds in the literature, and the benefits of the studies to all fathers in similar situations. There and then, they responded

by scheduling time for the interview. Even those who gave time slot for the interview postponed it several times and some never attended. Those who responded said that they thought it was going to be like the 'old story' where people ask about their problems, but nothing is done afterwards.

After introducing myself during the interview, I established rapport with them by expressing my gratitude for their participation. I reiterate the purpose and the value in our conversation and told that they have the right to answer the questions and to end the interview should they feel the need to do so. I also asked permission to audiotape the interview, which they all consented to. They became interested and willing to share with me everything I needed, and even told that they have many friends in similar situations. The interview protocol focused on divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds' experiences of child disconnection, their role as fathers, feelings and emotions, subjective wellbeing, value of children and coping mechanisms.

The administration of the interview protocol was structured in three segments during the interview, moving from a more open-ended question (see Appendix 4) that touched on concrete experiences to more specific and theory laden questions as clarified by Galletta (2013). Preceding the interview was the background (see Appendix 5). The first part focused on the participants' backgrounds was meant for the work life partner's assessment and part of the main study. The fill-in/tick questions relating to participants years of marriage before divorce, ages of the children and age range of participants, and the kind of activities or events they have participated with TAT.

The first segment was designed to elicit a narrative concerning fathers' experiences of being disconnected or away from their children. I turned the recorder on and began with a broader question, what kind of experiences or stories do you have about being disconnected or away from your children after divorce? This was followed by middle segment that was more specific questions that focused on and explore the study topic and concepts in more depth, inspired by the earlier answers by the interviewee. For example, how do you feel about your role as a father after being disconnected or away from your children? I also asked probing questions for clarification and generation of new meaning that came up in the earlier responses toward the study topic.

Afterwards, the final segment questions were more theory laden by giving the interviewee the opportunity to explore the contradictions and narrative towards how interviewee perceived their well-being after being separated from children. For instance, how often do you see your children? How important is/are your child/children to you? These last questions were intended to identify fathers' relationships with their children and what influenced their actions. Getting to the closure of the interview, I invited the interviewees if they have any other thoughts to add. I again convinced them to sign the consent form (see Appendix 3), but they refused and said that it was not necessary, that they just wanted their concerns to be heard. I wrapped up the interview by thanking my interviewee and stressed on their contribution to the study. I again, assured them about the data security and their confidentiality by telling them the data will only be used for the agreed purposes to close the interview.

#### 4.3 Inductive content analysis

Drisko and Maschi (2016) defined content analysis as 'the systematic reduction of content, analyzed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of data'. Data analysis requires considerable amount of time and reflection, and it starts from the interviewing, reviewing the data, accurate transcription of audiotape, and each step draws you more deeply into the participants lived experience. (Galletta, 2016)

Content analysis is applied to understand and analyze the meaning that embedded within texts and in the context in which it was created (kyngäs, 2019; Leavy 2019; Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The present study utilized inductive content analysis to make sense of the respondents, meaning of the textual data (see Figure 1. & Appendix. 1). Inductive in this study refers to the general methodological principles of avoiding any theorizing that does not emerge from a practical analysis of the data at hand (Zhu, 2016, 298). The application of this approach is not to produce generalizable results. Rather, my goal was to provide significant descriptions of divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds' experiences and feelings about their subjective well-being in the context of their personal lives.

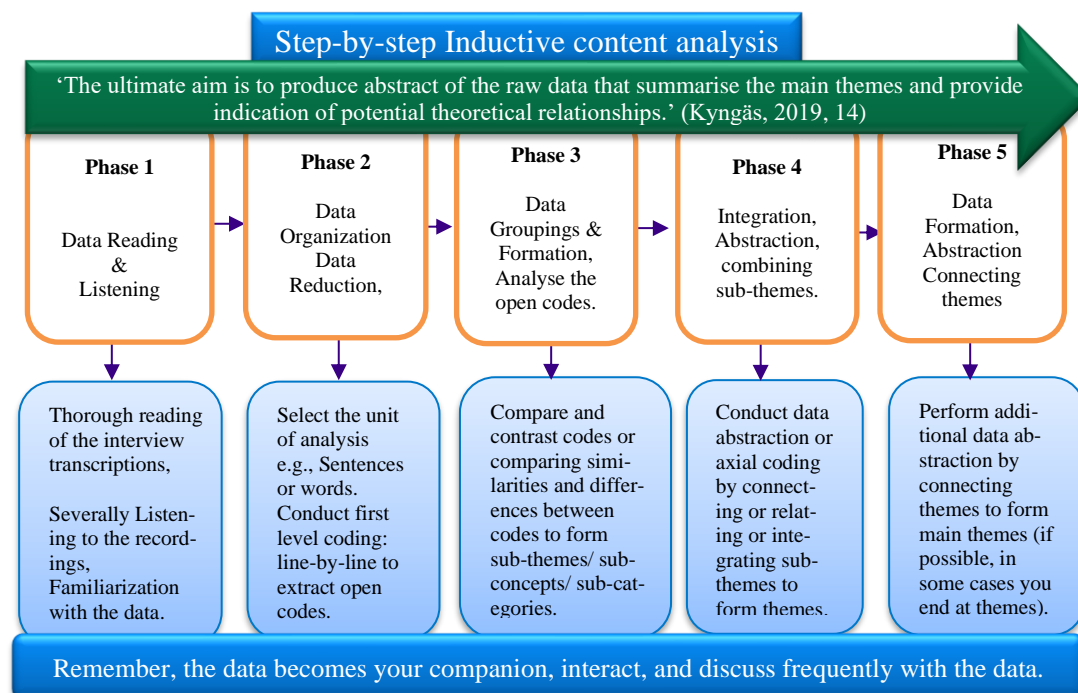
Content analysis could as well be used for interview transcript, speeches, even images and is employed to produce concepts, categories, and themes which can be developed

to generate ‘models, conceptual structures, and conceptual maps that describe the subject under study’ (Kyngäs, 2019). Kyngäs (2019), explains that the created conceptual map of content analysis results can only describe a phenomenon, but not explain it because content analysis has no tool for connecting concepts. Researchers typically adopt this approach to produce a meaningful description of human experiences and perspective in the context of their personal life milieus, rather than generating generalizable outcomes. The researcher is, therefore, obliged to use data which are unstructured or semi-structured (Kyngäs, 2019).

Inductive content analysis is employed when the data collection approach is open and follow loosely defined theme and suitable once the topic under study is new or not covered in the research or prior knowledge is fragmented. Inductive content analysis is implemented to create concepts, categories, and themes from the data. Basically, the inductive content analysis is applied through phases: data reduction, data grouping, and formation of concepts that can be used to answer the research questions. In the analytical process, the researcher reads, organizes, integrate, and forms categories, concepts, and themes by carefully comparing the similarities and differences between code data (see Fig. 1 & Appendix. 1). The basic aim is to generate abstracts of the raw data that summarizes the key categories, concepts, and themes which are theoretically related. (Kyngäs, 2019.)

This inductive analysis was based on the interview data from 5 fathers with foreign background, notes taken, and the researcher’s observation during the interview. The audiotapes were immediately transcribed, including the manifest and latent content, and yielded 19,181 words, equivalent to 45 paged textual data. The transcribed data were read thoroughly and repeatedly to immerse in the data and become familiar with the data collected, to get a sense of the broader picture, determine the unit of analysis, coding, analysis, and interpretation. This gave me the overall impressions and ideas for how to approach the coding based on what was seen in the content. The units of the analysis were determined from the manifested content, which was from each sentence of the text by creating similar ideas using Microsoft word tools as in figure 1. and Appendix 1&2. Afterwards the observed latent content which includes signs, mood, facial expressions, posture, silence, which occurred during the interview were also analyzed. This (Kyngäs, 2019)

Afterwards, inductive, and open coding was used to draw themes from the textual material that captures and describe the meaning of the content found in the data collected (See Fig. 1 & Appendix 1). The purpose of the coding was to develop new knowledge and to address fully the research questions that frame the study. Therefore, the coding was used to reduce and summarize those meanings that were most relevant to answer the research questions (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). This data abstraction process analyzed and reduced the open codes to form sub-themes. This was done by comparing the content similarities and differences between open codes (see Appendix 1) and making references to the main text over and over for confirmation to form sub-themes, and the subthemes were further grouped into themes. At this stage, some of the analysis ended and in others, the abstraction continued to get the main themes to end the inductive content analysis. The findings, the discussions, and the ethical considerations during the study are presented in the subsequent chapters. The reported information was discussed with the work life partners and reviewed by the study supervisors.



**FIGURE 1.**

## 5 RESEARCH ETHICS

Doing this qualitative research, involved fathers with foreign backgrounds' perception and personal feelings about their wellbeing. This means entering into fathers' privacy and to collect sensitive information regarding their lives. In view of this, it is critically useful to ensure ethical consideration governing qualitative research participants, personal and data protection, anonymity, and quality interactions without disenfranchising them while ensuring the production of authentic knowledge (Silverman, 2017).

