

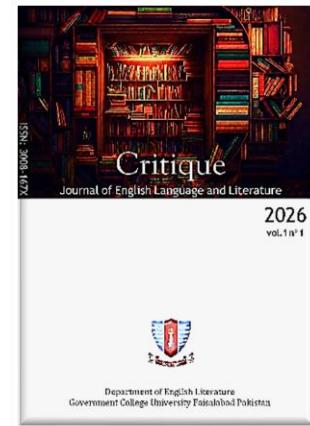
Critique

Journal of English Language and Literature

2026 vol. 1 n° 1

ISSN: 3008-167X

<https://critique.gcuf.edu.pk>



Stepchildren's Personality and Character Flaws: A Critique of Selected Literary Works

Muhammad Kashif Jan and Sardar Ahmad Farooq

To cite this article: Jan, Muhammad Kashif, and Sardar Ahmad Farooq. "Stepchildren's Personality and Character Flaws: A Critique of Selected Literary Works." *Critique: Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2026, pp. 19–30. <https://critique.gcuf.edu.pk/index.php/critique/article/view/50>



Published online: 12 May 2026



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Department of English Literature
Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

Stepchildren's Personality and Character Flaws: A Critique of Selected Literary Works

Muhammad Kashif Jan¹ and Sardar Ahmad Farooq² 

¹ Department of English, Government Postgraduate College Mandian, Abbottabad, Pakistan

² Department of English, Government Postgraduate College Mandian, Abbottabad, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The number of stepfamilies has increased globally over the past six decades, making stepfamily relations a significant area of emotional, social and psychological concern. Contemporary psychological research suggests that stepchildren face complex challenges arising from family transitions, such as parental detachment, altered household roles, unclear stepfamily boundaries, emotional displacement, and the lack of clear social and legal recognition in stepfamily relationships. These grave dimensions may have serious long-term consequences for their emotional stability, personality development, and ability to perform social roles. However, these concerns of stepfamily relations have so far received limited attention in literary criticism, particularly in the light of recent psychological insights. This paper, therefore, explores and analyzes the lasting impact of stepfamily relations on the personality and behavior of specific characters in literature, such as Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; David Copperfield in Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Khelleye Withers in Franzen's *The Corrections*. The paper analyzes the nature and causes of some related issues, including family transitions, role ambiguity, emotional and psychological consequences, repression, and academic and socioeconomic challenges. These issues are analyzed and discussed by adopting a mixed-method approach, comprising comparative analysis of stepfamilies and intact families, turning - points analysis, and a combination of role theory, systems theory and transition theory. The findings specify multiple lasting implications for stepchildren, including the emotional and psychological impact; loyalty conflicts and relationship maladjustment; developing externalizing and internalizing problems and lower academic and socioeconomic outcomes. This paper, therefore, examines the substantial challenges faced by an increasing number of stepchildren in modern societies.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 Feb 2026
Revised 11 April 2026
Accepted 1 May 2026

KEYWORDS

David Copperfield;
Hamlet; intact families;
personality
development;
stepchildren

Introduction

The ratio of stepfamilies has increased globally over the past 60 years, as recent research in psychology has revealed that “more than 40% of adults have a step-relation” (Pew RC). For example, “in 1960, 73% of American children lived with both biological parents but

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR Sardar Ahmad Farooq  sardarahmad.farooq@gmail.com

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by the Department of English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author (s) or with their consent. The views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher. The publisher accepts no responsibility for any errors or for the views expressed herein.

this has reduced to 46% in 2014” (Botwe 5-6). Contemporary research in psychology also reveals that stepfamily relations seriously impair the personality and character of stepchildren in the long-term, as they face numerous challenges which can be attributed partly to family transitions, parental detachment, and “the lack of legal and social clarity surrounding stepfamily relationships and roles” (Jensen et al. 2).

