

# CHANGES AND CHALLENGES OF PARENTHOOD AFTER DIVORCE

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## ABSTRACT

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The aim of the study was to find out how parenthood changed after a divorce. Moreover, the kind of challenges the divorce brought to the parenthood. Special attention was given to two aspects: how shared parenthood had worked and what kind of support interviewees had received for parenthood after the divorce.

The study was carried out as qualitative research and the data was collected by semi-structured, theme interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analysed based on thematic content.

The interviews were carried out in autumn 2009. The interviewees were divorced mothers and fathers from Southern Finland. The data presents experiences and opinions of four interviewees, who had different joint custody arrangements.

According to the results of the research the main changes in parenthood after divorce were: parenthood was shared in a way where parents implemented their parenthood separately; relationship with children changed because parents did not see their children daily; and parents had responsibility as the only adult in the household. In addition, the main challenges that parents had faced were: getting the cooperative parenthood to work, maintaining the close relationship with children, dealing with the overwhelming responsibility, learning new ways to cope and take care of their own wellbeing and finding sufficient support. The research also revealed that parents hoped for more support in parenthood after divorce.

Keywords: parenthood, divorce, joint custody, qualitative research, semi-structured interview

# CONTENTS

## ABSTRACT

1 INTRODUCTION .....	5
2 FINNISH FAMILIES .....	6
2.1 History of families.....	6
2.2 Families at present.....	7
2.3 Marriage and cohabitation.....	9
2.4 Divorce.....	10
3 PARENTHOOD.....	13
3.1 Parenthood – one great joy?.....	13
3.2 Support for families and parenthood in Finland .....	15
3.3 Child custody and right of access.....	17
3.3.1 Agreement or court order.....	19
3.4 Joint custody .....	20
3.5 Sole custody .....	21
4 PREVIOUS STUDIES.....	21
5 PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH.....	23
5.1 Research questions and aim of the research.....	23
5.2 Research methods.....	24
5.3 Gathering and analysing the data.....	25
5.4 Ethics, validity and limitations.....	27
6 CHANGES AND CHALLENGES .....	28
6.1 Cooperation and decision-making.....	29
6.2 Changes.....	31

6.2.1 Relationship with children .....	31
6.2.2 Responsibility.....	33
6.3 Wellbeing and coping .....	34
7 DISCUSSION .....	38
8 CONCLUSIONS.....	43
8.1 Main results.....	43
8.2 Self-help groups supporting divorced parents .....	44
8.3 Professional development .....	45
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDICES .....	51

Appendix 1: Background form of the interviewees

Appendix 2: Interview form

Appendix 3: Interviewees

## 1 INTRODUCTION

At present, divorce is very common and it affects everyone one way or another. In most cases there are children involved in it and therefore shared parenthood after divorce is more common. (Hokkanen 2005, 9.) Working with families requires understanding the diversity of families. This is the reason I feel it is important to study this topic and phenomenon.

Almost half of the marriages end up in divorce. Every year 30 000 Finnish children have to go through their parents' divorce. Finland is at the head of Europe's divorce statistics but there is plenty of room for improvement in divorce services of public sector. (Central Union for Child Welfare.) Divorce causes changes in parents' and children's lives. The situation after divorce is challenging for parents and they must find a way how the custody of children is going to be shared. According to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child has a right for both of his / her parents.

During my studies in Diaconia University of Applied Sciences my main interest in the field of social work has been families and children, and I hope to work with these groups in the future. Working with families requires understanding the diverse nature of families.

Social work with children and families rarely involves working with one individual. It will involve working with families that are complex, diverse and constantly changing. The family may consist of one or more parents or carers. (O'Loughlin 2008, 15.)

The aim of the research was to understand what are the changes and challenges in parenthood after divorce. Therefore, the research has concentrated on parents, their experiences and opinions of situation after divorce.

## 2 FINNISH FAMILIES

The concept of a family can be defined in several different ways and can have different meanings to different people. Often the family is defined to consist of parents and children. However, a single parent with children is regarded as a family as well. Family is an institution with a changing nature (Kautto 2002, 64).

Whether as an institution, a social network, or a system, the family has played a fundamental role as a provider of support and wellbeing, mainly in the education and care of children and elderly members (Freitas, Frisenhahn, Frost & Michailidis 2005, 18).

### 2.1 History of families

In Finland the dominating idea of a family is a nuclear family that consists of parents and children. However, this has not always been the case. According to Ollikainen, (2003) before The Second World War most of the families were extended families, which consisted of parents with several children, grandparents and other relatives as well. At that time most of the people were living in the countryside and made their living off farming. (Ollikainen 2003.)

After the Second World War there were many changes in society. Population was growing, more people were starting to move to the cities and family sizes were decreasing. Moreover, the number of single-parent families grew and the number of families where both parents worked increased. Most children were taken to day care or they went to school and grandparents went to live in elderly care homes. (Ollikainen 2003.) According to Kontturi all this led to a situation where “home was no longer the key element that tied a family together” (cited in Ollikainen 2003).

Since the 1960s the connection between family and relatives has weakened. However, it is usual that people have close relations with their parents and grandparents. (Yleisradio.)

According to Ollikainen (2003) in the 1980s the number of single parents grew significantly. It was one of the reasons why divorce became more acceptable. Furthermore, in the 1990s cohabitation became more common, especially among young people. (Ollikainen 2003.)

## 2.2 Families at present

As mentioned earlier, the history of Finnish family has had many changes during 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to O'Loughlin (2008) at present families are diverse:

Additionally, it may consist of parents who share the same race, class, culture, religion and sexuality or alternatively it may consist of parents or carers who have different race, class, culture, religion and sexuality. There may be one or more children in the family, some of whom may share the race, religion and sexuality of their parents and some that do not. To add the complexity people constantly enter and leave families. (O'Loughlin 2008, 5)

According to Karisto, Takala and Haapola (1988) there have been major changes in Finnish family life. Moreover, there has been a discussion of whether or not the family institution is in a crisis. There are several reasons that have been counted as factors of a crisis: decreasing number of marriages, diminishing number of children in the families, divorces becoming more common and the rise in cohabitation rates. In addition, a strong increase in the number of single-parent families and elderly people living alone are also concerns about the present state of families. (Cited in Kontturi 2003.) In the Table 1: Families 2008, the diversity of the families can be seen.

Nowadays, families are founded on relationships that are based on feelings. If the relationship is not working the family breaks up or it just changes its form. Jallinoja (2000) states that defining "a family" has become more difficult. There are several reasons that have made defining a family more challenging: relationships dissolve more often and people establish new relationships. In a divorce it is usual for one of the parents to move out from the family home. (Hokkanen 2005, 17.) Therefore, after divorce the form of the families change.

According to Karisto, Takala and Haapola (1988) family life in Finland has changed to emphasise freedom and the rights of an individual. Emphasising the rights of an individual may give a “feeling of freedom” to adults but it does not take into account the children’s rights. (Cited in Kontturi 1999, 24-25.)

TABLE 1: Families 2008

	All families	With children aged 0-17	With children aged 0-6	Persons per family
Total families	1 444 386	585 224	280 383	2,8
Change 2007/2008, %	0,5	-0,4	0,6	
Family type				
- Married couple without children	504 728	-	-	2,0
- Cohabiting couple without children	191 177	-	-	2,0
- Married couple with children	452 180	360 904	175 453	4,0
- Cohabiting couple with children	115 966	107 034	65 992	3,7
- Mother with children	149 631	101 717	36 398	2,5
- Father with children	29 460	15 382	2 404	2,3
- Registered male couple 1)	579	4	1	2,0
- Registered female couple 1)	665	183	135	2,4
1) Incl registered partnerships with children				

Statistics Finland, Demographic statistics.



### 2.3 Marriage and cohabitation

Marriage is an institution that has its own meaning for every person. Marriage is also a form of a relationship that is regulated by legislation. The couple must marry according to Marriage Act (1929/234) in order to have access to benefits, support and protection which are regulated by Marriage Act. (Väestöliitto).

