

# STEPFAMILIES

## FOR PROFESSIONALS:

### RESEARCH UPDATE

## PARTICIPATION IN HOUSEHOLD LABOR:

*Are adolescents in stepfamilies different from teens in other family forms?*

By Kay Pasley, ED.D  
Chair, Research Committee

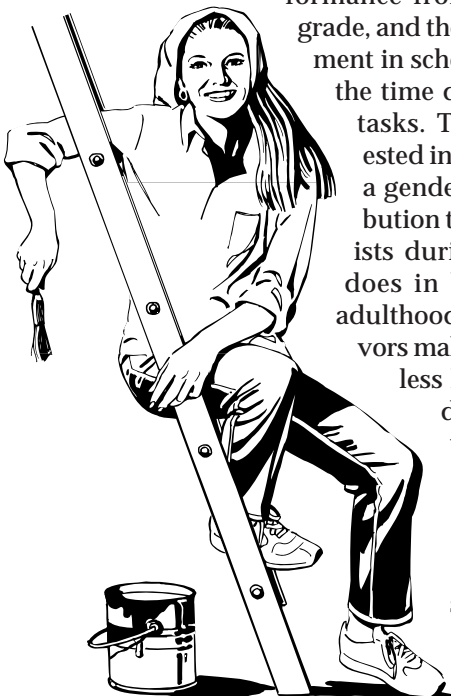
**H**ave you ever wondered whether your adolescent stepchildren are doing their fair share of tasks around the house? Findings from a recent study (Gager, Cooney, & Call, 1999) published in the November 1999 issue of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* may provide you with some insight into this important aspect of family life. The authors summarize the findings from their study of hundreds of teens regarding the types and time committed to various household chores, changes in chores and performance from 9th grade to 12th grade, and the influence of involvement in school and paid work on the time devoted to household tasks. They also were interested in determining whether a gender gap in one's contribution to household labor exists during adolescence as it does in both childhood and adulthood. This gender gap favors males, such that males do less household labor than do females. Of interest to those in stepfamilies or those professionals who work with members of stepfamilies, these scholars investigated the effects of certain family-related fac-

tors on adolescents participation in household labor, such as maternal employment, family structure, and family size.

Based on time availability theory, the authors assumed that the division of household labor in a family would reflect the constraints that members experience on their time. For example, in married couples, husbands would participate less in household labor than wives because they give more time to work outside the home. Similarly, parents who commit more time to paid employment, who have more children, or who are single (and don't have a partner with whom to share family demands) would be expected to have less time to commit to household chores. Some research supports these assumptions. For example, studies of children whose mothers are employed assume more responsibility in household tasks than do children whose mothers are not employed or who are employed less time. Similarly, children who live in a single-parent home are known to be more involved in household chores than are children living with both biological parents.

To answer these questions and test these assumptions, Gager and her associates used data from the four-year Youth Development Study which began in 1988 with a large sample (1,010) of 9th graders enrolled in St. Paul, MN, public schools. Students were asked how much time they spent in an average week doing each of 12 tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning the house, washing dishes, shopping for groceries, mowing grass, taking out the trash, caring for pets).

Not surprisingly, their findings showed that boys de-



*Continued on page P2*

## Participation in Household Labor

Continued from page P1

voted more time to male-typed chores, and girls contributed more time to female-typed chores. Further, boys devoted only 87% as much time as girls to household tasks in the 9th grade and about 68% as much time in the 12th grade. Boys also spent less time than girls in homework and paid employment in both the 9th and 12th grades. However, during this period of high school, boys participated more in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music clubs) than did girls. Important for understanding family stress is their finding that during high school, both boys and girls invested less time in household tasks and more time was spent in paid employment and homework. The bottom line in these findings is that girls do more than boys and the time difference is about doubled by 12th grade, even when there is an increase in time devoted to activities outside the family, such as school and work.