Literary studies lack examination of this nature; however, causes and implications of stepfamily relations of some well-known literary figures, and certain pertinent insights from contemporary psychological studies can be productively used in this regard. Stepfamilies are formed by blending “two sets of pre-established family traditions, routines, patterns of interaction, and shared meanings” (Sanner et al. 893). As family transitions upset children’s feelings of belonging (O’Rourke and Worzbyt), the child may feel totally banished or excluded and hence “feelings of unworthiness and selfhate may become evident” (Johnson and Deanna 19-20). Attachment with at least one of the parents is crucial, as distance brings grief and stress in children. Because of unsettled stepfamily relations, children may develop a sense of loss, stress, and emotional instability (Cummings et al.). Moreover, in case of ambiguity in parents’ role, stepchildren may also not get required emotional assistance (Carlson and Meyer).

Parental remarriage is also linked to many other challenges that children may face, such as “housing relocations, potential loss of friends, neighborhoods, schools, and communities” (Sanner et al. 885). Moreover, parental remarriage mostly causes changes, such as family income, lesser time with either of the parents, developing relationships with new and extended family-members, getting in terms with changed family environments and schedules.

Some of these psychological insights are employed in the paper for the analysis of the acquisition and development of personality and character flaws commonly termed in literature as tragic flaws or hamartia (Aristotle) of some well-known literary figures who experience stepfamily life. This paper, therefore, analyzes the nature and the underlying factors of such flaws which have hitherto not been registered in literary research and criticism.

Literature Review

Even though many literary characters suffer from problems in stepfamily relations, its causes and its grave implications for themselves and for those associated to them are not rendered convincingly in the existing body of literature. This study explores the selected literary works representing stepfamily relations in light of current psychological insights to develop a valid and timely literary perspective on the issues.

Family Transitions

According to recent research in psychology, stepchildren’s inability to rely on stepparents the way they do on their biological parents mostly generates emotional disorder and anguish in them, which can prompt disruptive behavior in them (Fraser and Fraser 248). If nobody in the family is willing to deal with the unease caused by such contradictions, stepchildren may develop flawed behaviors which linger into their adulthood and later stages, as they have no other option but to devise their own strategies to protect themselves from the sense of disarray, uneasiness and emotional erasure (Fraser and Fraser 248). Personality problems may also be caused by stepparents’ unwillingness to perform their basic roles in disciplining stepchildren.

Some of stepchildren’s personality problems point to “structural transitions in family (i.e. separation, divorce, and parental repartnering)” (Sanner et al. 885), and its related

processes, like inability to interact with parents, diminished emotional support from parents, and parents' skirmishes with ex-partners (Jensen et al. 2). Many stepchildren report dread, possessiveness, and sorrow perceiving that their associations with their parents have been receded because of their parents' desire to develop closeness with their new spouses and their offspring (Sanner et al. 888). Furthermore, stepfamily establishment takes place in the background of "cultural narratives that paint stepfamilies as either dysfunctional (e.g., Cinderella) or harmonious (e.g., The Brady Bunch)" (Sanner et al. 885-895), which do not truthfully portray the intricate, significant, and subtle implications of most stepfamily relations.

Parental Detachment

Family transitions may also cause higher degrees of parental stress, sometimes leading to uninvolved and abusive parenthood (Cooper et al.), or to less ideal childrearing (Anthony et al.). Stepfamilies are also distinct as parent-child ties precede the new spouse relation, implying that the parent-offspring dyad shares a longer history. Therefore, parents try to make stepparents feel like family insiders by investing more time and involvement in creating stronger ties with new spouse, whereas decreasing their involvement with their kids. Consequently, adolescents view their relationship with parents as showing lesser attachment, affection and parental response after repartnering. Stepparents also report a lesser responsibility for caring for their stepchildren, and are found to cater lesser financial resources to stepchildren in comparison to their biological children (Aquilino; Killian). Moreover, complexities in stepfamily structures can cause strain because of competing household demands. For example, Caroline Sanner et al. (895) report that transitions in stepfamily relations create new family substructures as well as associations with new relations who do not share a common history—a situation loaded with intrinsic strains and contradictions.

Academic and Psychosocial Challenges

Unlike intact families, stepchildren "have lower school performance on average, higher dropout rates and lower graduation or general educational development (GED) rates as well as low self-esteem, depression and poor overall mental health" (Coleman et al.). Reasons for such problems include the facts that after remarriage, parents frequently allot lesser time to supervise everyday school assignments and set lower academic goals for their children. Resultantly, children are highly expected to withdraw from school and lose interest in meeting their academic goals (Pong).