As an institution marriage has its history, but as time passes, its nature has changed. Kautto (2002) mentions that “getting married and having a child is no longer strongly correlated”. Furthermore, there are many external threats for marriage.

Economic, social, and psychological pressures are listed among the external threats to the institutions of marriage and the family (Hogan 1993, 34).

According to Statistics Finland in 2008 about 31 014 marriages were registered in Finland, which is 1517 more than in 2007. However, at present the number of marriages registered has yearly varied rather strongly. In 2008, the number of registered same-sex partnership was 249. According to Huhtanen (2009) in 2007 14.4 per cent of marriages registered in Helsinki were between a Finnish citizen and a foreigner.

Cohabitation is a situation where a couple is living together without the commitment of marriage. Cohabitation is not regulated by legislation in the same way as marriage.

Jalovaara (2007) claims that cohabitation can also be a long-term alternative to marriage. It does not necessarily lead to marriage or separation. Over the last few decades, cohabitation has become increasingly common, especially among young people in Finland. Similarly, as cohabitation as a form of union has increased, the proportion of children born outside of marriage has risen steeply since 1970s. At present the amount of births outside of marriage is about 40 per cent of all children. (Mäenpää 2009, 63-64.)

## 2.4 Divorce

In the past, marriage was for life. The sentence "till death do us part" had a true meaning for those couples that were committed to staying together "for better and for worse". People did not get divorced easily. Furthermore, the role of men was to be the breadwinners and the role of women was to be the nurturers of the family. When women started working and getting higher education, they became more independent. The balance between husband and wife changed when, for example, women started bringing their share to the family income.

At present, the situation is different. Legislation was changed in 1987 and getting a divorce has been made easier for both sides. Thus, if a relationship is not working well, people have the option to put an end to the marital state. Since the change in Marriage Act, it has been possible to get a divorce after half a year reconsideration period. Alternatively, divorce can be granted if the couple has lived separately for the past two years without interruption. (Marriage Act 234/1929.)

The process of ending a relationship is a long process. It is impossible to point out a single reason why the relationship possibly ends in divorce. There are various factors that contribute to a divorce.

Divorce has no single cause. Many factors contribute to divorce, including societal changes, economic conditions, ethnic and community characteristics, and individual and relationship qualities – and these factors are interlinked. Societal changes have reduced legal, moral, and social restrictions against divorce. (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano 2006, 50.)

Marriage between a Finnish citizen and a foreigner ends up in divorce three times more likely than if both were Finnish. Divorces have been attributed to for example marrying too soon after getting to know each other, different values or cultural differences. However, multicultural marriages face many challenges such as bureaucracy, pressure, prejudice and attitudes from the environment. (Huhtanen 2009.)

As mentioned earlier major changes were made in the Marriage Act in 1987, which made it easier to get a divorce and the impact of the Act could be seen soon after that.

Kautto (2002) states that “marriage and divorce statistics are very closely tied to legislation changes”.

During the same period (1980-1995), divorces became more common. After a significant leap in the early 1970s, divorce rates continued to increase in Finland. (Kautto 2002.)

The reality is that a great number of marriages end up in divorce and this has become accepted by society.

It is not only marriages that are ending. People are also separating from cohabitation relationships (without marriage). Divorce is not an easy decision to make; it is a long process that needs to be considered carefully. Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991) emphasise that contrary to prevailing thought, making the decision to divorce does not happen easily, especially if the couple have children. (Hokkanen 2005, 22.)

Divorce means an enormous change in life. According to Tolkki-Nikkonen (1985) divorce can be considered as a crisis situation that can change life for better. Pohjola (1999) states that as a result divorce has become an option for many people for changing their life situation. (Cited in Hokkanen 2000, 21.) Divorce does not only provide a positive change. Alternatively, it can also be a change to an inferior life situation.

Families should be supported during the time of marriage in parenthood and relationship issues. It is natural for a family to have problems but in order to reduce the number of marriages ending in divorce, support is needed.

Family conciliation and reconciliation are obviously important. It also seems very clear that we should seek to prevent people arriving at the situation of wishing to divorce not by making the process more difficult or painful but by doing all we can to support marriage and partnership. (Bernardes 1997, 189.)

If parents can deal with the divorce and parenthood after it in constructive way, it may have positive effects on children as well. Galambos and Ehrenberg (1997) discuss that divorced parents who are able to have a relationship of co-operative parenting do not

only protect their children from the possible negative effects of changes in the family, but can also provide models for children of how conflicts can be solved and relationships negotiated again (cited in Hokkanen 2005, 47).

### 3 PARENTHOOD

#### 3.1 Parenthood – one great joy?

Parenthood is a lifelong role and commitment. The parents themselves, childhood and environment shape the role of being the parent. Parenthood arises from parent-child interaction. (Central Union for Child Welfare.) Being a parent may be rewarding and joyful but also has many challenges.

In modern society parenthood is a choice. Furthermore, having children can be seen as a carefully considered project. (Hokkanen 2005.) The transition to parenthood is a life-changing event. In addition, the life of the couple is not the same anymore after the baby is born.

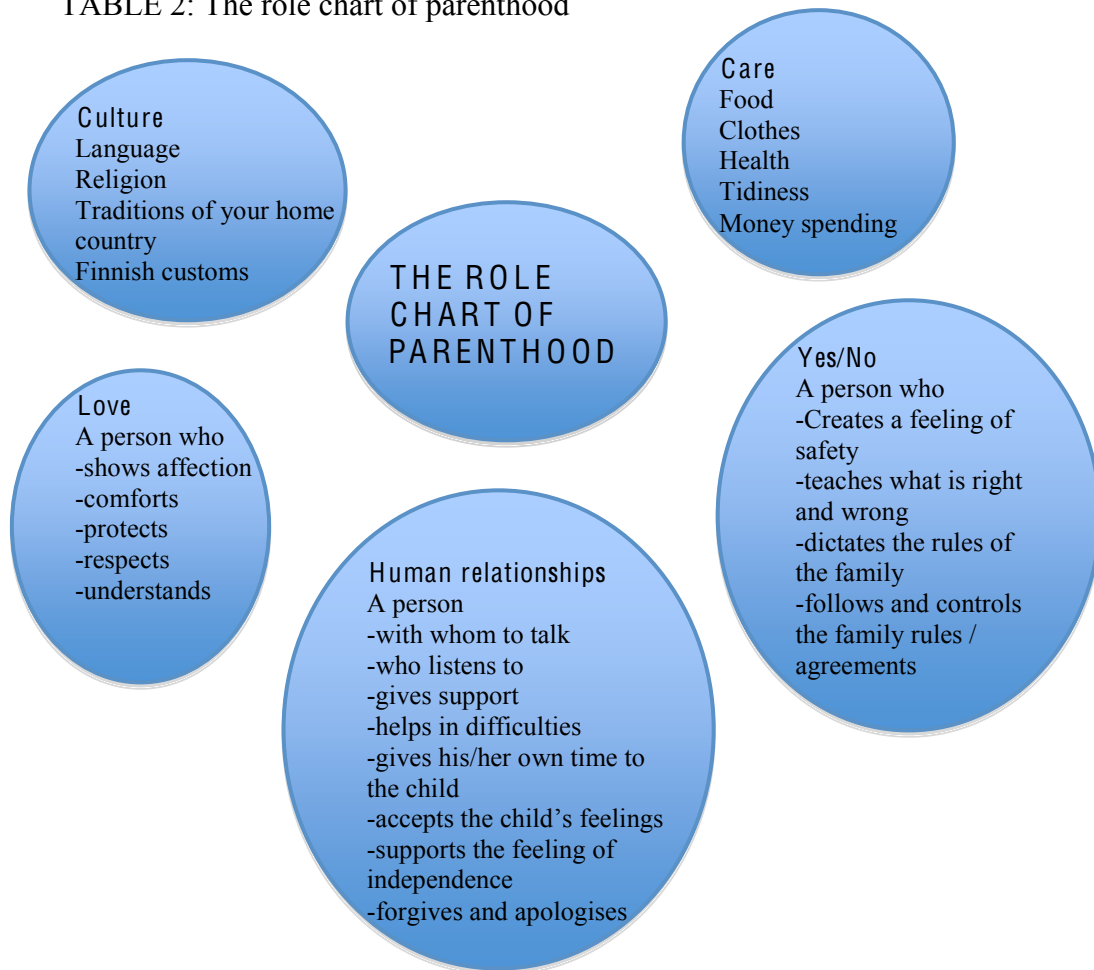
Becoming a parent for the first time involves reorganising perceived roles and relationships for mothers, fathers, and the couple as a unit (Brooks-Gunn & Sidle Fuligni 2002, 83).