Of interest to members of stepfamilies are their findings regarding family structure. First, they found that teens from large families (including those with stepsiblings) do more household tasks than do teens in small families; these findings are more robust for female adolescents by 12th grade, who also are more likely involved in the care of younger siblings and stepsiblings. Second, in the 9th grade teens living with a single parent spent more time on female-type chores when compared with teens living with both biological parents. Interestingly, teens who lived with a remarried parent in the 9th grade also contributed less time to male-typed tasks than those living with both biological parents.

Changes had occurred by the 12th grade such that those in single-parent homes were devoting the most time to all types of household chores compared with teens living with both biological parents. In addition, those residing with a stepparent showed a similar pattern of more participation in household tasks compared with those teens in a two biological-parent family, especially in terms of female-type tasks.

Taken together, these findings suggests that there is a gender gap in adolescent participation in household labor – a gap that has been reported for younger children, as well as adults. In other words, across high school, girls contribute more to family labor than do boys in spite of the fact that they also become more involved in outside activities (e.g., paid employment) during this period. Further, these findings suggest that the pattern of greater involvement in household chores on the part of adolescents when living with a single parent carry over to life in a stepfamily. When adolescents live with a parent and

stepparent, they continue to report contributing to household chores at higher levels than adolescents who live with both biological parents.

### References

Gager, C. T., Cooney, T. M., & Call, C. T. (1999). *The effects of family characteristics and time use on teenager's household labor.* Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61, 982-994.

## Call for Cases

Starting with the next issue of *Stepfamilies*, we will be presenting a case for discussion. We will ask three practicing therapists to comment on each case. If you have a suitable case for review, please send it to us at the SAA office no later than October 15, 2000. Please make appropriate changes in the information so that confidentiality is ensured. If you are a clinical affiliate of SAA and are interested in being on the team of therapists making comments, please let us know.

## SAA Board Member Receives Award

Laura Morgan who is a member of the Stepfamily Association Board of Directors was recently given the "President's Child Support Community Service Award" by the National Child Support Enforcement Association. This organization has 15,000 government attorneys who work in child support.

Laura is a Senior Attorney for Family Law at the National Legal Research Group in Charlottesville, Virginia, and is the Chair of the Child Support Committee of the Family Law Section of the American Bar Association.

She is the author of *Child Support Guidelines: Interpretation and Application* (Aspen Law & Business, 1996 & supps.), the leading treatise on child support guidelines in the United States, as well as a contributing author to numerous manuals and compilations.

# Stepfamily Association of America, Inc. Professional Training Institute

*Concurrent Two-Day Seminars, Co-Sponsored by SAA & the University of Houston*

## October 6 & 7, 2000 – Houston, Texas

### UNDERSTANDING STEPFAMILIES

Features nationally recognized experts in the stepfamily field. For professionals and students seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of stepfamilies and stepfamily dynamics. Sessions explore transition from divorce to remarriage, the most up-to-date and relevant research findings, and developmental processes and dynamics of stepfamily life from the perspective of adults and children. Specialty sessions provided for clinicians and family life educators. Completion of this seminar is prerequisite to *The Practice of Stepfamily Therapy*.

### THE PRACTICE OF STEPFAMILY THERAPY

This seminar is open only to those professionals who have completed *Understanding Stepfamilies* or are clinical affiliates of SAA. Clinical supervisors with expertise in stepfamily therapy offer a program that focuses on clinical assessment and strategies relevant to special needs of stepfamilies. Supervisors demonstrate effective strategies, provide case consultation to participants, and discuss new and innovative strategies for clinical intervention. A hallmark of this training is the use of a family facsimile, used as a graduate education-training tool the past eight years. The scenario chosen flows from the actors so when members of the stepfamily participate in therapy sessions the intake and therapy decisions made happen in real time rather than as a prepared role-play. Enrollment is limited to 14.

*12 CE CREDITS AVAILABLE FOR EACH SESSION*

For brochures contact: **STEPFAMILY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.**

650 J ST., STE. 205, LINCOLN, NE 68508

1-800-735-0329 • FAX: (402) 477-8317 • <http://www.stepfam.org>

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DAY PH # \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ FAX # \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ SAA MEMBER  YES  NO

- I am registering for:*  Understanding Stepfamilies – both days = \$275.00 \*  
 Full-Time Student – both days = \$140.00 \* (*with proof of current full-time student ID*)  
 Practice of Stepfamily Therapy = \$275.00 \* (*must have completed Understanding Stepfamilies or be a Professional Affiliate*) \* *Current SAA members will receive a 10% discount.*  
12 Continuing Education Credits available on request.