In terms of psychological impact, stepfamily formation may drastically change a child's worldview, rousing a sense of uneasiness and humiliation, which frequently results in social avoidance and alienation (Johnson and Deanna 4). Similarly, Ganong and Coleman argue that stepchildren mostly consider the family condition stigmatizing, so, they keep it as a private matter and also try to conceal it (Ganong and Coleman).

Research Methodology

Mixed-method approach is employed for the discussion and analysis of stepfamily relations as evidenced in the literary works under study. Firstly, comparative analysis of stepfamilies and intact families is applied, as recently many analysts have investigated "how adult parent-child relationships are shaped by family instability" (van Houdt 660-661). Secondly, the study applies the Turning Points (TP) analysis concentrating on incidents that characterize "sudden and dramatic relational breakthroughs ... [or] small, patterned, relational changes" (Mongeau et al. 332). The highest recurrent TPs reported are: transitions in family structure and organization; in-house bitterness and domestic crises (Baxter et al.), house-hold shifting, and unfulfilled expectations or frustration (Payton 7). Moreover, "common TPs across stepfamilies are helpful to understand the shared

experiences and critical events that many stepfamilies face” (Waldron et al. 4).

Furthermore, this study also takes into consideration a combination of related theories most widely applied in stepfamily research i.e. role theory, systems theory and transition theory. With regard to role theory, scholars concentrated on “three concepts of role theory: anticipatory socialization, role conflict and role reciprocity” (Fraser and Fraser 241). Family systems theory argues that provided a family is able to harmonize its structure, expected roles, rules, goals, and boundaries; it can achieve homeostasis and grow beyond the stagnation that can occur when there is rapid change which can create instability and disharmony. Transition theory analyzes challenges of stepfamilies, “considering stepchildren of all ages and their relationships with biological and stepparents” (Fraser and Fraser 242).

Discussion

When children inevitably have to adjust to complex changes linked with parental repartnering, various responses and complexities are likely to be experienced. This study analyzes complexities of some literary figures experiencing stepfamily relations, and in the subsequent sections, attributes it to several related factors, including, “stepparent-stepchild relationship, boundaries and structures, roles, emotional responses, and divided loyalties” (Johnson and Deanna 7). Besides, stepfamilies can have long term psychosocial, interpersonal and academic impacts on children (Ganong and Coleman). In literature, impact of such factors is reflected in some of the characters like Hamlet (Shakespeare), David Copperfield (Dickens), and Kelllye Withers (Franzen) who experience stepfamily relations.

Emotional and Psychological implications

Personality growth of stepchildren may be hindered, as they consistently undergo various emotional stressors such as “hostility, anger, confusion, guilt, shame, hurt, frustration, loneliness, embarrassment, powerlessness, and abandonment” (Johnson and Deanna 4-5). If persisted, such distresses mostly engender internal disarray and impulsive conduct. In *Hamlet* (Shakespeare), for example, the protagonist Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, experiences a severe emotional blow due to his mother’s prompt remarriage to his uncle Claudius, who has also assumed the throne after the death of Hamlet’s father. He vents it in such words:

That it should come to this!
But two months dead...
Let me not think on’t—Frailty, thy name is woman! ...
Within a month ... She married (Shakespeare I. II. 141-161).

Hamlet condemns his mother’s instant remarriage as a ‘foul incest.’ In the same way, in *David Copperfield* (Dickens), “Clara and David have an affectionate mother-child relationship until Clara remarries Mr. Murdstone” (Eskins 6-7). Young David, with the change in family structure, experiences a sense of insecurity, as his mother does not protect him from her second husband’s harsh treatment. Consequently, David is compelled either to accept the abandonment, or totally reject it as a loss. David, in his early adulthood, acknowledges his emotional ‘vacancy’ which he articulates in such words: "In short, I was not a favorite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did like me could not show it" (Dickens 177). This perception lingers and influences David’s behavior even when he attains maturity (Eskins).

