




Identifying the Development of Trust in Step-Parent–Child Relationships




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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The sentence “Recent empirical findings highlight the critical role of parental involvement in promoting children’s well-being within stepfamilies...” lacks a transitional link to the first paragraph. Consider adding a sentence that explicitly connects “trust” as a mediator between parental involvement and children’s well-being to strengthen conceptual coherence.

The discussion on “trust beyond dyadic bonds” and “broader social interactions” is insightful but dense. Consider dividing the paragraph into two—one focusing on intrafamilial trust and another on sociocultural context—to enhance readability.

The reference to “Swedish longitudinal analyses” and “educational attainment” is interesting but tangential. The paragraph might benefit from briefly explaining how educational outcomes link to trust development (e.g., through emotional stability, parental modeling).

The claim “When parental honesty and transparency are compromised...” could be supported by a clearer theoretical framework (e.g., Erikson’s psychosocial trust theory or attachment theory). Integrating a theoretical anchor would improve scholarly depth.

The sentence “Conversely, when step-parents fail to clarify their roles, children may perceive interactions as intrusive or insincere...” effectively identifies a key phenomenon but would benefit from adding an example from Georgian culture to contextualize the problem culturally.

The phrase “We started calling ourselves ‘Team G,’ and it made us feel like a real family.” is evocative but could be analytically linked to the subtheme “Building Shared Family Identity.” The analysis would be stronger if the narrative was followed by explicit interpretive commentary.

The summary sentence “These themes illustrate how stepfamily members construct, test, and sustain trust...” is effective but could better connect findings to phenomenological constructs (e.g., “lived meanings,” “essence of experience”) to align with the interpretive approach.

The claim “The Georgian context, cultural expectations regarding parental authority amplified this challenge...” is valuable but underdeveloped. A more detailed discussion on how Georgian collectivism or patriarchal family structures mediate trust formation would enrich cross-cultural insight.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The last sentence—“Therefore, the present study aims to identify and describe the lived meanings...”—should explicitly mention the phenomenological approach to align the aim statement with the stated design and clarify the interpretive paradigm guiding the research.

The description “Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation...” lacks clarity on recruitment channels (e.g., counseling centers, community organizations). Including recruitment context would enhance methodological transparency.

The section mentions “semi-structured, in-depth interviews,” but the number of core guiding questions or example prompts is missing. Including two to three sample questions (e.g., “Can you recall a moment you first trusted your step-parent?”) would improve replicability.

The study reports using Braun and Clarke’s framework but omits discussion on reflexivity beyond journaling. Elaborating on how researchers’ positionality (e.g., cultural familiarity or personal experience with stepfamilies) may have influenced coding would strengthen trustworthiness.

The description of participants’ demographics is clear but reads as a statistical report. Consider linking demographic diversity to thematic richness—e.g., how rural versus urban participants differed in their trust narratives.

The table is comprehensive but overly detailed in the “concepts” column. Some concepts overlap semantically (e.g., “keeping promises” and “reliability over time”). Collapsing redundant codes could improve clarity and analytic parsimony.

The quote “At first, I kept thinking, ‘He’s not my real dad; why should I listen to him?’” is powerful but lacks participant coding or pseudonym (e.g., Participant 7, Male, 15). Labeling quotes would enhance transparency and allow cross-reference with demographic variation.

The authors state “Cultural and social expectations... amplified these difficulties, particularly in more traditional households.” This is an important sociocultural insight that deserves expansion—perhaps a short example of how “community stigma” manifested in participants’ experiences.

Response: Revised and uploaded the manuscript.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.