The transition does not solely contain positive changes. Parents should remember that it involves both: negative and positive changes.

Parenthood is not a feature or role and not in itself a group of tasks, which an adult gets and takes responsibility of as becoming a parent. Ultimately parenthood neither is adult's right or obligation. First and foremost, parenthood is relationship between child and adult. (Tamminen 2004, 67.)

Parenthood can be examined through the role chart of parenthood. The role chart of parenthood (Table 2) was developed by personnel of Varsinais-Suomen Lastensuojelukuntayhtymä [Child Protection Federation of Municipalities in Southwest Finland]. In the role chart, the elements of parenthood have been divided in five different roles (Rautiainen 2001.)

TABLE 2: The role chart of parenthood



(Adopted from Rautiainen 2001, 118)

The role chart of parenthood helps parents to examine the roles of being a parent. In addition, the role chart of parenthood is a tool used by professionals who are working with families. When working with parents, the role chart of parenthood can be used to discuss the roles of parenthood. The role chart of parenthood is not further discussed in the research. However, this chapter provides the basic idea of the role chart and gives more information regarding parenthood.

According to Emery (1994) an essential part of parenthood is the relationship between parents. If the relationship between the couple, the parents, ends up in divorce, it is important to remember that parents do not get divorced of their children. Therefore, the connection between the parents remains. Children are the bridge between the parents. (Cited in Hokkanen 2005, 10.) Even though the parents get divorced, the relationship

between parents and children cannot be broken. In other words, parents do not lose their entitlement to be the mother or the father for the child.

According to UN Convention on The Rights of the Child Article 18, both parents have equal responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. In the relationship the parental responsibility is shared in a way that may not be so perceptible. The role comes naturally and people do not think about it.

After divorce the nature of parenthood changes. Either one becomes a single parent or both parents share the care of children. In most cases children spend part of the time with the mother and part of the time with the father. The changing parenthood is a major challenge for parents. Parents face a new situation, one they have not experienced before. It can be said that parents have to adapt to a new form of parenthood.

### 3.2 Support for families and parenthood in Finland

Support from family and friends is important for everyone, especially in difficult situations like a divorce. Nevertheless, the support from family and friends is not always available or it is not enough. Therefore, different types of support services exist in order to support parents and families.

Maternity clinics and child health clinics provide support for families. The aim of the child health clinics is to recognise the problems families are having and to arrange help for them. “The clinics carry out multi-professional collaboration with other professionals working with families.” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.)

Mannerheim League for Child Welfare produces diverse services for families, for example family cafes, home help and telephone counselling. There are over 400 family cafes all over Finland. Every family with children is welcome to visit them. Family cafes provide support for parents, information about different matters and offer the chance to participate in activities. (Mannerheim League for Child Welfare.)

Furthermore, Mannerheim League for Child Welfare provides home help in the form of short-term child-care services. Telephone counselling provides parents with empathy, assistance and advice. Telephone counselling gives a confidential opportunity to discuss with another adult. (Mannerheim League for Child Welfare.)

The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters provides many different types of services for families. One form of service is occasional childcare service for single parents. The service enables the parents to have some time alone, while the child is cared for in a place where there are stimulating activities and other children of the same age. These childcare services are available in 10 cities in Finland. The service is normally available in the evenings and Saturdays and they charge a small fee for the service. (The Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters.)

In addition, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland provides a consultation centre for family matters. The function of the centre is to help and support at the times when there are difficulties in a relationship or family life. Moreover, the aim of the consultation centre for family matters is to help solve the questions related to relationships, families and individuals. Clients can participate as a couple, family or alone. The consultation is free of charge. Majority of the people visit the centre when they have questions of divorce. (The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.)

Family conciliation is one form of family counselling. In the beginning of 1988, Marriage Act was changed and it had an addition of a decree regarding family conciliation. Family conciliation is a social service available for everyone and free of charge (Pettilä & Yli-Marttila 1999, 8). After divorce, the family conciliation's role is to help families to recover from the divorce, to monitor the children's situation and to solve any problems of contracts dealing with children's matters. This form of counselling consists of personal conversations and consultation with a social worker or psychologist. All or just some of the family members can take part in the sessions. The aim of the conversation method is to find a neutral solution for the problem, one that is approved by all family members. The main objective of the family conciliation is to secure children's position and benefits if parents decide to divorce. (Ministry of Justice.)



Self-help groups are a form of support that can be used in difficult life situations in order to get help and support. Moreover, in the self-help group a person who joins the group has a chance to share and at the same time support other people.

Self-help groups are an organized form of support taking place outside the informal networks with people who share a similar concern or a life situation. In these groups, members are both helpers and helpees. (Nylund 2000, 35.)

On one hand, a person joins a self-help group to receive support for her/himself, in other words she/he will gain something from joining the group. On the other hand, the person is willing to share personal experiences with others, which means that the person is also giving something for the group. (Nylund 2000, 37.) There are self-help groups for people who are going through a divorce or are coping with a divorce. The self-help groups for the divorced are organised by for example, churches, and Eroperheiden tukikeskus Neuvo [Support Centre for Divorced Parents]. In addition, Miessakit Ry [The Miessakit Association] organises self-help divorce groups for men.

Moreover, there are an increasing number of multicultural marriages in Finland. According to Niemi and Heikkilä the multicultural relationships need support from society. At present, supporting and arranging self-help groups for the multicultural couples is in the responsibility of third sector. (Cited in Huhtanen 2009.)

### 3.3 Child custody and right of access

Mason (1994) claims that sharing the care of children after divorce is a relatively new idea and that today the custody arrangements are based on the best interest of the child.

A century or so ago, children were “father’s property” after divorce given men’s capacity as breadwinners. The pendulum then shifted from a paternal to a maternal presumption because of mothers’ primary role as nurterers; and then to “the best interests of the child” imperative which

typically maintained mothers as primary carers. (Cited in Smyth & Weston 2004.)

Maccoby, Depner and Mnookin (1990) state that according to the common idea it is beneficial for the child to interconnect constantly with both of his/her parents. In western countries, the principle mentioned above is supported by the Act regarding child custody and the practices dealing with it. (Cited in Hokkanen 2005, 23.) In Finland, the Child Custody and Right of Access Act (361/1983) defines the objectives of the child custody and right of access, and how these issues should be carried into effect.

The Child Custody and Right of Access Act sets a joint custody as a principal rule. According to the Act, the custodians of the child are jointly responsible for the duties and making joint decisions related to the child. If the parents of the child are married at the time of birth of the child, they are both custodians of the child. If the parents are not married at the time of the birth of the child, the mother gets the custody of the child. (The Child Custody and Right of Access 361/1983.)

There are different custody arrangements that can take place after parents' divorce: either a joint custody or the mother / father being entrusted with the sole care of the child. The most common arrangement is a joint custody.

Social Welfare Boards confirmed a total of 35 241 custody agreements in 2008. Of the agreements, 93 per cent concerned joint custody. The mother alone was entrusted with the care of the child in 6 per cent and the father alone in 1 per cent of cases. (National Institute for Health and Welfare.)

Dual residence refers to a situation in which the child is living an equal amount of time in each parent's home. "Dual residence is arranged with an extended agreement on right of access". Agreements on dual residence in 2008 were made for 591 children in 87 municipalities. (National Institute for Health and Welfare.)