As an upcoming social service practitioner, doing my thesis within the university settings and with a work life partner, I had the responsibility to exercise considerable ethical discipline from the beginning to the end of the research. Throughout the study, I focused on trustworthiness. Doing qualitative research as emphasized by Kyngäs (2019), I am obliged to ensure trustworthiness in the study, in producing valuable and genuine work and at the same time maintain truthfulness of the findings. Galletta (2016, 40) adds that it is important to reflect on your research settings, approaches, and interactions afterwards. The researcher's method requires attention to ethical considerations, 'including how to recruit your participants, inform the participant and those who may act in the role of gatekeeper of the purpose of your study, and maintain a level of contact and accessibility' (Galletta, 2016).

Having these in mind, I sought and obtained approval from the work life partners and the participants before carrying out the study. The thesis proposal was also accepted by the thesis supervisors. The idea, plan, research plan, the manuscript and the publication were accordingly presented for discussions, criticisms, guidance, clarifications, corrections, and suggestion for improvement. Again, the research questions, methods and instruments of the data collection and the sampling technique were reviewed with the thesis supervisors and the work life partners. This ensured adequate openness that enabled me to elicit data embedded in the experiences and wellbeing of the research participants. These steps were also meant to protect the people involved in the study. Those include fathers' confidentiality, not to exploit them, gaining informed consent, maintaining safe storage for data, and other necessary precautions. (Galletta, 2016.)

Again, I maintained and increased connections with my supervisors, the work life partner, and the study participants, and as well attended all the needed sections of the thesis process. I constantly reflected on my thoughts, assumptions, decision making, and actions I took, and created room for documentation, study methodology and ethical issues that emerged. The researcher's dimension of reciprocity and maintaining a reflexive lens on your interactions with the study participants and institutions you are involved is critical to the subjectivity and biases in data collection and analysis and the reporting of the research results. (Galletta, 2016.)

According to Silverman, (2017) qualitative research unavoidably involves interacting with human subjects, and the researchers are ethically obliged to position themselves to negotiate for the hope and goodwill of the respondents. This could sometimes put researchers in ethical dilemmas; however, they are ethical obliged to maintain secrecy to protect the dignity and safety of the research participants. Additionally, the researcher should agree with the participants that participation is voluntary, and they have right to withdraw, ensure their protection, evaluate potential benefits and risk of participants, obtain informed consent, avoid harm, and avoid covert invasion of the participants' privacy (Silverman, 2017)

To ensure adequate representation of participant experiences without prejudice, and the strength of the study, thorough literature review was conducted. This helped me to acquaint, understand and gain insight about the topic under discussion. It also helped me to set appropriate research questions to elicit the needed data from the participant and in setting the general framework and design of the study. It also helped me to eschew biases in the study. It has been highlighted that following conventions are beneficial in the assessment of the efficacy, though, they do not guarantee relevance and usefulness in the study. The researcher's attitude of being responsive, coherence in the techniques used, sampling method, and ensuring an adequate number of participants for the needed information and rigor of the study. (Kynäs, 2019.)

To ensure credibility of the result, I systematic inductively analyzed the content of the respondents' data as it happened (see the results). To capture all the respondents, meaning in accordance with the research questions, I used sentences as the unit of analysis. From these sentences I derived the open codes, and sub-themes were abstracted from the codes. This means codes were compared and contrasted for the sub-

themes to emerge. I performed further data abstraction to obtain the themes and in some in some further abstraction for the main themes to emerge. The process of abstraction and grouping ensured that the final themes emerged from the data without any preconceptions to influence or prejudice the outcomes. As a father with foreign background, I reflected the analysis and the outcomes under consideration of the context of study, by reporting the results in accordance with legislative instruments such as Act on child custody and right of access, the family Act, previous local and international studies. In this way I was able to eschew any biases in the results.

To ensure confirmability and the authenticity of the results the results were presented as it happened during the analysis in accordance with the inductive content analysis approach. Again, extensive citations from all the respondent's data were used to substantiate each stage of the results presentation and any claim made. Again, the latent content observed during the interview and in the data was considered during the analysis to ensure full representation of the participants meaning. Besides, the recoded data were transcribed verbatim to ensure all the latent content were captured. (Kyngäs, 2019.)

## 6 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the exploration into *Father-child disconnection after divorce: the experiences and the subjective well-being of fathers with foreign backgrounds* in Finland. The information garnered are from the context and viewpoint of the respondents. Obtaining remedies to the situation, respondents responded to two central research questions of which the results are reported and discussed below: 1. What kind of experiences do divorced fathers with foreign background have after being disconnected or away from their children? 2. How do fathers feel about their subjective well-being?

One ethical challenge I encountered was how to engage in reflective thinking to report the results of the analysis as worthy as possible. As Kyngäs (2019) emphasizes that it is often challenging to report inductive analysis results as the researcher only describes, part of the analytical process as it happened and rely on their past experiences to explain other parts of the analysis. The completed inductive content analysis revealed 8 main themes from the respondents' data. They include: 1. Father-child relationship, 2. Quality environment 3. Early alienation, 4. Gender inequality, 5. Risk to health and well-being, 6. Social networking, 7. Kela (The Social Insurance Institute of Finland) as a protective mechanism, 8. Divorce, custody, and mediation norms.

The results are reported based on the research questions. The analysis of the questions related to fathers' experiences of child disconnection after divorce revealed father-child relationship, quality environment, early alienation, and gender inequality as the main themes. Risky to health, well-being, and life was the main theme that answered the research questions linked to fathers' perception about their subjective well-being. Also, social networking emerged as the coping mechanism for fathers after divorce. The new results that emerged from the analysis were Kela as a protective mechanism and fathers' limited knowledge about the divorce, custody, and mediation norms.

### 6.1 Father-child Relationship

One of the results that emerged from the inductive analysis of the fatherhood was a father-child relationship (see App. 2). This relationship was evident in two milieus of

the fathers' attachment to children and pre-divorce and post-divorce involvement. Fathers' attachment relationship to children emerged through intimate bond, personality (personality in this context refers to how father identify himself in his children), and protection. The intimate bond between fathers and children was more emotional, infancy closeness relationship with their children and the inseparable nature of their relationship.

*When your child is crying two to three o'clock in the morning and then you go to her and then you take care about her and this has been taken away from me, and even these days, like playing with her, having fun with her, all these things they will never come back. And then they give the custody to the mom, so suddenly she disappears from your life, and is something it will never come back. (A1)*

The personality was manifested in the value father place on their children as treasure, priceless, valuable, fathers' own blood, fathers' life current and own image, fathers' meaning and confidence in life. Children were seen as the most valuable by fathers. The protective attachment was seen in fathers' eagerness to be in their children's life to offer training for their children's future. This was apparent in fathers' role style which is elaborated in the subsequent topics. For instance:

*My daughter is everything I am, because after I became a father, I realized who I am. I have really a meaning for life. I have to be an example to her, I show much more confidence as a father because I have somebody who is mine, my blood. And this is something that gives you a lot of confidence (A1)*

The results also uncovered that fathers have been involved in their children's life from infancy and continually fighting to be part of their children's life to continue their parenthood (see App. 2). Their involvement was identified in childcare, leisure time with their child, parenting role style, role disruption after divorce. Fathers' childcare involvement was also observed from supporting schools, home, and payment of child or support or maintenance. The schooling was mainly through has taken children to and from school and helping in extracurricular activities like language and dancing or hobby classes. The home support was mainly changing diapers, feeding kids, caring for kids at night when they are crying and other house chores. The child maintenance support was noticed before and after divorce. The after-divorce payment of child maintenance was most apparent from monthly contributions as in their responses:

*You are paying the child support to your own daughter that you cannot see. If when you go to them like social and you complain about it, you know what they will tell you? They will tell you like there is nothing we can do about it; it is the law. So, you keep on waiting for the law, and they are affecting you (B2).*

*One thing that is very hurtful... I am still paying that child support. It is for the maintenance of your own kid, but you cannot even see the kids (C3).*

Moreover, the results revealed that fathers played important role in their children's lives through leisure time before the divorce. The leisure time role was related to children's hobby which included outing, playing time, extracurricular activities, and having fun with kids. The outing was shown in fathers taking children out for shopping and a parting. Playing time included playing sporting activities and taken children to playing ground or parks. Extracurricular activities were found in extra learning besides the normal school hours like dancing, language classes. Having fun with kids was identified in fathers' everyday life with children. This was apparent in father responses:

*I go to the school, I take her to the (x) school, and then I take her to the dancing school, and then I take her home so. (A1)*

*When you see some of your friends with their kid playing... and somebody is like taking advantage of your own daughter. (B2)*

The parenting role style was detected in influence and supervision of their children. These styles including building confidence in kids, training their kids, building trust, ensure kids love both parents, ensure togetherness in family, look up for kids' future, ensure freedom for kids, ensure kids do not fight, monitoring kids, ensure respect, tutor kids wrongs and good, nurturing, giving advice, spending time together, caretakers, creating good environment, and many more as this was illustrated as:

*They know the time to play around when not to play around when they see my face...you tell them like what is wrong, what is good, to teach them about how to be careful and to give them advice (D4).*

Role disruption was also found to be associated with after custody and divorce arrangement and officials' attitudes. Custody arrangement disruption was seen in loss of leisure time, loss of access, loss of fatherhood, loss of identity, and loss of contact. The officials' attitudes included disrespecting views, unequal attitude, disbelieve in fathers, and disappointment. Disrespectful attitudes involved inattentiveness to fathers,

uncaring attitude to fathers and undermining the value fathers place on their kids to be with them. Unequal attitude comprised biases in decision making, unidirectional focus on women. The disbeliever was mostly distrust in fathers. Father disappointment was in the system, and ex-wife's attitude in court. Identified in their responses as:

*So, it means that first they put your role as a father as nothing. Because these people who are deciding there, they were not there, when she had fever and you wake up two or three o'clock in the morning taking care of them. And this is what they never believe a father does. They believe that only the mom can do such things (A1).*

*You know everything is about the women not about men (B2).*

*Every child needs their parents, and they deserve to have their parents. I feel like I have taken away from my own responsibilities and I felt lonely. I feel disappointed about that. The child belongs to both of us, we all share the same feelings, the same blood. Is my child and her child. I want the best for him, and she wants the best for him, but why do you have to always look like we the men are like evils to our own kid (C3).*

## 6.2 Quality environment

Again, it was revealed that quality environment was vital before and after divorce relationship. Quality environment was distinguished as father's quality interactions and relationship with kids and ex-wife, and amicable settlement of dispute or conflict before and after divorce. The interaction included regular phone calls, discussion about the divorce process, avoid going to court, taken the child out of parental differences, assurance of trust, and leisure time together. The quality relationship included putting personal issues aside, empathizing with ex-spouse, good relationship with an ex before divorce. Also remaining in contact with the ex, doing things like family, focusing on family after divorce are critical. Amicable settlement of disputes or conflicts included remaining calm, being more careful, ensure no fight attitude, letting your thoughts override your anger, putting kids first before anything, and outing with both kids and ex-spouse as spotted in the respondent responses:

*Do not fight back, especially as immigrant, the whole thing about going to the court, for me, is like causing more damage, and bringing more fight. Make sure that she is physically and psychologically ok. Make sure that you have a good relationship, it is about communication. Always communicate with the kids' mum so that the kids will be living in a good environment (D4).*

### 6.3 Early alienation

One critical outcome that emanated from the analysis was divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds' perception of being alienated from their infant children after divorce. The perceived early alienation was exhibited through ex-wife's custody manipulations, social and child welfare officials' attitude after divorce, restricted visitations, and access and rights. Ex-wife custody manipulations included deceitful means for custody by giving excuses and lying before the court and skillful control of all decisions made by the courts and social and child welfare officials. This was illustrated as:

*The biggest challenge is when we went to the court and the mom is saying that she is afraid of me and then two days after she calls me, and she said come in bring my daughter into my house and stay for a while. This is mind sickness. (A1)*

*The court has to decide, because somebody the wife of you went to lie and tell something about you, then they will say ok you do not have the right to go there. (B2)*

Again, Fathers perceived that mothers condoned and connived with some officials and used the low level of the Finnish language proficiency to distance them from their children. This includes luring fathers to signing the divorce papers without understanding the content, and the disbelief, they have for fathers with foreign backgrounds. Fathers perceived that they only believe in what the mother says. This was evident in:

*She wrote in the divorce that I agreed with her that she was going to get the full custody of the kid. she wrote it in Finnish. So luckily for me I ask one of my friends before signing it...And I said this is not what we agreed on, and I am not gona sign this...we have changed that this was just for the divorce but not the child custody, we can deal with that later. (C3)*

*Lying to a lawyer because they have a lawyer given them full custody. I feel isolated from my little boy. You have a little boy, and you cannot go out and play with your boy. I grew up without a father too, so I know how it feels. I do not want my boy to grow up like that, but these people want him to grow up like that for what reason. (E5)*

The perceived social and child welfare officials' attitude was observed in undermining of father views, rejection of fathers calls and appointments, prejudices in discharging their duties, inattentiveness to fathers with foreign backgrounds, and unidirectional

support focus on women and children. Restricted visitation comprised less hours and negotiated visitation. Less hours include 2 hours in two weeks or 2 hours a month under strict supervision. The negotiated visitation was through fathers' unlawful means to see their children by moving to reside close to where the child lives and by negotiation with official for supervised visit for less hours. Denied access and right included access to children, and right as a father, cutting father leisure time role with kids, denied traveling access with kids. With these that that father perceived it breaks the bond between them and their children as was noticed from fathers' responses:

*They, social & child welfare will always believe what the mum says, so they always try to find a way to-to favor the mum. If mon says no, we agreed but this is the worst thing I have ever heard. Because I have been through a lot of discrimination, they just only believe what the mom and this is unbelievable. (A1)*

*The authorities and Child welfare will make it very difficult for you even to see your own child. Like sometimes a woman can deny you seeing your own child (B2)*

Another important finding that emerged from the analysis was that in all the 5 families the native ex-wife proposed for the divorce because of what fathers perceived as small misunderstanding. Again, in all the 4 families who went through court and custody mediation, the native ex-wives got the custody right to the children.

#### 6.4 Gender inequality

The analysis also demonstrated that divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds' perceived gender inequality as a major factor that affect their relationships with the children after divorce. This perceived gender inequality was established through systemic discrimination, powerlessness, exclusion, and deprivation. The systemic racism/discrimination against divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds encompassed unequal resources to phone calls, booking appointments, access and right to children, respect for women agency decision, control, unequal support, maintenance payment and imbalance power distribution. Powerlessness involved in fathers' inability to participate in their children's lives and leisure time, inability to influence family decision, restricted visitation, and gender bias. Exclusion included fathers' exclusion from family and children, and attention to only women. The deprivation was mainly fathers' roles and responsibilities.

*I feel so bad that the social workers think they are supporting families, but I believe they are breaking families because they only stand on one side on the lady's side, on the women's side. They have to understand that we are all human beings. Whenever there is family issue they only stand on the women's side. (C3)*

*What happens to fathers especially to the foreigner in Finland is not 100% discrimination, but a lot of discrimination. They do everything but then they play nice, it is all about propaganda. I have been through a lot of discrimination. But this is not what happen in real, they are very good in propaganda. My point is not talking bad about Finland my point is change you really want to happen. This is from my experience. (A1)*

Fathers perceive the authorities do not understand their predicament and have no privy to the reality on the ground by focusing solely on the women without listening to the men. That the system discriminates against foreign fathers in the welfare system, disregard, and excluded the divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds.

*This country is pampering mothers a lot. They make it like so difficult for you (deep breadth). They are convincing the woman, my ex-wife not to give me the child to come and be with me, because I am a black! When we went to the beach, the woman told me what they have been telling her about me. So, it is not easy for we like foreigners to have a child. The Finnish authorities they do not know what we are going through, they do not know. Everything is about the women not about man. It is racism, which is the way I see it. Life especially, if you are like a foreigner passes through a lot of things, like when you separate with your wife (B2)*

## 6.5 Risky to health, well-being, and life

The analysis revealed that fathers with foreign backgrounds perceived infancy disconnection from their children poses substantial risk to their health, subjective well-being, and life (see Appendix 1 for detailed analysis). The health, wellbeing, and life risk were uncovered as a result of physical risks, emotional risks, social risks, and mental risks. The risky to emotional health and well-being were identified through sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and shame. Sadness included grief of child, nostalgic for child, dejection, sorrowful moments and unpeaceful moments. Anger comprised frustration, resentment, inattentiveness of the official and prejudices of the professional. Fear

involved concern about the future of their children, Shame consisted of guilt, remorse, humiliation, regret for being involved in the relationship, mockery from ex-wife's relatives, Surprise- unequal treatment, shock of ex-wife lies at courts and in front of the welfare official. This was illustrated in fathers' responses:

*I have been playing with my daughter when she was a baby. And suddenly They just use paper to-to-to (stammering) put the father away. This kind of, how do you say it eeh exclusion is a very bad feeling...It like, oh my God! Who I am now, everything I-everything- I am is, my life meaning is to be a father to my child, and they just took it away from you? (A1)*

*It has given me a lot of stress, it affects me mentally, physically, and emotionally (C3)*

One response that amplified fathers' emotional risk started with introspective analysis of life:

*from where I went wrong? when my daughter grows up how is she going to look at me? how is she going to be? because every child needs a father and a mother together to learn from both sides. So, it was like eeh so many things going on in my head. How to decide and how to deal with it... it is very stressful (B2).*

The analysis also revealed physical health risk through Hurts and pain, insomnia, loss of access and contact, and unemployment. Hurt and Pain comprised of crying every night, not eating, losing of weight, loss of leisure time with kids, and difficult moments, unequal treatment. Loss of access and contact include access to visitation, distance from children, alienated from children, loss of family ties. Unemployment was mainly related to loss of job and financial capital. Insomnia was inability to sleep at nights, restlessness at nights, and nostalgic for children. This was demonstrated in father responses:

*You know that you have a child that you can also play with them and you cannot see the child, is very painful and is very difficult...the person is like denying you of your own father's right, is very painful. So many things were changing, I quit my job because I could not concentrate yeah. (B2)*

*I was laid off from work because I had depression. I could not sleep, I was feeling alone, I was feeling against, and I was feeling attacked... It is very painful (C3)*

*I do not eat properly, and I am losing weight. They do not see what kind of trauma they are putting me through. They do not see the stress they are putting me through. They do not see the sleepless night they put me through (E5).*

The social health and wellbeing risk consisted of exclusion, restriction, and distrust. Exclusion was characterized by denied access and right, helplessness, and rejection. Denied access and rights were mostly about cutting off from child, denied visitation right and contact to children. Helplessness was from mediating process, inattentiveness, and unsupportive nature of welfare of. Rejection was found in fathers calls and appointment rejection by the mediating officers. Restriction was also seen in ex-wife's decisions to prevent fathers' access to children even under court decision. Distrust in the officials and in ex-wife. This was discovered in fathers' responses:

*I feel rejected... I can call the social office 100 times and they will not give me answer, but when the mother calls the next minute, she gets the answer. And brother believing me, the child belongs to both of us, we all share the same feelings, the same blood (C3).*

*I feel isolated from my little boy because I only see my boy on their time. If they decided for a whole month, a who year, if they do not want me to see him, I don't see him(E5)*

Mental health risk was identified from Stress, depression, loneliness, Trauma, disappointment, mental exhaustion, life threatening and loss of hope. Depression includes visiting therapy and hospital, taking depressive medication, and so on. Stress includes legal arrangement, thinking about situation and the child, crying every night, in role disruptions. Loneliness was recognized from missing their children, losing leisure time with children. Disappointment was seen in involving in the relationship, loss or role as father, loss of trust for partners and the system. Example of fathers' mental health responses were illuminated in:

*I was going to hospital for depression medications because I was having depression. I could not sleep. I was feeling alone. It has mentally distracted my focus. I almost had an accident. I almost crashed because I was thinking about how to handle the issue with my child. In this 5 year, is full of depression for me. I was laid off from work because I had depression...It was very bad. I could not feel like human because I was restless, (C3)*

*To tell you the truth, nobody knows what I am going through. Every night I cry, and that is not good for my heart. My heart cannot take it... I am not at peace. I am missing my child. It hurts me,*

*it hurts me every time. And you know why it hurts me so much? I did not do anything to these people. I am stressed up. I am not mentally healthy; I am losing my mind. Everything is bad. They do not see what kind of trauma they are putting me through. They do not see the stress they are putting me through. They do not see the sleepless night they are putting me through. They do not see. (E5)*

## 6.6 Social networking as coping mechanisms

Networking was emerged as the coping mechanism for fathers with foreign backgrounds. This was illustrated through friends' accommodation support when fathers were evicted from the house after the divorce, engagement in recreational activities, closeness to child, visiting hospitals, and relying of their religious beliefs. The results indicated that fathers were evicted from the house the very time the dissolution was pronounced, that remains a shocking news to fathers and they had to relied on their friend for shelter. The results also showed that fathers were using sporting activities to reduce the emotional stress, depression, and loneliness. This was represented in their responses:

*The moment I signed the divorce she asked me to get out from her house and find my own place, to get out of the house. I said ok if that is the case, I had to find a place. And then I moved to my friend's place and I was living there. (C3)*

Visiting hospital includes taken anti-depressants to reduce the depression, loneliness, mental distractions, and for psychological support from professionals as it showed in:

*but this thing has cause me a stress, a depression. I was going to hospital for depression medications because I was having depression. (C3)*

Fathers also relied on their religious beliefs about creation and God that good time will surface, for after all rise, there is a fall. Closeness to child was manifested in the frequency father engages with child. The closeness was revealed as the strongest source of fathers' coping mechanism. This makes fathers happy and reduces their emotional tension as was seen in:

*Bro, I do not know how I deal with it. Is just nature being, and higher power helping me. the higher power and my woman are helping me. if not that I would have loosed it already. I am telling you straight up and I would not care! I think I would have loosed it*

*already if not the higher power bro. if I see my boy for 6hrs in a month, I am lucky I am good. I am happy is like the most. (E5)*

*as long as I can have emotional eeh emotional relationship with my daughter (A1)*

### 6.7 Kela as a protective mechanism

One interesting outcome that emerged was Kela (the social insurance institute of Finland) as a defensive mechanism. Fathers perceive it is because of kela that is why people do not talk even if their problem is overwhelming them. That many people are going through incredibly difficult situations that affect their mental health and threaten their life. But since they have kele to support them they manage through. For example:

*And this is a big problem, and this will be a big problem soon. If Finland would not have kela, there will be so many drugs, assassinations, eeh! Robbery in this country because people will find out the way to get through to shown themselves but as long as they have kela, people is quiet. But I am not the kind of person who is gona be quiet. I will always tell them. The Finnish system is horrible about fathers.*

### 6.8 Limited knowledge of divorce, custody, and mediation norms

The results disclosed that fathers with foreign backgrounds have limited knowledge about divorce, custody, and mediation norms. These manifested in some references they made by fathers regarding the judicial process and right of access, and some legitimate process they perceived was deliberately against them, such as:

*Can you imagine that you are going to see your own child, and somebody come over there, stand over there and the person is checking on you how you play with your own son (B2).*

## 7 DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the exploration into Child-disconnection after divorce: the experiences and the subjective wellbeing of fathers with foreign backgrounds in Finland. Obtaining solutions to the research problem, the respondents responded to two main research questions of which the findings are discussed. Research questions were: 1. What kind of experiences do divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds have after being disconnected or away from their children? 2. How do fathers feel about their subjective well-being after child-disconnection? The results are discussed in relation to other previous studies and the divorce custody laws in the context of study and other new research to substantiate the results.

### 7.1 Fathers Post-divorce experiences

In this section, the respondents provided adequate answer to the first research questions and other ancillary questions which were related to fathers with foreign backgrounds experiences after being separated or away from their children. It discusses about father-child relationship disconnection and its consequence using previous literature on the subject. From the results children were deemed by fathers with foreign backgrounds as the most important aspect in the relationship. Fathers described their children as indissoluble, treasure, priceless, primary, most valuable, fathers' own blood, fathers' life current and own image, fathers' meaning and confidence in life. However, fathers perceived the relationship they had with children is somehow cutoff.

Fathers' pre-divorce attachment and involvement in their children's life and post-divorce nostalgia and struggle to be in touch with their children was consistent with the attachment theory. The theory provides critical background for understanding how people form close relationships as children and as adults. This is motivated by the individuals need for protective bond with the immediate caregiver, usually the mother, the child's internalized experience of this early relationship develops as a cognitive-emotional template that continues to inform expectations of future relationship. If this style of attachment is distorted, it leads to psychological disorder such as interpersonal stress, poorer coping skills, lower self-esteem and less social support that are

associated with the person's early life adversity. These do not only affect the person but impose threats on the family and children. (Paquette, 2004.)

Again, fathers perceived experiences of massive losses, including loss of roles and responsibilities, loss of leisure time with children, loss of visitation and contact, loss of custody and loss of father involvement with children. The experience of losses and role disruptions were demonstrated as risky to fathers' health, wellbeing, and life. This is similar to and reinforce recent cross-sectional survey of fathering after union dissolution by Maslauskaitė and Steinbach (2020). The study focused on non-resident fathers' involvement and the quality of the co-parenting relationship and wellbeing of fathers with minor children. It was revealed that quality relationship between fathers and their children was the most important contributing factor to parental well-being. As long as fathers' perceived quality relationship with their children, it increases the level of life satisfaction and decrease the level of depressive feelings.

Again, it was similar to the earlier study by Whitehead & Bala (2012), that most men grieve for the loss of children and family and psychologically struggle to differentiate their role as father from their role as a husband after separation. Fathers' loss of social support and loss of contact with their children was the key determinant forces to men's depression. It also highlights Westphal et al. (2014) that father involvement in childrearing is on the rise and they are most likely to remain in contact with children after divorce. Likewise, meta-analysis of nonresident father involvement and child well-being found that positive forms of involvement were associated with benefits for children and was mostly strongly associated with children's social well-being, emotional well-being, academic achievement, and behavioral adjustment (Adamsons & Johnson, 2015).

Once More, the significance of fathers' pre-dissolution role style and involvement in family life was related to Carmen (2010), that a father plays imperative roles in families and in his children's development and subsequent adult status and behaviors. These roles are often manifested in the amount of time father spend playing and interacting with their children. These critical roles are also exhibited as 'nurturer, mentor, disciplinarian, moral instructor, and skills coach, among other roles' can never be quantified in monetary terms. Nonetheless, fathers perceived there were challenged by gender inequality and systemic discrimination. This echoes Mykkänen et al. (2017)

reference, that “in Finland, fathers are perceived as creators of welfare problems in child welfare.” According to Vaestoliitto, in Finland mother and children are valued, whereas father is seen as the independence of the main family.

The surprising but critical results which perhaps need further insight were fathers’ perception of gender inequality and post-divorce disengagement from their children which was illustrated as early alienation. This appears to be different from the values identified by the extant scholarship about Finland as part of the Nordic countries with the tenet of shared parenting, and equality agenda embedded in the legislative instruments of family and child welfare. But it was consistent with the notion that the image is not the same in the spheres of gender, violence in intimate relationships, child custody and access. (Mykkänen et al., 2017; Pösö et al., 2014, 477; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2013; Eriksson et al., 2005.)

Additionally, it appears to contradict the current Act on child custody and right of access (352/2019) section 2 seems to bridge the gap between the custodial and the non-custodial parents. The Act is purported to ensure that a child has the right to establish and maintain a positive and close relationship with the non-custodial parent. The right of access includes the right of the child to visit this parent's home from time to time or to meet with the parent somewhere else or to keep in touch with him or her in some other manner. Both child’s parents shall contribute to the realization of the right of access. In his or her parenting task, a parent shall avoid any behavior that is likely to cause detriment to the relationship between the child and the other parent. But this purpose does not seem to resonate in the divorce fathers with foreign backgrounds perceived early alienation from their children.