Relationship Maladjustment

Due to turbulent stepfamily relations, children may also suffer from relationship maladjustment. As a family’s lifespan expands, “stepfamilies may discover new opportunities to cohere or come apart” (Braithwaite et al. qtd. in Waldron et al. 7). In line

with Turning Points (TP) analysis, stepfamily environment can be constructive or damaging in the longer run. Some turning points occur much later in the lifespans of families, as in cases of a non-residential parent's death or a stepchild starting his own family (King). In the same way, the hasty remarriage of Hamlet's mother serves as the turning point that leads him to develop a perception of women as 'frail.' This feeling, subsequently, frustrates his already thriving love relationship with Ophelia during his later adolescence and he starts treating her with disgust and cruelty. He yells at her, abuses her, even advances to strike her and leads her to cry. Ophelia too laments the derangement of Hamlet's noble mind:

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword...
Th' observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down! ... O, woe is me
T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see (Shakespeare III. I. 164-175).

It shows that due to the transition to a stepfamily, even such a comprehensive education as Hamlet's goes entirely wasted, as Ophelia is deeply perturbed by his transition to an unsettled, filthy, insulting, shaky, and pale appearance. Such a violent treatment by Hamlet, who had until then adored her and had always been gentle to her, puts Ophelia under so much strain that eventually she is driven to commit suicide. (Payton 11).

Loyalty Conflicts

Other serious repercussions of stepfamily structure include domestic conflict and loyalty struggles, communication and interpersonal problems (Gonzales). As a stepchild, Hamlet too develops similar ramifications. He wittily describes his uncle, Claudius as "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (Shakespeare I. II. 67). In case of family transition, most children act upon what their parents decide about the change of family or household (Nahkur and Kutsar 3), but Hamlet is frustrated by his mother's wedding to his uncle and endures loyalty conflict as he does not accept him as his father. In his opinion, his step father is a lustful person and is no match for his righteous father: "So excellent a king; that was, to this, /Hyperion to a satyr ... My father's brother, but no more like my father/Than I to Hercules" (Shakespeare I. II. 143-157).

Similarly, in *David Copperfield* (Dickens), although David's father passes away before his birth, he feels intrinsically bound to his father by blood and by title. Having a deep desire to identify himself with his father, he calls himself "David Copperfield the Younger" (Dickens 6). His loyalty to his biological father is further established through Eskins's observation that "Mr. Copperfield was a gentleman, and David looks to his father's grave for assurance of his own gentility" (Eskins 6). He gets upset by the intrusion of others between him and his father as it is metaphorically described when he visits his father's grave, "See... how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects" (Dickens 6).

Depression and Repression

Another complexity that stepchildren face is "feeling caught in the middle" (Payton11). Hamlet also feels 'caught in the middle' after his father's ghost reveals to him that he has actually been murdered by his brother who then married Hamlet's mother. Hamlet bemoans the situation: "The time is out of joint:/O cursed spite/That ever I was born to set it right!" (Shakespeare I. V. 189-190). These words reflect Hamlet's emotional battle and his feeling of being loaded with the stress of the situation after his mother's second marriage. David Copperfield is also affected by family transition in his early life as he "senses that the early events of his life are responsible for his weak sense of self and the emotional fluctuations he undergoes ... As a result, he feels that he cannot know who he

really is” (Eskins 8-9). Hence, both Hamlet and David are depressed and distressed as stepchildren which is one of the factors contributing to their adversity.

Children in stepfamilies may also suffer major long-term psychosexual consequences, like Oedipus complex (Pew Research Center). Adult stepchildren are not much contented with their living conditions (McLanahan and Sandefur), and feel emotional urge towards parents of the opposite sex, whereas jealousy and conflict towards the same sex. Likewise, David deeply resents his separation from his mother after her remarriage. David has recognized his stepfather's aggression towards him which becomes more evident by his father's calling him 'dog' (Dickens 60). However, he is not aware of his oedipal urge and his inherent sexual conflict with his stepfather. His mother's response to the tussle between the father and the son further puzzles his sentiments and creates a sense of guilt over his oedipal drive when she whines, "Oh, Davy-that you could hurt anyone I love ... I am so grieved, Davy, that you should have such bad passions in your heart" (Dickens 95). The implications of the denials of his motherly instincts in childhood and subsequent depression become evident when he reenacts his repressed instinctive urge in his unsatisfying wedding to Dora. He does so to overcome the conditions that created his original anguish and to avert another parting like the one from his mother in his childhood.