Legislation sets joint custody of a child as the main objective, therefore any deviation has to be well justified. The Act emphasises that when decisions concerning a child's custody and right of access are made, the child's interest and opinions have to be taken into account. However, the decision should also take into account how the custody and

right of access can best be put into practice. (Child Custody and Right of Access 361/1983.)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Finland has also ratified, emphasises the child's right for both parents. In other words, the child has the right to stay in touch with and meet both parents. Divorce and being separated from the child does not release the parents from responsibility. Moreover, divorce does not give the right to attempt to separate the other parent from the child and from the duties as a parent. (Central Union for Child Welfare.) As mentioned earlier, parents do not lose their entitlement to be a mother or a father for the child. This point is taken into consideration also in the legislation:

The objective of the right of access is to ensure a child the right to maintain contact and meet with the parent with whom he no longer resides (Child Custody and Right of Access Act 361/1983).

### 3.3.1 Agreement or court order

When parents decide to divorce they have a chance to agree on custody and right of access issues. In practise it means that parents have to think whether they will have a joint or sole custody of the child, how they arrange the child's residence and how the child will meet and stay in touch with the non-resident parent. If the parents reach an agreement the social welfare board of the municipality has to confirm it. When the social welfare board has confirmed the agreement, it will be valid and enforceable similarly to a final court decision. (Central Union for Child welfare.)

Parents cannot make an agreement on the child's custody if the confirmation of the paternity has not been made. This is a problem that may occur when the parents of the child have not been married. To ensure the continuing relationship between the father and the child, it is important to take care of the confirmation of the paternity. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

If the parents cannot reach an agreement or the social welfare board does not approve it, the court will make a ruling on the custody and the child's residence. Additionally, the

wishes of the child are taken into account. Furthermore, the court may order that the child shall have the right to maintain contact and meet with the non-resident parent, and when necessary, the court may issue instructions on the duties, rights and obligations of the custodians. (Child Custody and Right of Access Act 361/1983.) On a disputed matter the court is not bound to the demands and solution options of the parents. Instead, the decision has to be made solely on the base of what is the best interest of the child. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

### 3.4 Joint custody

As mentioned earlier, the main objective of the legislation is a joint custody of the child. Despite the legislation promoting joint custody, the right of access is not tied to the custody form. The child, whose parents have joint custody, can be residing with the parents in turns or constantly with one parent. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

Parents who have joint custody share responsibility of the childcare, upbringing and maintenance. Both parents have the same possibilities and responsibilities on deciding on the child's matters, and the right to get information from the authorities regarding the child. When parents have a joint custody they make important decisions together, such as choosing the school and matters related to health care. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

Officially, the child can be registered to live in one place only, but in practice the child can have dual residence. Traditional practice on residence is that the child lives mainly with one parent and meets the other parent at appointed weekends, weekdays and longer periods on holidays. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

According to Sinkkonen, joint custody has become more common since parents know more about their rights and are aware of their significance to children's lives. Joint custody in itself does not improve or degrade the situation of the children. Everything depends on how the parents succeed in sharing the responsibility and making the decisions together. (Sinkkonen 1998, 230.)

### 3.5 Sole custody

Sole custody suits a situation where one of the biological parents does not have a relationship with the child and is not interested in creating one. There may also be several serious reasons for a parent not being capable of taking care of the child, for example mental illness or alcohol abuse. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

Before dissolution of the joint custody agreement, help can be found from family mediation. Often families try to cope on their own and do not seek help even when it is available. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

As mentioned earlier, the right of access is not tied to the custody form. Even when one parent has sole custody, the non-resident parent can have extensive rights to meet the child. Meeting the non-resident parent regularly is in the best interest of the child. (Central Union for Child Welfare.)

## 4 PREVIOUS STUDIES

This chapter discusses the previous studies related to the topic of the research. It points out the main aims and findings of two different studies by Kääriäinen (2008) and Hokkanen (2005). Moreover, this chapter includes description of the characteristics of co-parenting according to Central Union for Child Welfare's Neuvo-project.

Kääriäinen (2008) in her research, *Ero haastaa vanhemmuuden* [Divorce presents a challenge to parenthood], interviewed parents who had divorced. The research is part of Central Union for Child Welfare's Neuvo-project which deals with post-divorce parenthood. The goal of the project is to enhance the situation of the child and to reduce the losses experienced by the child as his / her parents divorce. The objective of the project is to develop services and approaches that support parenthood and mutual conciliation and cooperation between parents. (Eroperheiden tukikeskus Neuvo.) The research, conducted by Kääriäinen (2008) was based on parents' experiences and its aim

was to find out what parenthood is in divorce and after divorce, or what the changes in parenthood are after a divorce.

Mykkänen-Hänninen and Paajanen (2007) point out the characteristics of co-parenting according to Central Union for Child Welfare's Neuvo-project:

- a working mutual relationship on the child's matters
- maintaining a positive image of the child's other parent
- taking into consideration the child's viewpoint
- ability to protect the child from the conflicts between parents
- flexibility in conflicting situations

Hokkanen (2005) investigated in her research *Äitinä ja isänä eron jälkeen* [Being mother and father after divorce] how divorced mothers and fathers with joint custody experience their parenthood in a life situation where the children are at times present, at times absent.

The main findings of Hokkanen's research showed that many results were context-bound.

Time and place affected for example the experiences of closeness and remoteness in parent-child relationships. Parenting in your own time and place brought trust into spotlight between parents. The results showed that a mother's relationship to the father is mediated by the children and a father's relationship to the mother is sometimes mediated by money, the economic result of the divorce or the amount of child support. (Hokkanen 2005, 5.)

## 5 PROCESS OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the process of the research. Firstly, the chapter describes what the aim of the research was, and provides the research questions as well. Secondly, the chapter presents the methods used in conducting the research and how the data was gathered and analysed. In addition, the chapter gives information on how ethics, validity and limitations have influenced the research.

### 5.1 Research questions and aim of the research

The aim of the research was to study the experiences and opinions of the divorced parents interviewed. The purpose was to find out what the changes in parenthood after divorce are and what kind of challenges it brings. In addition, the research demonstrated how the parenthood worked in cooperation with the former partner and how the relationship with the former partner affects the interviewees' own parenthood. Furthermore, one goal was to know how parents have coped and if they have needed support to parenthood after divorce.

To examine these questions, I formulated my research questions as follows:

How has parenthood changed after the divorce?

What kind of challenges have there been in parenthood after the divorce?

How has the cooperation between parents worked after the divorce?

Have parents needed support in post-divorce parenthood?

## 5.2 Research methods

I chose to conduct the research with qualitative methods. A starting point for qualitative research is describing real life (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 157). My research topic, Changes and challenges of parenthood after divorce, required using qualitative method since I needed to hear parents' experiences and opinions.

Qualitative interviewing is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 51).

The reasons why I chose to use interview as a method were as follows: I knew beforehand that the topic of the research will give answers that are complex and many-sided; I wanted to have a chance to clarify the answers given; and I wanted to provide the interviewees with an opportunity to freely bring out issues. These were also mentioned as reasons listed by Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2007) to use interview as a method.

According to Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoaarkisto [The Finnish Social Science Data Archive] semi-structured interview progresses in a way that the same or almost the same questions are asked from the interviewees. However, the order of the questions can vary. Semi-structured interviews can be called as theme interviews. For example, specific questions about certain themes are asked from the interviewees, but not necessarily exactly the same questions are used. (Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoaarkisto.)

In the research, interviews were conducted as semi-structured, theme interviews. In the beginning of the interviews I gave an information form to the interviewees to fill (Appendix 1). I formed themes that I wanted to go through with interviewees. In addition, I had made some specific questions which I asked from all the interviewees. The semi-structured interview allowed, if something was unclear or needed to specified, to ask clarifying questions during the interview.

According to Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2007) in theme interviews it is typical that themes are known beforehand but the exact form and order of questions is still missing.



Qualitative interviewing requires intense listening, a respect for and curiosity about what people say, and a systematic effort to really hear and understand what people tell you (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 17).

