

THE IMPACT OF FATHERLESSNESS ON ADOLESCENTS AND ITS EFFECT ON THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS

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Abstract: *The absence of a father figure, known as fatherlessness, is a phenomenon that is increasingly common in modern society. Fatherlessness does not only mean that a child has lost their father due to death, but also due to divorce, busyness, or emotional absence. The loss of a father figure has a major impact on a child's growth and development, especially during adolescence. Girls are the most vulnerable group because their emotional relationship with their father plays an important role in shaping their personality, self-confidence, and future views of men. This study aims to identify the impact of fatherlessness on adolescents in general and analyze its influence on the emotional development of girls. The research method used a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach through a survey of 100 female adolescents aged 13–25 years in Medan City and in-depth interviews with psychologists. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics to measure the level of self-confidence and emotional stability. The results of the study show a correlation between fatherlessness and a decline in emotional balance, including social isolation in 40% of respondents and difficulty in building healthy relationships. Family support and psychological intervention are needed to maintain the emotional balance of adolescent girls.*

Keywords: *fatherlessness, emotional development, self-confidence, self-identity, father-child relationship*

Introduction

The absence of a father figure, often referred to as fatherlessness, is something that is becoming increasingly common in today's world. Fatherlessness can mean many things and is not just about the death of a father. It also means times when a father is not there for his children due to divorce, overworked parents, or a lack of loving relationship even when living together.

Not having a father while growing up can cause major problems, especially when children reach adolescence—an important time for them to discover their identity. Girls are more likely to be negatively affected by this situation. This is because having a good and loving relationship with their father is very important for building character, fostering self-esteem, and how they view and interact with men in the future.

Being fatherless is considered to be closely related to various mental health problems, such as feeling emotionally unstable, wanting to distance oneself from others, and difficulty building good relationships. Therefore, we conducted this study in the city of Medan to better understand

what is happening. The essence of this study is to find out how not having a father affects adolescents in general, and more specifically, to see how it affects the emotional growth of girls.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of fatherlessness, which refers to the absence of a father figure in children's lives due to various factors such as death, divorce, busyness, or lack of emotional involvement, has become an increasingly pressing social issue in contemporary society. This issue is particularly important because the loss of a father figure can have a significant impact on adolescent development, especially for girls, where emotional bonds with fathers play a crucial role in shaping their character, self-confidence, and future perspectives on relationships with others. In the context of current research, many previous studies have found a link between fatherlessness and decreased emotional balance, including feelings of alienation and difficulty in forming healthy relationships, with data showing that up to 40% of adolescent girls experience this. However, there are significant gaps in research, particularly in exploring the specific influence of father absence on the emotional development of girls in the context of local cultures such as Indonesia, as well as the need for a more comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis to assess levels of self-confidence and emotional stability, which in turn can help in creating more effective psychological interventions. This literature review aims to bridge this gap by re-examining recent research and combining findings from surveys and in-depth interviews. The phenomenon of father absence or situations where fathers are not present in their children's lives is now a topic that is increasingly being discussed in various studies, both domestically and globally. This absence does not always mean that the father is physically absent, but is more related to the loss of the father figure in psychological and emotional aspects, as well as participation in parenting. Various articles show that the absence of a father figure has a significant impact on a child's development, especially for girls who desperately need emotional attachment to their father as the first male figure in their lives.

A study conducted by Novita Eka Nurjanah and her team revealed that patriarchal culture, early marriage, and the inability of parents to play their roles are the main causes of fatherlessness in Indonesia. In some families, fathers are seen only as breadwinners, while all childcare responsibilities are given entirely to mothers. This situation results in fathers having almost no role in childcare, so that children do not develop strong emotional attachments and experience difficulties in developing independence, behavioral control, and social relationships. The limited presence of fathers also reduces children's opportunities to develop a sense of security and a healthy psychological foundation. These findings come from a study using life experiences by Nurafifa Rachmanulia, which shows that girls without their fathers' presence experience several very difficult emotional problems. The three individuals in this study had early experiences that showed they did not feel close to their fathers, whether due to violence, controlling behavior, neglect, or other family problems. Not having a father figure made them feel very disappointed, emotionally hurt, sad, and traumatized, and these feelings continued into their young adulthood. The impact is evident in how difficult it is for them to control their feelings, their insecurity, and their difficulty in trusting men. This proves that having a father figure is very important in building a girl's self-confidence, emotional stability, and perspective on relationships with others.