Such repressed feelings exacerbate the problems in spouse relationships, “escalating negative communicative patterns such as belligerence, contempt, criticism, denial, and ineffective problem-solving characterize marital transactions” (Hetherington qtd. in Johnson and Deanna 5). Because of the same ‘negative communicative patterns,’ the divergence in the personalities of David and his wife Dora becomes even more evident (Eskins 16). David's "old unhappy feeling" deepens as he finally outlets his pent up resentment against his mother. He transmits the mental strength and will-power that were missing in his mother, into his wife Dora's personality. Resultantly, “Dora dies ... He does not even feel conscious satisfaction in the fulfillment of any of his repressed desires (Eskins 18).

With regard to repression theories, David's feelings can be explained like this: after a kid is distanced by either of the parents, "he may find the lack of love so intolerable that unconsciously he decides to destroy his "bad" self and create a new self that will be loved and accepted” (Watkins 8, qtd. in Eskins 12). David also “combats not only the embarrassment of belonging to a stepfamily but also with the tainted desire of retrieving their genetic family” (Johnson and Deanna 16). Similar struggle is evident in David's distress:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I ... compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood ... and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position ... cannot be written (Dickens 234).

Internalizing and Externalizing Problems

The affective and mental growth of stepchildren may suffer as they are likely to develop internalizing and externalizing problems unlike children of intact families (Barrett & Turner). Such personality problems are evidenced in another character, named Khellye Withers, in the novel *The Corrections* (Franzen). Withers also experiences a turbulent childhood as his “stepfather had burned him with an electric iron when he was little” (Franzen 307). Consequently, he too develops internalizing and externalizing problems

such as aggressive, revengeful and delinquent behaviors.

Besides, Withers gets associated with criminal gangs and intrudes into his former art-counselor's house to snatch her car and other provisions. When he is told that the car had been borrowed by one of her friends for a week, he inflicts the same torment by applying her "light n Easy iron to her bare skin and advanced the temperature ... and cuts her throat in a panic when her friend came by ... to return the car" (Franzen 307). This can be analyzed as avenging his repressed anger as a stepchild. Withers' acquired personality flaws cause trouble not only for others but also contribute to his own downfall. The complexities of stepfamily life eventually lead Withers to a catastrophic position, as the victim's mother wants him executed after he is sentenced to death for murdering his art therapist.

Academic and Socioeconomic implications

Multiple studies have also revealed that stepchildren are at a higher risk of academic achievement (Zill) and achieve comparatively low socioeconomic position, as they are more likely to be "unemployed, drop out of school ... become involved in substance abuse and delinquent activities, and associate with antisocial peers" (McLanahan & Sandefur qtd. in Johnson & Deanna 4). Such externalizing problems are connected to ambiguity in parental roles, particularly authoritarian parenting (Sanner et al. 891; Coleman et al.) which is an index of stepfamily relations. Similar references to Withers' taking drugs are made in the narrative as, for example, Sylvia, the 'victim's mother' knows about Withers' drug use and its ramifications in his life, and imagines "a society that stanching the flow of illegal drugs into urban neighborhoods (so that Withers could not have spent the stolen money on crack" (Franzen 306-307). Besides, knowing that Withers is jobless, Sylvia also imagines "a society that provided jobs at a decent wage for young men like him" (Franzen 306) so that Withers would not have resorted to coercion and torture to force his art therapist to disclose information about her car and her bank cards.

The idea that Withers' personality flaws may have been engendered by the turning point of family transition is also reinforced by the analysis that Sylvia's husband Ted, aware of Withers' circumstances and personality, suggests the right remedy for the adversity of stepfamilies. Ted opines that "it's not computers that are making everything virtual, it's mental health" (Franzen 309). Therefore, unlike Sylvia, Ted does not demand his execution. Rather, he emphasizes that everyone should try "just getting married and raising children like they used to" (Franzen 309), as compared to the modern increasing trends of stepfamily formation.