### 5.3 Gathering and analysing the data

The data was collected in autumn 2009. Interviewees were altogether four divorced mothers and fathers from Southern Finland. As far as sexual minorities are concerned, I did not interview any same-sex parents. The reason for this was the difficulty of reaching same-sex parents for the interview.

The interviewees had altogether eight children, ranging from one to three per an interviewee. The interviewees had been married or had had cohabitation with the child's other parent. There were different custody and visitation arrangements. One interviewee met the child every other weekend, one was the resident-parent but every other weekend the children went to the non-resident parent - visitation varying from three until five days at a time - and two of the interviewees' had children with dual residence.

Criteria for the interviewees were that the interviewees had been divorced for more than six months and they had children who were underage, meaning less than 18 years old. In addition to these criteria, I decided that I would not interview both parties of former couples. The information was gathered from four different cases. My criteria for the interviewees and knowing that all people are different in personalities and experience would provide variation in the data.

I made a table of the interviewees (Appendix 3) according to the information from the forms (Appendix 1). The table of interviewees provides information regarding the interviewees' age, years of marriage or cohabitation, residence of children, and number of children and their ages.

I decided not to interview the former partners of the interviewees because of the sensitive nature of the research. I wanted to create an atmosphere where the interviewee was able to speak and express oneself freely, and did not have to think what the former partner had said about him/her. Furthermore, I wanted to encourage the interviewees to

talk about their experiences and thoughts of their own situation. Finally, I wanted to know what the challenges in parenthood were when the situation had changed from sharing it with the partner, to dealing with parenthood separately but in cooperation with the former partner.

A place for the interviews was chosen by the interviewees. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, I wanted to make the interview situation as comfortable as possible for the interviewees. I interviewed each person in one session and individually.

Gathering the data was implemented by semi-structured interviews, theme interviews. The interview form had three main themes: 1. shared parenthood, 2. changes in parenthood after divorce and 3. own wellbeing and coping. In addition, the interview had an important question of how the parents would describe “good parenthood after divorce” (Appendix 2).

Before concluding the interview I asked the interviewees “What kind of experience this interview was for you”. Some of the interviewees said that the interview was a “nice experience” for them. In addition, they had not even thought about some issues before that came up in the interview. Moreover, they wanted to bring their experiences to the research. Lastly, some of the interviewees said that talking about the divorce and issues related to divorce was helpful for them when they got to unload their feelings of this experience.

After conducting each interview I transcribed the interviews word to word from the interview recordings.

The interview is an evolving face-to-face conversation between two persons; in a transcription, the conversational interaction between two physically present persons becomes abstracted and fixed in a written form (Kvale & Brinkman 2009, 177-178).

When all the data was transcribed I read through the interviews several times. In the next phase I organized the data in themes by choosing themes that continuously came up in the interviews. In order to clarify whose opinions are expressed in the text, I referred to the interviewees as I1, I2, I3 and I4.

#### 5.4 Ethics, validity and limitations

A starting point for a research has to be respect for human dignity. Respect for a person's self-determination is achieved by letting people decide whether they want to participate in the research. The interviewees should be informed of the progress of the research. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 25.) Therefore, participating in a research should be voluntary and people should have a chance to refuse to take part in it. After expressing their willingness for the interviews, a few people cancelled and did not want to take part in the research anymore.

In the research, before starting the interviews I informed the interviewees of the topic of the research, asked their permission for recording the interviews and ensured them that the information gained in the interviews will be kept confidential. The interviewees were informed that in the research, they will appear anonymously and it will be impossible to identify them.

The report demonstrates the process of the thesis thoroughly. The results of the research are presented accurately and interviewees' expressions are written carefully.

The topic, Changes and challenges of parenthood after divorce, is current and important. The aim of the research was to understand how parenthood changes after divorce. The topic of the research is sensitive. The research shows personal opinions and experiences of the interviewees.

Strength of semi-structured interview is its high validity. In semi-structured interviews people are able to talk about the theme in detail and depth and the meanings behind an action may be revealed as the interviewee is able to speak for themselves with little direction from the interviewer. (Sociological Research Skills.)

Due to the small sample size of the research, generalisations cannot be made but the research shows the experiences and opinions of four separate cases.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted in Finnish and parts of them needed to be translated into English for the purposes of the research. Thus, “direct quotes” from the interviewees are not in interviewees’ own words.

## 6 CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

This chapter introduces the themes and the main results that came up in the research. The three main themes at the focus of the research are:

1. Cooperation and decision-making
2. Changes
3. Wellbeing and Coping

The interviewees used different concepts when describing their former partner, the father or mother of common children. Some of the parents used the terms former partner, ex-husband/wife, mother/father of the child or called them with their first names. In addition, some of the parents used the concept the other parent, which emphasised that the relationship between the parents no longer exists, but despite of divorce the former partner continued to be child’s parent.

It is important to point out a clarification of the terms used in this result chapter. A concept “the former partner” refers to a person with whom the interviewees have been married or cohabitating, and had children with. A concept “the other parent” refers to the interviewee’s former partner, who shares the custody of children together with the interviewee. It is important to recognise that the research points out that some of the interviewees wanted to talk about the former partner primarily as the child’s parent rather than the former partner.

## 6.1 Cooperation and decision-making

In the research, cooperation with the former partner came up as an important aspect of post-divorce relationship between parents. It was not simple to start co-parenting after a divorce. New rules of parenting had to be made when parenthood was shared after a divorce in order to have a working relationship. It could have a positive impact on post divorce parenthood. The nature of cooperation influenced the parenthood to a fair degree. If the relationship was working, former partners could have a good relationship and they were able to co-operate, it could support and ease the parenting after divorce.

...we can talk and share the lives of our children in such a nice atmosphere, so I cannot see any ill effects for the children, or our parenthood. We are able to support each other's parenthood and, at the same time, the everyday life of reconstituted families...(I2.)

As the example above points out, shared parenthood after a divorce can work. An interviewee told how they did not have any problems with the former partner with anything. "We are in better terms now than when we were married" (I2). According to the interviewee the reasons for good cooperation and good relationship were that right after divorce they wrote everything on paper, made a legal document related to children's affairs, and therefore "the rules of the game" were clear for both.

The lack of cooperation made implementing parenting more difficult and was an additional burden in some cases.

I cannot implement my own parenthood in a way that I would want to, because I am trying to fix things also as a father, things that father does (I3).

... there was a hope that divorce parenthood could work very well, we could and should be flexible with things, but there is no flexibility.(I3)

It was discussed in the interviews, if the relationship with the former partner influenced parenthood positively or negatively. There were a few different opinions about it.

Well, positively, just now for example this first born started school, It was such a major event in both of our (parents) lives that we shared it together (I2).

Well, positively in a way that we both agree on things, on our children's matters and well we can talk about everything. For example we have this thing where... that if you have a problem, which we have not had much, we always talk about the problem at our place and I talk about it to child's father, he participates in solving it and is not in a way like "it is your problem" (I4).

I feel that maybe it affects negatively, in a way that I have been more tense and nervous, because this parenthood is not the kind of parenthood that I would want (I3).

Both cooperation and shared parental responsibility were seen to benefit both the parents and the children's lives.

The responses of the interviewees varied when the joint decisions were discussed. There were discussions on what the important matters of the children are that the parents should decide together. A few of the interviewees were unhappy about the decision-making situation because it was not shared equally with the child's other parent.

Such things do not exist anymore. I am not told about those things. I do not, there are no common decisions, only her decisions. (I1)

Above is an example given by an interviewee. The interviewee (I1) was not content with the situation of decision-making. The interviewee felt that he could not make a difference in the child matters. The child's other parent had made all the decisions because "the child comes to your house every other weekend and that is it"(I1). The interviewee pointed out, as an example of his role, that he was not informed about the child meeting with a psychologist.

One interviewee pointed out an example in which the former partner did not want to participate in decision-making on affairs related to children. The interviewee stressed the fact that none of the children's affairs were decided together anymore. Everything worked in a way where she decided everything and let the former partner know about the decisions and asked for his opinion, even though she did not get an answer with any frequency.