The mothers winning all the all the child custody and residency in this study was consistent with recent statistical analysis of the disputes over custody and residency at district courts of Finland between 2004-2015. The study revealed that mothers were the frequent applicants for sole custody and won more disputes than fathers. The situation was different when father had a foreign background, it lowered their winning chances in a custody dispute. (Sobolev, 2020.)

The perceived fathers’ experiences of early alienation, payment of child support, and mother winning all the child custody were not different from the previous research by

Agllias (2015). It stresses that in many countries, most marriages end in divorce and higher percentage of them involve children. In most of these divorce issues, women become the dominant custody of the children and father are often granted visitation or rejected after divorce. Besides, fathers are made to pay child support obligations to their children, which often strain the relationship between divorce father and children. According to Umberson and Williams (1993), a larger number of noncustodial fathers progressively lose contact with their children after divorce. Kalmijn (2015) uncovered that most children with foreign backgrounds hardly see their father after divorce and have little contact with their fathers.

The perceived alienation by fathers was consolidated by Lilja (2018) study about maintenance and housing disputes in the district courts of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area 2004-2013. It revealed confirmed accusations by fathers with foreign backgrounds' allegations of alienation, mental health problems, and a previous court decision that reduced the fathers' likelihood of winning, as the main cause of the custody dispute. It also uncovered that fathers with foreign backgrounds hardly ever won the dispute, 'but in disputes between native Finns, mothers and fathers won the dispute just as often'. Lilja (2018.)

Studies highlight parental alienation as an imperative mental experience that professionals working with children, adolescents, divorced adult, and adult who experience parental divorce at the tender age should be aware with in depth understanding. What was different in the present perceived alienation is that it was largely caused by the prejudices and attitudes of professional working with families without any involvement of a child. In contrast, parental alienation usually arises from a child who allies convincingly with one parent and rejects a relationship with the other parent with no legitimate reason. This mostly leads to a tragic consequence for the child and the alienated parent who previously had cordial and mutual satisfying relationship but had lost these warmth and joy of the relationship (Bernet et al., 2010; Gardner, 2002).

The accusation of court and child custody mediating professionals' imbalance faced by fathers with foreign backgrounds was related to Bhugun (2019), that cross-cultural relationships continually meet statutory challenges and impediments. Coleman (2007) argues that the law plays a significant role in immigrant families because it describes maltreatment according to majoritarian norms. It implies that traditional parenting

practices that do not conform to or disagree with those norms are mostly labelled as ‘‘abusive’’ or ‘‘neglectful’’. The relationship that exists between parent and children within these immigrant families is consequently endangered by official intervention, disruption, and even termination depending on the circumstances (Coleman, 2007)

One opposing experience uncovered was creating quality environment before marital dissolution. It suggests alternative method for dealing with family issues, rather than resorting to judicial process for mediation during family crisis. Adopting court mediation was revealed as creating more damage to the already existing problem in the relationship. Rather, creating a quality environment in the family before dissolution was critical to post-divorce relationship with family, family progress and peaceful co-existence. This manifested as a result of fathers perceived unequal attention and distrust in professional working with family. In all the four families who went to court and for custody mediation, fathers lost custody to the native ex-wife.

## 7.2 Father-child disconnection and subjective well-being

This section answers the second research questions. The central issue was fathers feeling about their subjective well-being (SWB). Fathers evaluated their lives and emotional experiences (Diener et al., 2017), and the main theme that emerged was that father-child disconnection after divorce was risky to father’s health, well-being, and life (see Appendix 1). The causes of the perceived experience of risk were related to the impact child disconnection had on fathers’ emotional, physical, social, and mental health and well-being. Specifically, the risk emerged as a result of stress, depression, exclusion, loneliness, shame, sadness, and many others. These were consistent with the previous studies that negative indicators of emotional wellbeing which affect individuals’ health and well-being (Diener et al., 2017), and how fathers were satisfied with their life and how happy and fulfilled they felt (Sodermans et al., 2015).

The constituents of wellbeing are often debated as to what should be included. Fathers of foreign backgrounds have evaluated their life and how satisfied they were with the post-divorce custody and mediation arrangement for reflection. Very often, policy makers and governmental bodies tend to focus on a bigger picture and the mainstream economic features to enact laws and societal norms about people’s health and wellbeing. Study argues that we should rather place more emphases on quality of life in

societies that go beyond economic indicators and point towards guidelines that can enhance societal well-being around the world (Lilja, 2018).

One of the cardinal agenda of the Finnish government is to strengthen the structure of the welfare society in creating a caring and productive Finland. To ensure this, government is focus on poverty reduction, inequality and social exclusion as the main tenet which is in line with the purpose of present study. Health is considered as priceless, a human right and core component of individual's well-being and happiness. Quality health empowers people to become fulfilled and productive, study, work, care for others, attainment of goals, enjoy life and children to learn effectively. Individual's health is influenced by the social, physical, and economic context in which they reside. (Leppo et al., 2013)

Likewise, the revealed negative emotions agree with Cooper et al. (2018) stressing that negative emotions generate unpleasant, dangerous, or even life-threatening situations, and building positive emotions enable individuals to cope more effectively over time. Moreover, prolonged experience of negative emotions reduces psychological resource and make people prone to physical and psychological illness and stress.

Perhaps, the results caution us to be more circumspect and reflect deeper into fathers with foreign background perception of the risky nature of fathers' health, well-being, and life. It was revealed that fathers were not at peace, could not think straight, some taking anti-depressants to survive, and many more serious claims that focused on threat to life. Similar to a Psychologist Edwin Schneidman, founder of suicidology who describes suicidal behavior as the hurt, anguish or ache that inherently entangles individual's mind. It is also the pain of negative emotions, such as guilt, shame, anguish, fear, panic, anger, loneliness, helplessness, and so on. Individuals who go through these psychological pains reach a point where it becomes unbearable, and death is the only option to end 'the unceasing flow of intolerable consciousness'. (Hoff, 2014.)

The results also elaborated on fathers with foreign backgrounds' mental health and well-being risk. This agrees with previous research, that when fathers are separated from their children, they go through various issues like loss of role, anger, frustration, anxiety, and depression. They are likely to engage in risky health behaviors and exhibit poorer mental health score than those living with their children. Father and the

children are those who usually struggles to maintain meaningful relationships as the mother become the custodian of the children. (Umberson & Williams, 1993)

### 7.3 Social networking

The results indicated that fathers were evicted from the house the very day the divorce was pronounced. And fathers first contacts were friends who accommodated them for some time. With this, fathers described it as very helpful and without immediate intervention of their friends, they could not have imagined what would have happened to them. Reflecting on fathers' imagination of being cast outside from their perceived 'homes' was consistent with Hoff (2014), for individual to have a reasonably happy life involve being free from excessive stress, a balanced fulfilment of needs in privacy, intimacy, and community. When these social needs are seriously unavailable, "the result may be suicide by an isolated person who is lonely and feels rejected by others". Therefore, social networking is the best remedy to end the unending and hopeless situation of every individual or family experiencing chronic emotional and social crises (Hoff, 2014).

The significance of fathers' post-divorce social networking was in line with Hoff (2014) highlighting that meaningful networking of divorcees or family in crises reduces extreme isolation that led to a suicide attempt. It also helps them to develop quality relationship to replace the loss of one's partner, reestablish ties in the work world and resolve job conflicts. Again, it creates stability and a means of family support, and avoids individual saying "no one is helping me". In Canada, study by Whitehead and Bala (2012) indicates that loss of social support and loss of contact with their children was the key determinant forces to men's depression. And most men grieve for the loss of children and family and psychologically struggle to differentiate their role as father from their role as a husband after separation.

A study identifies that social support is beneficial to individuals and assists physical and mental health. Human beings are social species who frequently and practically depend on others in whatever we do. Our social behavior is rooted within both biological and our cultural systems. Through reproduction, we are bonded together as families and by the culture we function through diverse group processes within and between families. Supportive environment connects human beings, and their engagement

in altruistic helping manners makes them feel competent and rewarded. This Social support and psychological processes exert a potential effect on individuals, promote well-being, physical and mental health. It also, reduces uncertainty and stress and make human beings feel safe, respected, self-valued, enjoy greater autonomy in mastering their own life, optimize their potential, improve their weaknesses, and effectively support the society. (Lam, 2019.)

Social support assists people in a various way. It assists people to safeguard stress and enhance coping performance in a distressing condition, for people to feel a bit relieved. Again, it helps in individual's relational context. Individuals experience a sense of meaning, self, and identity through interaction with others and this determines how people contribute to their environment. Low support creates anxiety. Individuals' gain from close and weak ties in their social networks lead to greater control of the condition and useful outcomes in different kind of events. Again, good quality experiences in different relationships influences an individual's life experience positively. Lastly, is about the motive of supporting people. For example, being empathetic concern about other, reducing support givers' own distress and feelings of competence through giving support to others. (Lam, 2019.)

New knowledges that were uncovered for reflection, discussion, and insight include: the divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds had limited understanding about the norms governing divorce, custody, and mediation process, and Kela (Social Insurance Institute of Finland) was revealed as a protective mechanism for families in crisis. The perception was that it is *“because of kela support that is why people are keeping calm”*. And without Kela support there will be diverse *‘form of drugs, assassination, and robbery in Finland’* as alleged by a father. This was consistent with the previous study by Flouri (2005) that the absence of a partner and fathers' mental health problems is associated with welfare dependency.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focuses on how the research questions have addressed the purpose, the framework, the methods, and the analysis of the study. It provides a summary of the whole study and outlines the key findings, the limitations, and recommendations.