According to Barbara M. Newman & Philip R. Newman's (69) table of psychosocial processes, the developmental tasks in the infancy stage include communication, attachment and emotional development, whereas the psychosocial crisis is trust vs. mistrust which gets thwarted for Withers in his infancy as his genetic family is broken up and he consequently becomes unable to reconcile himself to his stepfather. Contrarily, in the case of Melissa, another character in the story, the developmental tasks of the stage remain stable with her biological parents whom she describes as her "best friends" (Franzen 310). She, therefore, grows into a stable personality that even her boyfriend envies: "how he loved the lilt in her voice, the bounce in her step, the serenity of her amour proper! She got to be her and he didn't (Franzen 310). Similarly, in line with Erik Erikson's 'maturation timetable' (Erikson), Withers is overtaken by guilt in his conflict between initiative vs. guilt, as Withers suffers maltreatment by his stepfather, which he later replicates as attitude of vengefulness, developing aggression as a major personality flaw.

Results

Results of the thorough discussion of the problems under study reveal that stepchildren

are at a disadvantage with regard to overall personality development in comparison to children of intact families.

Firstly, stepchildren are emotionally and psychologically affected as their relations become more distant, experiencing lesser degrees of communication and affection with their step parents. For example, Hamlet undergoes feelings of depression, aggression, anger, and relationship maladjustment after his mother's remarriage. Similarly, David deeply resents his mother's remarriage and feels abandonment, shame, anxiety and distance. This grieves and strains him to the extent of affecting his emotional and mental growth.

Another major problem that stepchildren may face is loyalty conflict, which becomes an evident challenge in adapting to stepfamily formation. Some stepchildren in their adolescence believe that liking their stepparents would be betraying their loyalty to their biological parents. Hence, Hamlet is frustrated by his mother's wedding to his uncle Claudius who, in his opinion, is a lustful man and no match for his righteous father. Therefore, he is not ready to accept him as his father. David also feels intrinsically bound to his father through blood and name. David's loyalty to his biological father also gets established as he gets upset by the intrusion of others between himself and his father as is metaphorically depicted when he visits his father's grave, "See ... how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects" (124).

In line with the turning points analysis, parental remarriage leads to less ideal childrearing or to uninvolved and abusive parenting. Resultantly, stepchildren are likely to develop internalizing and externalizing problems. Unlike intact families, adolescents in stepfamilies are also more likely to achieve comparatively low academic and socioeconomic outcomes, engage in delinquent and criminal behavior and alcohol and drug abuse. These personality flaws are evident in Khellye Withers' character who also experiences a turbulent childhood as his "stepfather had burned him with an electric iron when he was little" (Franzen 307). He develops similar personality flaws, as in his early adulthood stage, he replicates the same torture on his art therapist and murders her in panic, leading to his catastrophe, as the victim's mother wants him executed after he is sentenced to death.

Long term adjustment problems may impact stepchildren in their adult life as they may not be much contented with their living conditions. For example, Hamlet's love relationship with Ophelia is frustrated in his later adolescence as he develops a tainted opinion of women as 'frail' after his mother's hasty remarriage and starts treating Ophelia with disgust and cruelty. Similarly, David's longstanding melancholy deepens, in his adulthood, when he finally releases his repressed bitterness against his mother and attempts to impose the rigor and will power that were deficient in his mother into the persona of his wife Dora who perishes as a result.