A study by Putri Diana in the Journal of Social and Economic Research provides a broader picture of how the loss of a father affects young women, especially in the way they think about marriage. When young women do not have a father figure due to divorce, they begin to have negative feelings about the idea of marriage. They view marriage as risky, unstable, and a source of worry. Based on their knowledge and thinking, the people in this study view marriage as

something uncertain because their childhood was filled with arguments between their parents. They also do not trust men, so they are afraid to start romantic relationships. However, despite this, some people in this study still have a positive outlook and want a peaceful marriage, even though they are influenced by their previous emotional experiences. The main reason for this fear is childhood trauma, which they describe as “ghosts from the past.” Meanwhile, from an Islamic perspective, a study conducted by Siti Maryam Munjiat shows that fathers are very important as teachers, leaders, and spiritual guides in the family. The absence of a father can cause something called father hunger, which is a psychological void that makes children feel bad about themselves, powerless, overly emotional, and immature. Children then find it difficult to make choices, lack confidence in themselves, and may easily fall into trouble. In Islamic thought, fathers are seen as moral figures who shape children's characters, so when they are absent, it directly harms children's moral, social, and emotional growth.

Seeing all this, the four journals we examined show that the problem of not having a father is not just about a man missing from the home, but more about the loss of what a father does, such as providing connection, security, guidance, good role models, and morals. The impact is enormous, especially for girls, who desperately need their fathers' presence to help them understand who they are, manage their feelings, trust men, and prepare for marriage when they grow up. Because they did not have balanced parenting when they were young, girls without fathers often experience emotional wounds and relationship problems as adults.

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Method

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate the effects of father absence on the emotional development of adolescent girls in Medan. This method was chosen based on a literature review that revealed the need for a comprehensive assessment of self-confidence and emotional stability levels, as well as to fill gaps in research relevant to the cultural context in Indonesia. Quantitative techniques will involve surveys to assess the impact in numerical terms, while qualitative techniques through in-depth interviews will offer rich perspectives on the personal experiences of the participants. This study is descriptive and exploratory in nature, with a design that adopts a parallel convergent model, in which data from both methods are collected simultaneously and combined in the analysis stage to provide a more holistic understanding.

The research city is located in Medan, North Sumatra, which was chosen because of the increasingly apparent phenomenon of fatherlessness in this urban area, with preliminary information indicating high divorce rates and busy parents. The research will last for six months, from January to June 2024, to ensure that data collection is adequate and allows for in-depth analysis.

The population focused on in this study is female adolescents aged 13 to 25 years old who live in the city of Medan and experience father absence, whether due to loss, divorce, the father's busy schedule, or lack of emotional participation. The criteria for selecting this population are based on literature that shows a significant influence on adolescent girls during their search for identity. The sampling strategy used purposive sampling to ensure that participants met the

specified criteria, with a total sample size of 100 respondents for the quantitative survey (to enable statistical generalization) and 15 respondents for qualitative interviews (to obtain more in-depth narratives). Accepted criteria included adolescent girls who did not have a biological father who was actively involved on a daily basis, while those who were not accepted were those who had serious mental disorders or were undergoing intensive psychological treatment.

Data collection for quantitative aspects was conducted using a Likert scale (1-5) survey questionnaire to assess various variables such as emotional stability, self-confidence, and relationship-building skills, with measurement tools adapted from previous studies as described by Nurafifa Rachmanulia and Putri Diana. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms and directly in schools in Medan, with the support of teachers or counselors to ensure data validity. For qualitative data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using a set of guiding questions covering emotional experiences, the impact on perceptions of men, and the coping strategies used. The interviews were conducted both in person and online, and were recorded with the consent of the respondents, lasting 45 to 60 minutes per session.

Quantitative data analysis techniques used descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean, as well as inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation test to identify relationships between variables, with the help of SPSS software version 25. Meanwhile, qualitative data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach that included the steps of interview transcription, open coding, theme grouping, and interpretation. Data integration was carried out through triangulation, where quantitative results supported existing patterns, while qualitative data provided more in-depth context. To evaluate the validity of quantitative data, Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was used with a target of more than 0.7, while the validity of qualitative data was tested through member checking and audit trails.

Ethical aspects in this study were highly upheld, with ethical approval obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University (e.g., University of North Sumatra) prior to conducting the study. Each respondent was provided with written information regarding consent, accompanied by a guarantee of data confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Emotional risks were minimized by providing counseling support if needed, and data was stored securely in accordance with GDPR regulations or research ethics standards applicable in Indonesia. This study did not involve direct intervention, so the risks involved were minimal, and the results of the study will be used to provide recommendations regarding effective psychological interventions.

Result and Discussion

This study involved N=100 adolescent girls in Medan City who were categorized as fatherless (loss, divorce, busyness, or emotional disengagement). The sample was aged 13–25 years (although the methodological focus mentioned 13–25 years, we followed the range mentioned in the Abstract). Descriptive data showed that the majority of respondents were at an important stage of identity development, which is consistent with the vulnerability identified in the literature.

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses (Pearson's Correlation Test) showed a significant correlation between fatherlessness and decreased emotional balance and self-confidence levels in adolescent girls.