...I always have to make those decisions and decisions, I always let him know and ask if it is fine. I ask his opinion, but he does not give an answer... (I3)

Some of the interviewees had close cooperative relationships with their former partners where decisions were made together on what were considered “important and relevant” matters related to the child.

Actually we decide everything together. So, like, not all small things, all the hobbies and such. Now, especially, autumn is the kind of time where everything starts so we call to each other... what could be done... suitable for both. Both can contribute and so on... (I4)

If the parents did not agree on the upbringing issues, it had a negative impact on parenthood. Common rules were seen as important part of “good parenthood after divorce”. If the parents had different rules for children it caused problems for some families.

...we have different rules. That’s the biggest problem.(I3)

Well, at least in upbringing we have aimed somewhat in the same direction, but that has been ruined from the mother’s side also (I1).

## 6.2 Changes

According to the interviewees the parenthood changed after the divorce. The main changes in parenthood after the divorce were described to be: sharing the parenthood with the former partner, relationship with children and overwhelming responsibility.

### 6.2.1 Relationship with children

Relationship with children was described as having changed after the divorce. In some cases immediately after the divorce both parents and children reacted strongly to the changed family situation.

...my relationship with my children, like, first was very very close and they latched onto me and so on. (I3)

...every other week when children came, I tried to be a mother 110 per cent, I was bustling and hustling.... And broadly speaking I did not have any other life in those weeks when they were there... (I2)

Moreover, the parents emphasised that in general the relationship with children had changed because the divorce, quite naturally, caused a situation in which the parent does not see his/her children on a daily basis. The interviewees had to get used to different systems in which the children's custody was shared between them and the child's other parent regularly. This was a completely new situation for the parents and children, with its own challenges.

...I would say that the relationship necessarily becomes more distant if you do not see your children every day. I felt there has been a break away from children or the children have broken away from me. (I2)

It (relationship with child) necessarily changed in that I don't see him that much and when he grows up with his mother, that is not necessarily the best thing in the world (I1)

One of the interviewees pointed out that after divorce it was impossible to have as close a relationship with the children as before. Thus, the relationship was more distant in comparison to the time of marriage (I2). The interviewee felt that she had to "let go" of the children because the children were having dual residence.

Furthermore, one of the interviewees brought up the theme of motherhood. The interviewee was describing how in her case, there were three different stages of changes. In the first stage she felt guilt. She felt that she had failed as a mother in that she was not able to keep the nuclear family together, and that therefore her children would never do well in this life. Moreover, she had doubts about how she could cope alone with two children. The second stage was described as excessive motherhood on those weeks when the children were with her. She spent all the time with children keeping them close and doing everything for the children. The third stage was the feeling of having total responsibility. According to the interviewee, during the marriage the responsibility was shared with her partner in everyday life, but after the divorce she had to face it alone. Later, she understood that it was part of the process that took half a year to go through.



...my motherhood does not disappear anywhere; it is maybe the change that you have to think about on those weeks when the children are not here. (I2)

The interviewee I2 pointed out that it was important to share and emphasise for the children that the parents do not change after divorce: their mother is the same mother and their father is the same father, regardless of changes in the situation. Some weeks the children lived with their father and on those weeks they did not see their mother and on the next week it would be the other way around.

...what I have told the children is that I am the same mom as on those weeks when you are not here and dad is the same dad. That I have wanted to emphasise that the other parent does not disappear anywhere. (I2)

### 6.2.2 Responsibility

Some of the interviewees were talking about the overwhelming responsibility that they experienced when they were alone with the children. One of the interviewees stressed that the responsibility that she was given “suddenly” felt heavy to be taken alone (I2). Most of the interviewees gave examples and discussed about the immense responsibility.

It’s a big change because you are alone with children. So, the responsibility, especially in that, is quite big. Then when you think about “if something were to happen to me, the other parent would not be there”...you get used to it and notice that you can manage, then that brings a kind of self-confidence to the bustle and of course children grow up, so that makes it easier. (I4)

The other one was always in a way sharing the everyday life...and this kind of huge burden of responsibility was suddenly kind of coming to me. (I2)

Well the circumstances are a lot tougher in my situation (I3).

### 6.3 Wellbeing and coping

Right after the divorce some of the interviewees wondered how they could manage alone with the children.

I survive and I guess things could be worse... At first I thought there's no way I can manage... I congratulate myself that I have survived this well... (I3).

In the interviews several matters emerged which were affecting parents wellbeing and feeling of coping after divorce.

Work was pointed out as one of the factors that took energy from their own parenthood. The interviewee I2 gave an example of how she was happy that in her present situation she could influence her own work and working hours fairly much and therefore she worked less on those weeks when the children were with her.

...I try to reduce work on those weeks when I know that the children are coming, I do not organise any extra meetings, which would continue until the evening. (I2)

Being the only parent and adult taking care of the household led to a situation where the parent had to organise the timetable carefully in order to get the everyday life running. The interviewees were describing the constant organising as being stressful and hard.

It is a bit too much, the kind of wheeling and dealing in the matters takes energy. Schools start and everything. Awful, the whole calendar is full of children's stuff. (I4)

One of the interviewees (I3) stressed that organising was hard, but what made it harder was the former partner not being flexible and cooperative. Thus the former partner had an impact on her coping too.

... [This] has been quite hard...organising everything, organising two children and hobbies and my long commute... When the other one (parent) is not flexible. (I3)

As mentioned above the former partner could influence the other parent's wellbeing. The relationship's influence was positive or negative depending on what type of relationship the former partners had formed after divorce. An interviewee mentioned the former partner as an example of what can influence own wellbeing (I1).

The child's other parent can do that too. But not so much, when you do not let it affect you. (I1)

From the interviews rose examples of post-divorce relationship with the former partner, in which the good relationship with the former partner was helping and supporting the interviewee's own parenthood. If she needed help or something happened to her, she knew that she could always ask her former partner for help (I4).

Albeit there deliberately having been no questions about new partners, the topic came up several times during the interviews. New partners were seen as a significant factor in their own wellbeing. Having two adults in the household made the everyday life easier. When the parents had someone with whom to talk and share, it supported the parenthood.

...I need that kind of conversation partner to share the every day life, children talk many things and there are all kinds of things related to the children and I want to talk about those things to someone to be able to support the children. (I2)

Personal time was seen as an important factor of wellbeing. By way of illustration, while one of the parents is taking care of children, the other parent has personal time to use it for his / her own wellbeing. Right after the divorce some of the parents did not know what to do with the personal time but later they learned to take advantage of it.

Two of the interviewed parents' children had dual residence, therefore the parents had personal time every other week and they could use the time to get more energy for the weeks when the children were with him/her.

... My children spend every other week with their other parent and I have this ... blissful time for myself and I have learned to use it, I exercise and have hobbies on those weeks when the children are not here...(I2)

One of the interviewees emphasised the importance of personal time. According to an interviewee, I3, her children were children with special needs and therefore she felt that she needed time for herself also during the week. There had been a previous system where the children were with their father one or two nights during the week. However, the visitation system was changed and the children did not spend as much time with their father as before.

... [When] I got one free evening every week, I did much better, but my ex-husband wanted it changed for some reason. (I3)

Some of the interviewees saw this situation of being alone some weeks as an opportunity. In the situation when the children were with the other parent, the parent with time for themselves, could use the time to gain energy, to go to hobbies, to study and to work more. Thus, when the children were in the care of the interviewee, the time could be used to be with children with no extra activities or long working days:

...but in a way I have been offered this kind of opportunity that I am alone some weeks and... I have to know how to use those (weeks) to benefit me, then the children will benefit from that too. (I2)

The parental responsibility was shared after the divorce and it was a new situation for the parents. Parents looked forward to spending time with their children. However, the parents started appreciating time spent apart as well.

According to an interviewee right after the divorce the situation of having all the responsibility alone felt difficult when there was not support network to turn to in a situation where the parent needed help (I4).