#### PAYMENT METHOD:

CHECK OR MONEY ORDER # \_\_\_\_\_ payable to STEPFAMILY ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

VISA/MASTERCARD # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please send completed registration to Stepfamily Association of America, 650 J St., Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508, or Fax: (402) 477-8317, Phone 1-800-735-0329 or E-mail: [StepfamFS@aol.com](mailto:StepfamFS@aol.com)

## FORWARD AND OUTWARD – FURTHER JOURNEYS IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

Barbara Perlmutter, MSW

*This is the third in a series of articles about developing a stepfamily-oriented focus within a private practice setting.*

**A**s my private practice interests broadened to include working with stepfamilies, I started to wonder about how I would get the word out to people who might need my services. It was clear to me that the time was definitely right. I was ripe for change. I had begun to attend trainings, to read about stepfamilies and I was additionally (or perhaps primarily) fueled by my personal life as a stepmother. My stepmother support groups were up and running. I was beginning to see other stepfamily members as well as stepmothers-ex's coming in with step-parents, biological parents alone and with partners and all combinations of the above.

Prior to my social work career I had been part of developing two small businesses, East Valley Gardens Herbal Vinegars and Gardenkeepers, a landscape gardening business. I had also been a cofounder of SHANTI, a nonprofit volunteer organization in Seattle. The experiences I had had with these enterprises in developing name recognition and visibility were helpful. It was time to formalize this part of my practice. I knew I needed a name and an identity which I could use as I began to market this aspect of my work. My minimal computer skills rapidly convinced me of the need for professional assistance in creating a brochure. The designer I found was terrific and provided everything I needed but a logo; for this I turned to a therapist/artist friend for help. Surprisingly, this was a very formative and critical step in the process of creating Stepfamily Consultation and Counseling. I confess I'd hoped and expected that my friend would do the logo for me and that would be that. As usually happens when you ask a therapist to do something for you, she politely declined and explained that she thought this piece needed to come from me rather than from her. She saw the logo as needing to reflect my personal vision, my own picture of what I wanted this work to be. Despite my initial panic, I later realized that it was tremendously helpful for me to take the time to let

that image develop within me, to think not only of a visual but also the "spirit" of my idea and what I wanted to make happen in my work. Gradually an idea formed of two dissimilar houses that would be separate yet attached. She sat me down with paper and brush and encouraged me to just start. After many failed attempts I actually came up with a "picture" I liked. I was nothing short of astonished. Next, I needed a name to go along with my logo. That was a lot easier! I knew I needed to appeal to a range of people, including those wanting therapy and those wanting education or issue-specific help. I also wanted the name to reflect my interest in consulting with individuals or other professionals and to be broad enough to include other possible services and activities.

Stepfamily Consultation and Counseling clearly described the practice I envisioned.

Most of the stepmothers in my groups continued well past the initial 8-week session. I got to know them well and began to see that there were many unmet needs in their stepfamilies. Through my experiences in the groups, I became increasingly aware of the importance of relevant information and education for stepfamily members, professionals and organizations.

My first opportunity to venture into the community came when I was approached by a local hospital that sponsored free Thursday evening public seminars. I was invited to offer an educational evening for stepparents. Attendance was surprisingly high (27) and the response was positive. Clearly, people needed this information. In addition, it appeared that participants were gaining a lot by interacting with the others in attendance. I was relieved to discover that my informal, interactive style worked well and contributed to creating a lively, informative forum. Over the last three years I have offered many 1 1/2 - 2 hour talks on remarriage and stepfamily life through community colleges, family/neighborhood centers and churches. I've had the pleasure of being invited to present to a group for gay and lesbian parents.