Conclusion

Stepchildren experience several intrinsic challenges, like family transitions, parental detachment, and legal and social ambiguity with regard to step relationships, belongingness, and responsibilities. When stepchildren are compelled to adapt to these complexities, the likely responses and implications include emotional and psychological repercussions, relationship maladjustment and loyalty conflicts, anxiety and repression, internalizing and externalizing problems, and academic and socioeconomic consequences. The findings also reveal that stepchildren are at a disadvantage in terms of personality growth as it is evident in the characters of Hamlet, David Copperfield and Khellye Withers as stepchildren. For example, Hamlet suffers from depression, aggression, anger, relationship maladjustment and loyalty conflicts after his mother's remarriage. Similarly, David's family transition produces feelings of desertion, shame, anxiety and detachment,

contributing to his emotional instability. Moreover, in Withers's case, the turning points analysis reveals family transitions as leading to less ideal childrearing or to abusive and uninvolved parenting, thus hindering the child's affective and mental growth, and further causing the development of internalizing and externalizing problems in stepchildren. The other complexities that have been noted in stepchildren, include lower academic and socioeconomic outcomes, delinquent and criminal behaviors and alcohol and drug abuse.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Muhammad Kashif Jan is an Associate Professor of English at Government Postgraduate College Mandian, Abbottabad, KP Higher Education Department, Pakistan. He holds a PhD in English and has established himself as a researcher in literary theory, linguistics, and psychosocial literary studies. His work advances interdisciplinary perspectives by integrating literary analysis and linguistics with psychology and discourse studies, particularly in areas such as personality development, culture, power, gender and racial identity, and ideology. He has contributed to academic scholarship through publications in recognized journals and continues to promote critical and research-oriented learning among undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Sardar Ahmad Farooq is an Assistant Professor of English at Government Postgraduate College Mandian, Abbottabad, KP Higher Education Department, Pakistan. He holds a PhD in English from the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. He has a strong academic background in English and American literature, with specialization in eco-criticism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial studies, and linguistics. Through his teaching and research supervision, he has contributed significantly to academic writing, communication skills, and English for Academic Purposes. His scholarly work, reflected in numerous research publications in national and international journals, focuses on environmental justice, identity, culture, and discourse. He is also actively engaged in research leadership and academic development initiatives.

Works Cited

- Anthony, Laura G., et al. "The Relationships between Parenting Stress, Parenting Behaviour and Preschoolers' Social Competence and Behavior Problems in the Classroom." *Infant and Child Development*, vol. 14, 2005, pp. 133–154.
- Aquilino, William S. "Impact of Family Structure on Parental Attitudes toward the Economic Support of Adult Children over the Transition to Adulthood." *Journal of Family Issues*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2005, pp. 143–167.
- Aristotle. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Translated by S. H. Butcher, Hill and Wang, 1961.
- Barrett, Anne E., and R. Jay Turner. "Family Structure and Mental Health: The Mediating Effects of Socioeconomic Status, Family Process, and Social Stress." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2005, pp. 156–169. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002214650504600203>.

- Baxter, Leslie A., Dawn O. Braithwaite, and John H. Nicholson. "Turning Points in the Development of Blended Families." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1999, pp. 291–313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407599163002>.
- Botwe, Emmanuel. *The Impact of Step Parenting on the Health, Behavior and Development of School-Aged Children*. CUNY Academic Works, 2019.
- Braithwaite, Dawn O., et al. "Feeling Warmth and Close to Her? Communication and Resilience Reflected in Turning Points in Positive Adult Stepchild-Stepparent Relationships." *Journal of Family Communication*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2018, pp. 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2017.1415902>.
- Carlson, Marcia J., and Daniel R. Meyer. "Family Complexity: Setting the Context." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 654, no. 1, 2014, pp. 6–11.
- Coleman, Marilyn, Lawrence Ganong, and Mark Fine. "Reinvestigating Remarriage: Another Decade of Progress." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2000, pp. 1288–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01288.x>.
- Cooper, Carey E., et al. "Family Structure Transitions and Maternal Parenting Stress." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2009, pp. 558–574.
- Cummings, E. Mark, et al. "Interparental Discord and Child Adjustment: Prospective Investigations of Emotional Security as an Explanatory Mechanism." *Child Development*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2006, pp. 132–152.
- Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Planet eBook, 1850.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. 2nd ed., W. W. Norton, 1963.
- Eskins, Steven A. *The Role of Alter Egos within David Copperfield*. 1990. William & Mary, dissertation. <https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-52nr-0g06>.
- Franzen, Jonathan. *The Corrections*. Picador-Farrar, 2001.
- Fraser, Preston F., and Robert Fraser. "A Qualitative Analysis of the Stepparent Role on Transition Days in Blended Families." *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 8, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.68020>.
- Ganong, Lawrence, and Marilyn Coleman. "How Society Views Stepfamilies." *Marriage & Family Review*, vol. 26, nos. 1–2, 1997, pp. 85–106.
- Gonzales, Jennifer. "Prefamily Counselling: Working with Blended Families." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, vol. 50, 2009, pp. 148–157.
- Hetherington, E. Mavis, Margaret Bridges, and Glendessa M. Insabella. "What Matters? What Does Not? Five Perspectives on the Association between Marital Transitions and Children's Adjustment." *American Psychologist*, vol. 53, no. 2, 1998, pp. 167–184.
- Jensen, Todd M., et al. "Stepfamily Relationship Quality and Children's Internalizing and Externalizing Problems." *Family Process*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2018, pp. 477–495. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12284>.