Well, at the beginning it was very difficult. I do not have parents or anyone else here. I have not had anyone who would have helped me at any point, so the coping was, at times, very so-so. (I4)

According to the interviewees there were often several possibilities to influence their own wellbeing. Spending time doing other important things was seen as a significant aspect of personal life.

... I have to remember to rest enough and exercise, so that I can manage again on the next weeks to be the “normal” mother and not tired and exhausted. (I2)

But otherwise in my opinion I quite a lot of influence on what would take energy from the parenthood (I2).

Family and friends played an important part in support after the divorce. According to the interviewees support was indeed needed in the post-divorce situation. When we discussed about the support that the interviewees had received after divorce the first thing that they mentioned were family and friends.

Well, from my family... well mostly from the current partner and the people closest to me. (I1)

... in general, I got support from my friends after the divorce... (I2)

... well I have been talking with friends ... (I3)

Some of the interviewees had used professional help after divorce. The interviewees had been using the services of the Consultation centre for family matters and family counsellors.

...we went to one of those, how divorce affects children and how it affects [in general] and it lasted for three weeks, we were there a few evenings every week... (I2)

... I went to or I still go to a family counsellor of Consultation center for family matters (I3).

Some of the interviewees had joined self-help divorce groups as well. The interviewees, who used the services of divorce groups and family counsellors, found it helpful. It gave support for the parenthood and a chance to discuss and to get peer support.

...it gave support to parenthood. (I2)

It helped, it helped. Very well... and I got peer support. That helped. (I3)

The interviewees agreed that it would be better to receive more support after divorce. In the discussion different forms of support came up that they would have wished, such as:

practical help with the children, help from the former partner and a supporting attitude from the family.

...but that kind of concrete help, where you could take the children if you have something where you have to go, or do (something)(I3).

... those first months, I was quite in stagnation so maybe at that point, very close people, even friends do not understand. You would have thought that grandparents would had understood that at that point... would had said “you will survive and we will help you and everything will be fine ...” (I2)

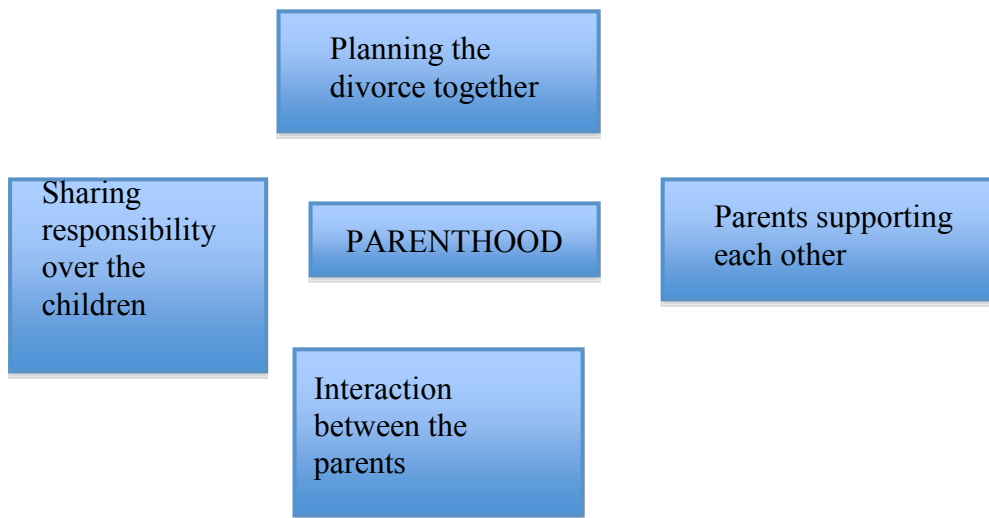
The support I would have wanted was from the children’s father, but now it’s not possible so I didn’t get any... just friends tried to get... ask help...(I3)

## 7 DISCUSSION

This chapter compares the results of the research with findings of Kääriäinen (2008), Hokkanen (2005) and the model of challenges in parenthood in a divorce. This research demonstrates partly similar results as well. Most of the parents who were interviewed for the research gave similar answers for the question of what was considered good parenthood after a divorce compared to the model of challenges of parenthood in a divorce (Table 3). In addition, parents were reflecting their own experiences and sharing their opinions on parenthood after divorce.

Kääriäinen (2008) has made a model which describes the challenges that parenthood faces in a divorce. The research showed that if the four aspects of the model were taken into account, they would support parents in the process of a divorce and after a divorce in a way that would cause less harm to the children. In Table 3, parenthood was placed in the middle and the four aspects were placed surrounding the parenthood. These four aspects that Kääriäinen pointed out were: planning the divorce together, sharing responsibility, parents supporting each other and obligation for interaction. The negative impacts on parenthood and especially on the children would be reduced if all these aspects were taken into account at the time of divorce. (Kääriäinen 2008, 115.)

TABLE 3: Challenges of parenthood in a divorce



(Adopted from Kääriäinen 2008, 115)

Firstly, Kääriäinen mentioned planning the divorce together. More than one interviewee of this research did not mention having planned the divorce together as such. Nevertheless, it does not mean that it was not an important part of the divorce and parenthood after the divorce. Regardless, the parents mentioned keeping the child's best interest as a principle during the divorce process, and when planning the decisions dealing with the children and the future. Furthermore, one of the parents emphasised that for the former partner and her everything was clear due to a carefully planned legal document. The document, regarding children's affairs, made "rules of the game" clear and released parents from fighting about issues related to children.

Secondly, shared responsibility over the children was one supporting aspect after a divorce in Kääriäinen's research. In this research responsibility was a significant factor that affected the post-divorce parenthood. Many interviewees pointed out that the responsibility was overwhelming, especially immediately after the divorce, even when the parental responsibility was shared. The parents were implementing parenthood separately "on turns", thus the one who had the children was the only adult with the responsibility at that time. Taking care of the children and organising life was described to be a task both demanding and energy consuming. Therefore the parents understood that it was important to remember to take care of their own wellbeing.

The interviewees were describing that as time passed and the parents learnt new ways to take care of their own wellbeing, the situation improved. The parents understood that their own wellbeing would benefit the children too.

Thirdly, one of the challenges in the model was the interaction between the parents. Hokkanen (2005) agrees that in order to share taking care of the children, an integral requirement for success is that parents are capable of having discussions, at least regarding the children's affairs. In her interviews, most of the parents were capable of discussing affairs related to children. This research supports the idea that interaction is an integral part of parenthood. However, this research revealed that after the divorce some of the parents were capable of discussing affairs related to children and some of the interviewees were not. The situation varied from person to person.

In addition, after divorce parents may still have conflicts between them. The interviewees emphasised that parents should be able to talk and have a cooperative relationship, because the parenthood continues even when the love relationship between parents came to an end. All the interviewees agreed that it is in the best interest of the child if the parents can deal with their divorce and parental issues rationally and in co-operation. Nevertheless, it was not easy for all the parents to start dealing with these matters in co-operation with former partner and they could not fully implement the interaction and co-operation.

According to the results of the research the interaction, getting the co-operation working after the divorce, seemed to be a real challenge for the parents. Part of the interaction is dealing together in the affairs related to child. Common rules for the children was one issue that came up and that some of the parents felt as important. If parents have not agreed on common rules it can cause disagreements. Therefore, it is important that parents can plan and decide together some common rules regarding children. When parents work in cooperation making the rules together, several problems may be avoided.

Fourthly, parents should support each other in post-divorce parenting in order to minimise the conflict between them. The former partner was seen as an important part



of support. However, there were positive and negative experiences; it was not for granted that shared parenthood worked in a way where parents supported each other. Examples of working relationships were also found in this research. The interviewees described that it was easier to implement their own parenthood when they got support from the former partner.

Furthermore, interviewees had needed support in the parenthood after divorce. The support they got was mainly from family, friends, the new partner and professionals. Nevertheless, the interviewees hoped that family and friends could be even more understanding and supportive. In addition, some of the interviewees wished that professional help would be easier to reach, especially practical help with children. Thus, finding sufficient support was seen as challenging.