### 8.1 Implication of the results

The study explored father-child disconnection after divorce: the experiences and the subjective wellbeing of 5 fathers with foreign backgrounds in Finland. The qualitative study used inductive content analysis approach to analyze the respondents' data. Two research question were utilized with the main focus on divorced fathers' experiences, fathers' perception about fatherhood role, feelings about their subjective well-being, and means of dealing with the negative emotions if any.

The effects of early disconnection of divorced father with foreign backgrounds from their children after divorce has been uncovered as risky to fathers' health, well-being, and life (see Appendix 1). It also revealed that divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds had strong relationship with their children and they are the most valuable in their lives. The divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds perceived that their relationship with children, role as a father, leisure time with children, and visitation rights have been disrespected and somewhat truncated. Yet they continually pay alimony to their children they cannot see. They attributed the cause of the loss and its consequences to early alienation, gender imbalance, ex-wives' manipulation, and prejudices of some professional appointed for divorce and child custody mediation. They perceived the professional are inattentive to their views. The social networking was revealed as the coping mechanism for divorced fathers. I do not by any means generalize the results, rather I described the main themes and what can be learned from the study.

This result correlate with Braver et al. (1993) citing Levinger (1979) exchange theory, that in circumstances like divorce, the divorced father evaluates the anticipated cost and perceived reward of the relationship with the child whether to continue or terminate it. This to a larger extent depends on the level of involvement with the child in relation to the frequency and quality of the visiting relationship and the level of the

fulfilment of the child support obligation. Additionally, if the divorced father decides to terminate the relationship with the child, it also implies that the family now must depend on the state for social support which in turn put stress on the government budget. (Braver et al., 1993.)

## 8.2 Professional development and limitations

It has been more than a year journey of reflection and discussion with the thesis supervisors, working life partner and in depth reviewing about the extant scholarships concerning divorced fathers in general, and specifically about divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds. The subject of this thesis emanated during my internship with Toiminnan Avulla Työelämään- TAT the working life partner. Frankly, I was not interested in the topic from the beginning because I had an ambition to do something new for the society. However, my imagination about the substance of the topic proved wrong, as I developed so much interest in the topic after reviewing the literature. I found out that research that focus on divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds' experiences and subjective well-being was hard to find in Finland and in other parts of the world. The question bounced on me at the beginning was that how I will research into this topic as foreigner myself and remaining neutral as an upcoming social worker?

During this thesis, I was strengthened and guided by my earlier qualitative research and the social work values I had learned from social service courses. My job now was to focus on a practice-based research that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. The tenet of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity and addressing life challenges and enhancing well-being of people were central in my reflection and working with divorced fathers with foreign backgrounds (IFSW, 2016).

My reflections became more apparent mirroring on my own values, weaknesses, presumptions, and the results uncovered in this study about the professionals working with families. I must mention that my support also came from the thesis supervisors' comments and motivation, working life partners' reviews and most especially from my respondents whose willingness and trust reposed in me to participate and share their personal experiences. I would like to express my apology to the participants for

the mood and discomfort I stimulated in them while sharing their stories with tears during the interview. To remain neutral was partly the choice of the analytical method used, which enforces researchers to represent the outcomes as they emerged systematically from the data analysis with less prejudices (Kyngäs, 2019). Doing this study, I realized that ethical obligations could create a barriers and dilemma for the researcher. Challenging by an encounter, considering your personal values, and being under ethical obligation of maintaining confidentiality to protect the dignity and safety of the human subject makes a qualitative research a difficult task.

In my reflection on the social work professionals' roles with Higham (2006), I realized that they are challenged with a complex dilemma of combining several roles of balancing empowerment and emancipation with protection and support which are not easily resolved. There is no specific choice that deems best. Visualizing the numerous and shifting needs of the service users or clients make the social worker's roles more dynamic and that aggravates the existing dilemmas. Social worker is also challenged by personal values, assumptions, and beliefs with organizational and judicial supervision tension and expectations. They work with multi-professionals, but the end result is blamed on them. The work is simply not easy.

Undoubtedly, some limitations were identified in this study. The results uncovered some negative perception about the professionals working with families and not any of them were part of the interviewees. For fair judgement of the results, it would be prudent to hear the views of the professionals working with families about the fathers' perception. In view of that the results cannot be generalized to all the professional working with families in Finland. After all, a father mentioned that he had consolation from a professional who cares so much but was duty bound and could not help.

*the social worker was crying and told us that as long as that is what she (ex-wife) is saying she cannot, she has to listen to what the mum is saying, but she is not going to put her signature on this case after seen our record. She does not want to be the one to sign this because she knows that I am also a human being and I have the heart. The father is a human being, and he also has a heart. That was the only time that I felt that someone was on my side.*

Again, because of the small sampling size of the respondents' I cannot also generalized the results to all divorcees in Finland. Once more, the selection of the participants was

done by the working life partner which might have some effects on the results. Nevertheless, the relevance of the results cannot be easily undervalued, especially where extant scholarships support the outcomes.

### 8.3 Recommendations

Indeed, further deductive content analysis might be needed to compare the emerged results in different context to determine if they exist. The study recommends further insight into the post-divorce experiences of fathers with foreign backgrounds. Previous research emphasized, that the most important reason for thoughtfully considering the experience of fathers in divorce is not only to support fathers, but to advance the welfare of children. It is therefore crucial to recognize the impediments and struggles men go through in their effort to remain engaged and to appreciate why so many men relinquish their responsibilities to children after divorce (Thompson, 1994).

Miessakit ry (2019) found that activities that support immigrants with a focus on men have been very scarce in Finland's training and developmental projects. This study adds to the existing cry for divorce parent's engagement in a meaningful way. Perhaps, it would be helpful for the working life partner (Toiminnan Avulla Työelämään-TAT) to organized peer support group sessions for divorcees with foreign backgrounds to alleviate any negative ramifications of health, well-being, and life-threatening event.

The consequences of divorced father's absence from the family are catastrophic and substantially affect the entire family, especially the innocent child who has no privy to parental differences. Perhaps, it be necessary that professionals working with families, focus on supporting positive relationship between couples. And also, to help children to maintain a positive relationship with both parents after divorce as described in the new Act on Child Custody and Right of Access (361/1983; amendments up to 352/2019 included). I end with a concern raised by divorce fathers for change and further investigation into the custody issues before pronouncing judgement.

*They do not care about who is close to the child in the family. I believe that they should come and check who is closest to the child because there are more families, the children are closer to their dad than their mum. These are the thing they do not put attention to, they just think because she is the mum let us give the right to the mum. (E5)*

## REFERENCES

- Act on Child Custody & Right of Access (361/1983; amendments up to 352/2019 included). *Translation from finish legally binding only in Finnish and Swedish ministry of justice, Finland*. <http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaanokset/1983/en19830361.pdf>
- Adamsons, K., & Johnson, S. K. (2013). An updated and expanded meta-analysis of nonresident fathering and child well-being. *Journal of Family Psychology: JFP: Journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43)*, 27(4), 589-599. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033786>
- Agllias, K. (2015). Difference, choice, punishment: Parental beliefs and understandings about adult child estrangement. *Australian Social Work*, 68(1), 115-129. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2014.927897>
- Bernet, W., Boch-Galhau, W. V., Baker, A. J. L. & Morrison, S. L. (2010). Parental alienation, DSM-V, and ICD-11. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 38(2), 76-187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180903586583>
- Bhugun, D. (2019). *Intercultural parenting and relationships: challenges and rewards*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14060-1>
- Braver, S. L., Wolchik, S. A., Sandler, I. N., & Sheets, V. L. (1993). A longitudinal study of noncustodial parents: Parents without children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7(1), 9-23. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0893-3200.7.1.9>
- Carmen, D. F. (2010). Fatherhood Initiatives: Connecting father to their Children. In C. H. Leyton (Ed.) *Fatherhood: Roles, responsibilities, and rewards*. Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?docID=3019726>
- Coleman, D. L. (2007). The role of the law in relationships within immigrant families: Traditional parenting practices in conflict with American concepts of maltreatment. In J. E. Lansford, K. Deater-Deckard, & M. H. Bornstein (Eds.), *Immigrant families in contemporary society* (pp. 287-303). ProQuest Ebook Central <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>