- Johnson, Deanna S. *Stepfamilies: Implications and Interventions for Children*. 2000. University of Northern Iowa, graduate research paper. UNI ScholarWorks, <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/936>.
- Killian, Tim S. "Intergenerational Monetary Transfers to Adult Children and Stepchildren: A Household Level Analysis." *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, vol. 42, nos. 1–2, 2004, pp. 105–130.
- King, Valarie, et al. "Adolescents' Perceptions of Family Belonging in Stepfamilies." *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 77, no. 3, 2015, pp. 761–774. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12181>.
- McLanahan, Sara, and Gary Sandefur. *Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Harvard UP, 1994.
- Mongeau, Paul A., Mary Lynn Miller Henningsen, and Bonnie M. Oliver-Blackburn. "Developmental Theories of Relationships: Uncertainty, Stage Model, and Turning Point Approaches to Relationships' Lifespan." *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication*, edited by Dawn O. Braithwaite and Paul Schrodtt, 3rd ed., Routledge, 2022, pp. 327–341.
- Nahkur, Oliver, and Dagmar Kutsar. "Family Type Differences in Children's Satisfaction with People They Live with and Perceptions about Their (Step)parents' Parenting Practices." *Social Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2022, article 223. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11050223>.
- Newman, Barbara M., and Philip R. Newman. *Development through Life: A Psychosocial Approach*. 13th ed., Cengage Learning, 2018.
- O'Rourke, Kathleen, and John C. Worzbyt. *Support Groups for Children*. Taylor & Francis, 1996.
- Payton, Sierra R. *An Exploration of the Quality of Relationship between Step-Children and Step-Parents Based on Address Term Usage*. 2018. Rowan University, thesis. Rowan Digital Works, <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2617>.
- Pew Research Center. "A Portrait of Stepfamilies." *Pew Research Center*, 13 Jan. 2011, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/01/13/a-portrait-of-stepfamilies/.
- Pew Research Center. "The American Family Today." *Pew Research Center*, 17 Dec. 2015, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/.
- Pong, Suet-Ling. "Family Structure, School Context, and Eighth Grade Math and Reading Achievement." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 59, no. 3, 1997, pp. 734–746.
- Sanner, Caroline, et al. "Effective Parenting in Stepfamilies: Empirical Evidence of What Works." *Family Relations*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12703>.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Comedies and the Histories*. Cambridge UP, 1986.
- van Houdt, Kirsten. "Adult (Step)parent-Child Relationships in Complex Families: A Latent Profile Analysis." *Journal of Family Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2023, pp. 660–682. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2021.1962730>.

Waldron, Vincent R., et al. "Paths to Positivity: Relational Trajectories and Interaction in Positive Stepparent-Stepchild Dyads." *Journal of Family Communication*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2022, pp. 33–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2021.1999243>.

Watkins, Gwen. *Dickens in Search of Himself*. U of Nebraska P, 1987.

Zill, Nicholas. "Understanding Why Children in Stepfamilies Have More Learning and Behavior Problems than Children in Nuclear Families." *Stepfamilies: Who Benefits? Who Does Not?* edited by Alan Booth and Judy Dunn, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994, pp. 97–106.