Hokkanen (2005) supports the findings of this research as she states that fathers and mothers of her research had met professionals once or twice, but they emphasised the meaning and support of relatives, friends and colleagues in the context of divorce. In this research interviewees emphasised the significance of family and friends as well. However, none of the interviewees mentioned colleagues as an important source of support.

In the model of challenges of parenthood in a divorce two points that were counted as characteristics of co-parenting in Neuvo-project did not come up (Mykkänen-Hänninen & Paajanen, 2007). Those points were: maintaining positive image of a parent and an ability to protect child from the conflicts between parents. In this research interviewees pointed out that these two factors were significant part of good parenthood after divorce.

Interviewees emphasised that a child has two parents and therefore one should respect the former partner, who is the child's parent as well and not to express negative ideas of him/her. Respecting and maintaining a positive image of the former partner, as a parent of the child, requires putting behind oneself in the disagreements and focusing on the best interests of the child. Furthermore, interviewees stressed that it was important to keep the children out of parents' problems; the conflicts had to take place so that the child does not need to see, hear or be part of it. The conflicts were between parents and should stay that way.

Kääriäinen (2008) states that trust and confidence on the mothers and fathers own resources may be put to the test after divorce. The results of this research support this statement as well. Some of the interviewed parents were wondering how they can cope in the changing life situation. Especially the time right after the divorce was seen as challenging for the parents and they had to learn new ways of influencing their own wellbeing.

Hokkanen (2005) argues that “cards of closeness and remoteness are shuffled and dealt again after divorce”. In this research some of the interviewees felt that the parent-child relationships changed when the custody was shared, and parenting was not full time anymore. Some of the interviewees described feeling of remoteness with children when parenthood was shared, despite parents were having different kind of custody arrangements. Thus, sometimes it was a challenge to maintain a close relationship with the children.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

### 8.1 Main results

Parenthood faces many challenges in a divorce and after one. Parenthood is about relationship with a child and it is a life-long relationship. While the love relationship with the former partner comes to an end, the shared parenthood continues. As the parents share the custody of the children, the parenthood changes its form. Being a parent is a challenging role even in the time of marriage or relationship.

It was challenging to start a co-operative relationship with the former partner, who is also the child's other parent, after a divorce. The nature of cooperation influenced the parenthood a great deal. Relationship with the former partner supported and eased implementing one's own parenthood if both parents were flexible. However, the lack of cooperation made implementing one's own parenthood more difficult and it was an additional burden. Working cooperation was seen to benefit both the parents and the children's lives.

The parents had different custody and visitation arrangements. Visitation arrangements and sharing the parenthood caused parents not being able to see their children every day. Therefore, the parent-child relationship necessarily changed. If the custody was shared equally, it was impossible to have as close a relationship as before. The change was described as distance.

During the marriage parents shared the responsibilities. After divorce the responsibility was also shared but parents had to take care of the children each on their own time and while being the only adult responsible for the children at that time. The parents described the responsibility to be overwhelming.

After the divorce parents were wondering how they would cope. Work, organising, being the only adult in the household as well as issues related to the former partner were factors that parents described as taking energy from the parenthood. There were also factors that had a positive influence on coping: often the child's other parent, a new

partner and increased personal time. However, interviewees stressed that they also had several ways to influence their own wellbeing. The parents felt challenged to find new ways to cope and take care of their own wellbeing. When parents got used to the new situation, they learned to take care of their own wellbeing as well.

Support for the parents had been received foremost and mainly from the family and friends. However, some of the interviewees had used services from professionals as well, such as family counsellors and self-help divorce groups. Moreover, some of the parents expressed hopes that they had received more help: practical help with children, help from the former partner or a more supporting attitude from the family.

To summarise, the main changes in parenthood after a divorce were: parenthood was shared in a way where the parents implemented their parenthood separately; the relationship with children changed because the parents did not see their children daily; and the parents had responsibility as being the only adult in the household. In addition, the main challenges that the parents had faced were: getting the cooperative parenthood to work; maintaining a close relationship with the children; dealing with the overwhelming responsibility; learning new ways manage and to take care of their own wellbeing and finding sufficient support.

## 8.2 Self-help groups supporting divorced parents

As mentioned earlier, self-help groups are part of support service for parents. Anyone can join a self-help group out of interest or need. In the groups, participants are able to share their experiences and opinions with others, who are facing a similar situation. Self-help groups can be a good way of empowering people.

In my opinion the amount of services to support people who are considering a divorce or who have divorced should be increased. People need help in difficult life situations. As mentioned earlier, support from family and friends is not always sufficient. Often families need help from outside and therefore community should be the first place to support these families. In the community there should exist low threshold places where families can find help.

The idea of self-help groups for parents who have divorced should be developed further and it should take into account that at present time families are more diverse than in the past. For example, there should be groups for the mothers and fathers who are divorcing from a multicultural relationship or for people who divorce from a same-sex relationship.

### 8.3 Professional development

Conducting the research was interesting and challenging. Finding the topic for the research took fairly long time and the topic only became clear at the end of spring 2009. This was the first time I conducted the research of this extent. Also using interview as a research method was the first time for me. The interviews required preparation, the questions had to be thought carefully and I found myself needing more information about using interview as a method. However, I believe that I learned a great deal about conducting a research and using an interview as a research method.

An additional challenge conducting the research was the language. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and a large volume of the material was in Finnish as well. However, the research had to be written in English. Translating the materials used in the study was a difficult, challenging and time-consuming task.

When I wrote the report, I noticed that I could have used the role chart of parenthood as a tool and could have given it to the interviewees when I was conducting the interviews. It could have given ideas for parents and supported them in thinking about themes.

When I was conducting the research I got more information about children's dual residence. According to the research, parents were positive about dual residence arrangements and this fact made me interested in it. Parents with dual residence arrangements could be a possible further research topic. In addition, it would be interesting to hear children's ideas of the arrangement.

The research has given me tools to conduct a study and I have learned a great deal regarding divorce, families and parenthood. Encountering forthcoming work life feels like a next step in my life. I have a positive feeling about taking this step. Transition to work life will require learning new skills but this is something that will happen with practice.

I hope the research can help parents who are considering a divorce or have divorced. In addition, the research could help professionals and everyone else who, in their work, encounter parents who have divorced.

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## APPENDIX 1

## INTERVIEW

## Background information

GENDER:

AGE:

CHILDREN'S GENDER AND AGE:

YEAR OF GETTING MARRIED / COHABITATION:

YEAR OF DIVORCE:

## APPENDIX 2

### Shared parenthood

- What kind of custody you have in practice
- How did you arrive to this decision
- Has the child been meeting both parents regularly after divorce
- Equality, how does your former partner use his/her rights in relation to the child? How about taking care of the duties?
- How is the parenthood working in co-operation with child's other parent
- Do you feel that your relationship with child's other parent influences your own current parenthood in a positive or negative way
- Co-operation, what are the important matters that you decide together / parents common decision-making on child's matters
- Did you need /would you have needed external conciliation

### Changes in parenthood after divorce

- Duties, responsibility, rights, challenges
- In your opinion has divorce changed your relationship with the child/children? If yes, how? Is there difference between the situation right after divorce and now?

### Own well-being

- How do you feel you are coping with your (current) parenthood
- How has the situation changed after the divorce compared to the previous situation?
- What takes your strength?
- Have you received support for parenthood after divorce? What kind of support? What kind of support you would had needed more?

### **How would you describe "good parenthood after divorce"**

Do you want to continue with some theme or is there something else you want to talk about?

What kind of experience was this interview for you?

## APPENDIX 3

## INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee	Cohabitation / marriage in years	Children	Children's residence
Male 29 years old	5	Boy 8 years old	With mother, meets father every other weekend
Female 34 years old	7	Boy 7 years old Girl 6 years old	Dual residence
Female 49 years old	11	Boy 11 years old Girl 7 years old	With mother, meet father every other weekend for 3-5 days
Female 35 years old	7	Girl 12 years old Boy 8 years old Boy 6 years old	Dual residence