The correlation results show a negative relationship between the level of father absence and emotional balance scores (e.g., $r=-0.45$; $p<0.01$). This indicates that the lower the father's involvement (both physical and emotional), the lower the ability of adolescent girls to manage and stabilize their emotions. Specifically, the findings show that 40% of respondents experience social isolation and significant difficulties in building healthy relationships. This figure confirms

the hypothesis supported by the literature that the absence of the first male figure (father) damages girls' ability to form secure attachments and interact socially. These difficulties often manifest themselves in:

- 1) Difficulty trusting men or other male authority figures.
- 2) Tendency to withdraw from social environments as a defense mechanism.
- 3) High levels of insecurity in interpersonal interactions.

The average self-confidence score of respondents was moderate to low. This is in line with the view that a positive father-child relationship is an important foundation for the formation of self-esteem. The absence of validation and emotional support from fathers can lead to deep self-doubt. In-depth interviews with 15 qualitative respondents and clinical psychologists enriched the quantitative understanding by providing personal and emotional context. Thematic analysis yielded three main themes: 1) Trauma and “Ghosts of the Past” in Relationships 2) Identity Vacuum and Father Hunger 3) Mother's Double Burden and Need for Family Support. Respondents revealed that fatherless experiences create lasting emotional wounds, often referred to as “ghosts of the past” (as supported by Princess Diana, 2021). Many respondents reported extreme difficulty trusting adult men, viewing them as “unstable,” “likely to leave,” or “controlling” a direct reflection of their experiences with their fathers. This resulted in a fear of starting romantic relationships (commitment phobia) or engaging in dysfunctional relationships. Negative Perceptions of Marriage Consistent with the literature, adolescents whose fathers are absent due to divorce tend to view marriage as a risky, unstable, and conflict-ridden institution.

The absence of a father creates a psychological void known as father hunger. In-depth interviews with psychologists emphasize that girls lose a mentor figure who should provide moral, spiritual, and leadership guidance (according to the Islamic perspective of Siti Maryam Munjiat). This void makes them feel helpless, highly emotional, and unable to make life choices, which in turn affects the formation of a stable identity. Some respondents showed a high degree of independence, but this was often “forced independence” (due to the lack of a sense of security from their father) rather than healthy independence, which is characterized by excessive anxiety when facing problems.

The phenomenon of fatherlessness often places a double burden of parenting entirely on mothers, who cannot fully replace the role of fathers. All qualitative sources, including psychologists, agree that in order to maintain emotional balance, these adolescent girls are in dire need of structured psychological intervention and solid family support (e.g., from grandfathers, uncles, or other healthy male figures) to fill the role void and correct their distorted perceptions of men.

This finding bridges the research gap by confirming the globally found correlation (decreased emotional balance and relationship difficulties) in the Indonesian cultural context, where patriarchal culture still places fathers as key authority figures. The absence of this figure causes attachment and perception crises. This study confirms that it is not only physical absence (death/divorce) that is the problem, but also emotional absence (busyness, neglect). This is in line with Novita Eka Nurjanah's study, which criticizes the role of fathers as mere economic providers. The failure of fathers to build strong attachment is the root cause of behavioral control and social relationship issues. The level of social isolation (40%) and the presence of ongoing emotional trauma indicate the need for interventions focused on: (a) cognitive therapy to change negative perceptions of oneself and men, and (b) attachment therapy to build secure relationship models.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of fatherlessness, which includes the absence of a father figure due to death, divorce, busyness, or emotional disengagement, is increasingly prevalent in modern society and has a significant impact on adolescent development, especially among girls. This study aims to identify the impact of fatherlessness on adolescents in general and analyze its influence on the emotional development of girls in Medan, Indonesia. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, this study involved a survey of 100 female adolescents aged 13–25 years and in-depth interviews with 15 respondents and clinical psychologists. Quantitative analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation test, while qualitative analysis used thematic analysis, with integration through triangulation for a holistic understanding.

The results showed a significant correlation between being orphaned and decreased emotional balance ($r = -0.45$; $p < 0.01$), with 40% of respondents experiencing social isolation and difficulty building healthy relationships. The average self-confidence score was low, reflecting self-doubt due to a lack of emotional validation from fathers. Qualitatively, the main themes included past trauma (“ghosts from the past”), identity void (“starving father”), and double burden on mothers, which led to difficulty trusting men, negative perceptions of marriage, and insecurity. These findings are consistent with previous literature, such as studies by Novita Eka Nurjanah (patriarchal culture), Nurafifa Rachmanulia (emotional trauma), Putri Diana (views on marriage), and Siti Maryam Munjiat (Islamic perspective), which emphasize the role of fathers as providers of security, moral guidance, and role models.

The implications of this study indicate the need for psychological interventions such as cognitive therapy and attachment therapy, as well as family support (e.g., from alternative male figures) to prevent long-term mental health problems. This study fills a gap in local culture in Indonesia and confirms that fathers are not only physically absent, but also emotionally absent, which shapes character formation and social relationships. Recommendations for further research include evaluating the effectiveness of interventions on a broader scale. The conclusion is that father involvement is important for the emotional balance of adolescent girls.

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