- Cooper, C., Robertson, I. & Johnson, S. (2018). *WELL-BEING: Productivity & happiness at work*. (Second edition. ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62548-5>
- Diener, E., Heintzelman, S. J., Kushlev, K., Tay, L., Wirtz, D., Lutes, L. D., & Oishi, S. (2017). Findings All Psychologists Should Know from the New Science on Subjective Well-Being. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 58(2), 87-104. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000063>
- Drisko, J. W. & Maschi, T. (2016). *Content analysis*. Pocket Guides to Social Work R.
- Flouri, E. (2005). *Fathering and child outcomes* (1. Aufl. Ed.). GB: Wiley. [http://ebooks.ciando.com/book/index.cfm/bok\\_id/493570](http://ebooks.ciando.com/book/index.cfm/bok_id/493570)
- Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication* (Vol. 18). New York University Press.
- Gardner, R. A. (2002): Parental Alienation Syndrome vs. Parental Alienation: Which Diagnosis Should Evaluators Use in Child-Custody Disputes? *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(2), 93-115.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/019261802753573821>
- Greif, G. L. (1997). *Out of Touch: When Parents and Children Lose Contact After Divorce*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Higham, P. (2006). *Social work: Introducing professional practice*. SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781446212356>
- Hoff, L. A. (2014). *Crisis: How to help yourself and others in distress or danger*. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>
- International Federation of Social Workers (2016). The role of social work in social protection systems: The universal right to social protection. IFSW.  
<https://www.ifsw.org/the-role-of-social-work-in-social-protection-systems-the-universal-right-to-social-protection/>
- InfoFinland (2019). Family. <https://www.infofinland.fi/en/living-in-finland/family/divorce/children-in-a-divorce>
- Jalovaara, M. (2007). *The effects of marriage partners' socioeconomic positions on the risk of divorce in Finland*. (Finnish yearbook of population research XLIII 2007 supplement). Helsinki: The Population Research Institute, Helsinki, Finland. In collaboration with The Finnish Demographic

- Society. (Dissertation, University of Helsinki). <https://journal.fi/fypr/article/view/45286>
- Kalmijn, M. (2015). Father-Child Relations after Divorce in Four European Countries: Patterns and Determinants. *Comparative Population Studies*, 40(3), 251-276. <https://doi.org/10.12765/CPoS-2015-10>
- Kaslow, F. W. (2013). *Divorced fathers and their families* (1. Aufl. Ed.). Springer-Verlag.
- Kela. Kela benefits. <https://www.kela.fi/web/en/operations-kela-benefits>
- Kruk, E. (1994). The disengaged noncustodial father: Implications for social work practice with the divorced family. *Social Work*, 39 (1), 15-25. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=9403302572&site=ehost-live>
- Kushner, M. A. (2006). Is ‘‘Best Interests’’ a Solution to Filling Potholes in Child Custody Planning? *Journal of Child Custody*, 3(2), 71-90 [https://doi.org/10.1300/J190v03n02\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J190v03n02_04)
- Kyngäs, H. (2019). Qualitative Research and Content Analysis. In H. Kyngäs, K. Mikkonen, & M. Kääriäinen (Eds.), *The application of content analysis in nursing science research* Cham: Springer. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?docID=5969468>
- Lainiala, L. & Säävälä, M. (2014). Jalovaara, M. (2007). The effects of marriage partners' socioeconomic positions on the risk of divorce in Finland. *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research*. Väestöliitto Väestöntutkimuslaitos / The Population Research Institute, Helsinki, & Finland. <https://refworks.proquest.com/library/read/doc:5e29b94ee4b0a74b5f7c42f1/>
- Lam, B. (2019). *Social support, well-being, and teacher development*. Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3577-8>
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. Guilford Publications. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?docID=4832778>
- Leppo, K., Ollila, E., Peña, S., Wismar, M. & Cook, S. (2013). *Health in All Policies - Seizing opportunities, implementing policies*. <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/69920>

- Leyton, C. H. (2011). *Fatherhood: Roles, responsibilities, and rewards*. Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?Docid=3019726>
- Lilja, E. (2018). Huolto- ja asumisriidat pääkaupunkiseudun käräjäoikeuksissa 2004-2013. Helsingin yliopisto.
- Mannonen, P. & Weller, M. (11.11.2014). Men's Exclusion is a gender equality issues. Valtioneuvosto. [https://valtioneuvosto.fi/artikkeli/-/asset\\_publisher/1271139/men-s-exclusion-is-a-gender-equality-issue?\\_101\\_INSTANCE\\_YZfcyWxQB2Me\\_languageId=en\\_US](https://valtioneuvosto.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/1271139/men-s-exclusion-is-a-gender-equality-issue?_101_INSTANCE_YZfcyWxQB2Me_languageId=en_US)
- Marriage Act (234/1929; amendments up to 1226/2001 included) <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaanokset/haku/?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bkieli%5D%5B%5D=en&search%5Bpika%5D=Marriage+Act&submit=Search>
- Maslauskaitte, A. & Steinbach, A. (2020). Parental psychological well-being after union dissolution: Does involved fatherhood have a protective effect? In M. Kreyenfeld & H. Trappe (Eds.), *Parental Life Courses after Separation and Divorce in Europe* (pp.215-234). <https://www.doa-books.org/doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=46202>
- Metsä-Simola, N., Martikainen, P., & Monden, C. W. (2018). Psychiatric morbidity and subsequent divorce: a couple-level register-based study in Finland. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 53(8), 823–831. <https://doi-org.anna.diak.fi/10.1007/s00127-018-1521-2>
- Miessakit ry (2019). Daddy's room chart published! | Dad-like project. <https://www.miessakit.fi/2019/11/07/isatyon-huoneentaulu-julkaisu-isan-nakoinen-hanke/>
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2013). Child and family policy in Finland: Brochures 9eng. <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/69916>
- Mykkänen, J., Eerola, P., Forsberg, H., & Autonen-Vaaraniemi, L. (2017). Fathers' narratives to support and agency: A case study of fathers in a Finnish child welfare NGO. *Nordic Social Work Research*, 7(3), 236-248. [Doi:10.1080/2156857X.2017.1356350](https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2017.1356350)
- Obholzer, A. (2002). Foreword. In A. Etchegoyen & J. Trowell (Eds.), *The Importance of Fathers: A Psychoanalytic Re-evaluation* (1st ed.), Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203013946>

- Paquette, D. (2004). Theorizing the father–child relationship: Mechanisms and developmental outcomes. *Human Development*, 47, 193–219.  
<http://doi.org/10.1159/000078723>
- Pösö, T., Skivenes, M., & Hestbæk, A. (2014). Child protection systems within the Danish, Finnish, and Norwegian welfare states-time for a child centric approach? *European Journal of Social Work*, 17 (4), 475-490.  
Doi:10.1080/13691457.2013.829802
- Quah, E. L. S. (2018). Emotional reflexivity and emotion work in transnational divorce biographies. *Elsevier Ltd.* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.09.001>
- Saracho, O. N. (2013). Mexican-American father-child literacy interaction. In J. Pattnaik (Ed.), *Father involvement in young children's lives*. Dordrecht: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-5155-2 [http://www.fachportal-paedagogik.de/fis\\_bildung/suche/fis\\_set.html?Fid=1012178](http://www.fachportal-paedagogik.de/fis_bildung/suche/fis_set.html?Fid=1012178)
- Silverman, D. (2017). *Doing qualitative research*. SAGE Publication Ltd.
- Sobolev, A. (2020). Disputes over custody and residency at district courts of Finland 2004–2015. Helsingfors universitet.
- Sodermans, A.K., Botterman, S., Havermans, N. & Matthijs, K. (2015). Involved fathers, liberated mothers? Joint physical custody and the subjective well-being of divorced parents. *Social Indicators Research*, 122(1), 257-277.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0676-9>
- Sullivan, R. (2003). *Focus on fathering*. Camberwell: Australian Council for Educational Research. [https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/\[SITE\\_ID\]/detail.action?docID=242663](https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/[SITE_ID]/detail.action?docID=242663)
- Tapola-Haapala, M., Karvinen-Niinikoski, S. & Kääriäinen, A. (2012). Parental divorce and children in Finland. In A. Kääriäinen, J. Hämäläinen & P. Pölkki (Ed.) *Challenges of divorce, intervention, and children*. Helsinki: Kirjoittajat ja Ensi- ja turvakotien liitto ry.
- Thompson, R. A. (1994). The Role of the Father after Divorce. *The Future of Children*, 4(1), 210-235. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602485>
- Toiminnan Avulla Työelämään (December 13, 2020). Y-Care TAT (Toiminnan Avulla Työelämään)- Empowering diversity.  
<https://www.hnmky.fi/toiminnan-avulla-tyoelamaan>
- Umberson, D. & Williams, C. (1993). Divorced fathers: Parental role strain and psychological distress. *Journal of Family Issues*, 14 (3), 378-400.