Helping stepfamilies create  
healthy relationships

Continued on page P5

## Journeys in Private Practice

Continued from page P4

This past year I had the opportunity to teach my first two-part class for the University of Washington Women's Center. I have also been invited to lecture on stepfamilies at a graduate level couples counseling class and an undergraduate introduction to counseling class. I am reimbursed for most of the presentations, although I occasionally give them for free, as it is an aspect of marketing and an important effort in establishing visibility and validity for the work. I've also found that there are many folks who cannot attend paid lectures and classes but who are desperate for some information. Despite the fact that teaching and presenting are a real "stretch" for me, I've been surprised at how much I enjoy it.

My clinical practice has continued to expand. I see many couples already in stepfamilies, as well as an increasing number of couples coming in for premarital stepfamily counseling. Occasionally a couple will bring an adolescent in with them, but usually I will refer families to a specialist. Increasingly, I have couples interested in a consultation on a specific issue (discipline, or finances, or boundaries with the "ex" for example) or for more general stepfamily education. Often, these clients will come two or three times; it is quite common for them to return at a later time for additional short-term work. Many couples come regularly for several months of counseling. I also have several stepfamily couples involved in more intensive, longer term, family-of-origin based psychotherapy. Each situation has its challenges and interests me for different reasons. I find the variety stimulating.

When several stepmothers in my groups reported that their husbands were expressing interest in attending their group, my husband, Steve, and I began to offer one-day workshops for couples. Some of these workshops have had general themes ("Stepfamily Life") and some have had more specific ones ("Nurturing the Couple Relationship" and "Roles and Responsibilities in Stepfamilies"). We combine an educational and experiential approach that provides a nice balance of interaction and information. The workshops have been very popular and we try to do them a few times each year. I remember preparing for the first one. My three stepkids were incredibly supportive of us going off to an all-day stepparenting workshop until they realized that we, whom they considered to be the ones in need of the workshop, were actually the ones giving it! The element of truth in their disbelief is that we always learn so much from the participants as we, too, struggle with our own stepfamily challenges.

Each season I send out a calendar of events. I'm al-

ways listening out for what's needed. Some things have been very popular, such as the seminar on Estate Planning for Stepfamilies given by an attorney. Those events specifically for men are the least popular; perhaps this reflects the need for a male facilitator. Last September the National Stepfamily Day picnic was very well-attended, while there was almost no interest in the Stepfamily Ropes Course I thought would be terrific. Most of the classes and public forums I propose are accepted and offered, though some are not well attended. A grant I coauthored for a lesbian stepparent group did not get funded. My energy for new ideas has been fueled both by the "sameness" of the private practice routine I've experienced for over 10 years, the energy that is generated by doing a variety of things and by the suggestions of those with whom I work. I hope this year to finally offer a much-demanded weekend retreat for stepmothers as well as coming up with a new format for meeting with groups of couples over an extended period of time.

What's on the immediate horizon? Well, next is a web site (check the SAA web page in the fall for my link). I will travel to Juneau, Alaska this fall where I will facilitate a training for professionals and Steve and I will offer a couples workshop. I'm currently consulting with two Seattle "steppmom group alumni" who are starting a local SAA chapter. Most recently I've been collaborating on several magazine articles with another stepparent psychologist. All of this takes an investment of time and energy and involves time away from earning the standard hourly wage.

The biggest challenges in this new venture have been developing ongoing stepfamily consultation for myself, finding ways of avoiding professional "isolation" (perhaps pairing up with or joining other health/mental health professionals would be worth considering), meeting the constant demand to develop and promote my ideas, and responding to the unrelenting stresses of self-employment. Another interesting demand is balancing a work life that has become increasingly focused on stepfamily issues with my home life in a stepfamily that, of course, has plenty of issues of its own. As always, I am eager to hear from others who have found their way through such challenges, who have an interest in these, and related topics, as well as from those of you who have created your own unique stepfamily work-lives.

*Please e-mail me at: [barbperl@juno.com](mailto:barbperl@juno.com), write to me at 613 19th Ave. E. #205, Seattle, WA 98112 or telephone me at 206-329-1711.*