<https://refworks.proquest.com/library/read/doc:5efe7cd2e4b06fe557e78436/>

Vaestoliitto. <https://www.vaestoliitto.fi/>

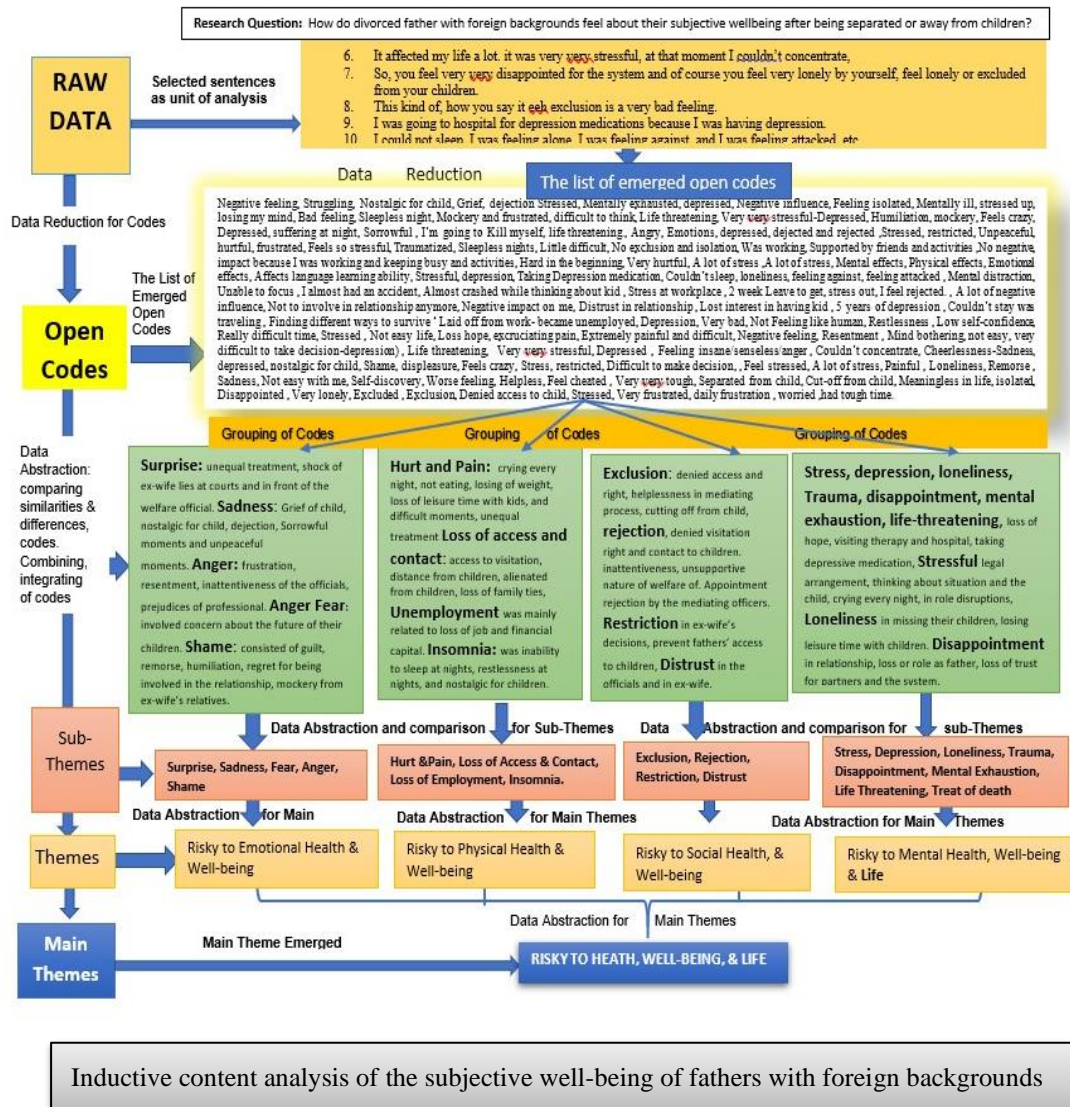
Westphal, S. K., Poortman, A. R., & van der Lippe, T. (2014). Non-resident Father-Child Contact across Divorce Cohorts: The Role of Father Involvement during Marriage, *European Sociological Review*, 30(4), 444-456.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcu050>

Whitehead, D. L. & Bala, N. (2012). The Short End of the Stick? Fatherhood in the Wake of Separation and Divorce. In J. Ball & K. Daly (Eds.), *Father involvement in Canada: Diversity, renewal, and transformation*. Vancouver: UBC Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/diak/detail.action?docID=3412825>

Zhu, H. (2016). *Research methods in intercultural communication* (First edition ed.). Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119166283>

APPENDIX 1. Inductive content analysis of fathers' subjective well-being



## APPENDIX 2. The analysis of father-child relationship

SENTENCES AS THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS	Grouping Compare and contrast codes or comparing similarities and differences between codes to form sub-themes/ sub-concepts/ sub-categories (choose one e.g., themes and be consistent)	SUB-THEMES	THEMES	MAIN THEMES
<p>1. We have so many things in common, but now that he is separated from me.</p> <p>2. Emotions were like, they took my child from me. I was like puuu! who I am, what am I gonna do now.</p> <p>3. So, for now the action they have taken is to stop me from seeing my child because whenever I am alone, I always think about the kid.</p> <p>4. we played so much, we had so much fun together and suddenly she is more with her mom.</p> <p><b>(Few sentences for security reasons)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotion bond</li> <li>• Infancy close relationship with children</li> <li>• Inseparable nature of relationship</li> </ul>	Intimate bond	Father attachment	Father-child Relationship
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value father placed on children.</li> <li>• Child as treasure</li> <li>• Child is priceless.</li> <li>• Child is Valuable.</li> <li>• Child is Father's own blood.</li> <li>• Child is Father's life current.</li> <li>• Child is Fathers' image</li> </ul>	Father's personality		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eagerness to be in child's life.</li> <li>• Want to train child against the future.</li> </ul>	Protection		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Supporting schools:</b> Taken child to and from school extracurricular activities, language school and dancing school.</li> <li>• <b>Home tasks:</b> changing diapers, feeding kids, caring for kids at night, cooking.</li> <li>• <b>Payment of child support:</b> monthly payment</li> </ul>	Childcare	Father Involvement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Hobby:</b> playing time, sporting activities, taking child to playing ground</li> <li>• <b>Extracurricular activities:</b> reading stories, language classes, dancing school.</li> <li>• <b>Having fun with child:</b> everyday life with child</li> </ul>	Leisure time with child		
	<p><b>Father's influences and supervision:</b> building confidence, training child, building trust, ensuring child to love parents, ensuring togetherness, look up for child's future, ensuring freedom, they do not fight, monitoring, ensuring respect, tutoring wrong and right, nurturing, giving advice, spending time together, caretaker, creating good environment...</p>	Parenting role style		
<p><b>Custody and divorce arrangement:</b> Seen in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ loss of leisure time,</li> <li>▪ loss of access,</li> <li>▪ loss of fatherhood,</li> <li>▪ loss of identity,</li> <li>▪ loss of contact.</li> </ul> <p><b>Official's attitudes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disrespecting father's views-</li> <li>▪ Inattentiveness</li> <li>▪ Uncaring attitude</li> <li>▪ Undermining father's values,</li> <li>▪ Unequal attitude-biases in decision making, unidirectional focus.</li> <li>▪ Disbelieve in fathers,</li> <li>▪ Distrust in father and</li> <li>▪ Father disappointment in Ex-wife's attitude in court</li> </ul>	Role disruption after divorce			



### APPENDIX 3. Consent form

Dear participant,

I am a student in the Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, pursuing a bachelor's degree programme in Social services. I am currently doing my internship with TAT. I am writing my bachelor's thesis in collaboration with TAT and the topic is '*Father-Child Disconnection After Divorce: The Experiences and well-being of Fathers with Foreign backgrounds*'. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and the well-being of fathers with foreign backgrounds after being disconnected or away from children. It focuses on your experiences, how you feel about your role as a father, how you feel about your well-being and how you deal with negative situations if any. In this interview as explained already to you by TAT, all responses will be confidential, and the data will be judiciously camouflaged to protect your real identity. The interview will be audiotaped if you want me to do so. However, you have every right and freedom to opt out or participate. All participants will be offered the opportunity to read and comment on the draft of their opinions shared if you want before it is published. Thank you.

DATE: .....

STUDENT: Godfred Gyimah

THESIS SUPERVISORS: 1. Marianne Nylund  
2. Margarita Sakilayan-Latvala

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE: .....

## APPENDIX 4. Interview questions

## Background

Before we start, could you please fill/tick the appropriate group.

1. How long did your relationship last before the divorce?.....

2 How many children do you have with your ex-wife.....

How old was your child? .....

3 Age group (x) below 20..... 20-29.....30-39.....40 and above.....

4 Which of the following Y-care TAT activities have ever participated? (x)

Finnish language discussion group.....Online peer support group meeting.... Sports for men..... Face to face individual guidance..... Football session.....

Volleyball session..... IG Mental health and well-being..... Coffee club (zoom).....

None of the above .....Basketball session..... Family out (beach party) .....

1 What kind of experiences do divorce fathers with foreign background have after being disconnected or away from their children?

- Mr.... after your divorce, I guess you are no longer living with your children. Could you please share with me what kind of experiences you have about being disconnected or away from your children?
- How often do you see your children? Isolate?
- Can you describe the state of feelings you and your children had before separated?
- How do you feel as a father about being separated or away from your children?
- Could you please describe how you feel about your role as a father after being separated from your children?
- How important is/are the child/children to you?

2 How do fathers feel about their subjective well-being?

- Do you think being separated from your children has had any kind of negative influence on you?
- Have you had any moment of stress or depression for being away from you children?
- Do you feel lonely or rejected or isolated or excluded from your children?
- How do you feel about your general well-being after separated from your children?
- What has been your biggest challenge times after being away from children?
- I am interested to know how you are dealing with or coping or managing with being away from your children?
- What advice do you have for parents with children who are planning for divorce?

## APPENDIX 5. Backgrounds of the respondents

Fathers	Father's Age	Custody status in court	No. of Children at divorce	Age of children at Divorce (Years)	Relationship Duration	No. of Different TAT activities participated
Participant	40 and above	Loss	1	2	5	4
Participant	30-39	Loss	1	2	4	6
Participant	30-39	Loss	1	1.5	4	8
Participant	30-39	No court	2	1.5, & 6	7	2
Participant	30-39	Loss	1	1.5	2	2