

## Emotional Impacts among Adolescents of Divorced Parents

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore the understanding, impact on emotions, and ways of emotional management of adolescents of divorced parents. The study also explores their ways of dealing with the issue of divorce. The study method was qualitative with a case study design. Interviews with four study participants were conducted with adolescents of divorced parents. A set of questions was drafted as an interview guide and transcribed. Next, it is analyzed using thematic and coding methods. The results of this study show that adolescents of divorced parents have a clear understanding of divorce. There are effects on emotions before, during, and after the divorce. It shows that these divorces have a big impact on the emotional transition they feel and it is difficult to shift to positive emotions. The way of emotional management stated by the respondents covers various aspects and a comprehensive conclusion can be concluded.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Adolescence, Parenting, Divorce, Emotional Management

### Introduction

The family is a comprehensive human institution in which it consists of a structured group of members with the function of socializing the newborn children. Functionalist sociologists define the family according to its function. They see how the family is connected to other parts of society. In society, the family fulfils the basic functions, namely for the development of offspring, socialization, emotional support and social status. The family is the centre of emotional life, a place where children will find support or reassurance. Children will lose emotional support and love in the event of divorce in the family because the parents no longer live together. The group of students in this study were referred because they often caused problems to teachers and peers throughout the school hours. According to a study from Murat et al (2019), negative thoughts drive them to make mistakes. The best way to deal with disciplinary issues is through thought, while the best place to be given an intervention is the place where a student spends the most time. According to Ningrum (2013), divorce for a child is a sign of the death of the integrity of his family so that it seems that half of the children's selves have been lost. The ability to focus on a variety of things involving emotions, thoughts, and actions will be affected due to feelings of loss, rejection and abandonment.

Having a divorced parent is very difficult in the process of accepting the child's self, and most of the parents who take action to divorce are due to covering up the shortcomings possessed by their respective selves. The process of self-acceptance in a child in the situation of a divorced parent will be able to restore happiness in the child's life (Zulkefli & Mustapha, 2016). Divorce that occurs in a family is a big transition, especially for children. Losing a parent causes them to experience different emotional and behavioural reactions. Parental behaviour before, during, and after divorce has a significant impact on a child's emotions toward family divorce. Emotional problems resulting from parental divorce will affect adolescents in particular. This leads to the existence of various types of emotions and feelings that are felt and experienced by adolescents facing the crisis of parental divorce. They may show difficulty adjusting in the form of behavior, learning difficulties or dislike of social activities. Children from families that experience divorce will experience a variety of emotions and feelings due to the absence of parents as the main driver in ensuring the functioning of a family runs smoothly. Among the emotions that are often associated with children when their parents' divorce are feelings of sadness, depression, shame, anger, hatred, guilt and so on. Emotional disclosure, that is, whether the emotions felt are expressed or not, depends on the adolescent self.

There are children who can express emotions but are unable to express the emotions they feel as a result of their sadness and stress. This emotional outburst is included in children's emotional management. So, emotional management is something that is important to help in providing support and encouragement to children while reducing the emotional problems faced. In addition to the strategies taken by the children themselves to manage emotions, social support is also a source of emotional management for children. If the issue of behaviour is taken lightly and not addressed properly, it will become deviant behaviour that causes big problems to society and the country in the future. For example, the increase in existing criminal cases involving students such as bullying, extortion, free sex, rape, drug addiction and murder has caused enough annoyance to the entire Malaysian society (Mohammad & Masroom, 2019). Therefore, these various problems of increasing concern need to be addressed with the best approach so that they do not continue to spread and add to existing concerns. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the understanding, impact on emotions, and ways of emotional management of adolescents of divorced parents.

## **Literature Review**

### *Emotions of Children of Divorced Parents*

Children's reactions to divorce vary according to their personalities and relationships with parents. According to Yahaya *et al* (2006), the reaction of children to this divorce depends on several factors, such as factors of age, gender and the degree of disharmony that existed in a family before the divorce, as well as the degree to which people around them are willing to provide moral support to the children. A study from Zulkefli *et al* (2016) stated that parental divorce will have an emotional impact or impact on children who are still learning either negative or positive emotions. According to Tullius, De Kroon, Almansa and Reijneveld (2021), students from divorced families will feel a deep loss in themselves and easily feel heartbroken suddenly with things happening around them that are beyond their control. In addition, students who are faced with divorced parents will experience a variety of emotions and feelings due to the absence of parents as the main driver in ensuring the functioning of a family runs smoothly. Among the emotions that are often associated with children when

experiencing parental divorce issues are feelings of sadness, depression, shame, anger, hatred, guilt and so on (Zulkefli *et al.*, 2016).

### ***Emotional Management***

A study by D'Onofrio and Emery (2019) aimed to find out the emotional management between genders and the emotions shown by male and female students when faced with parental divorce. Studies show that divorce crises in families cause female students to feel more embarrassed than males. From the point of view of positive emotions, female adolescents show more positive emotions, namely love, compared to male students. Nevertheless, male students have more happy emotions. In addition, male adolescents are more focused on negative emotions such as hate and anger than females. In terms of emotional expression, female students express less emotion than males. The results of the study found that the average respondent manages emotions with help from good friends and followed by help from mothers and counselors.

While Anderson (2014) found that the majority of students experience emotional stress and show symptoms of psychological disorders. Most students use positive ways, although some take negative actions such as smoking and taking drugs to deal with stress due to divorced parents. Hashemi and Homayuni (2017) study showed that students among divorced parents need support and communication between the child and both parents. It aims to reconstruct the self-concept of children who have been distressed by the family crisis that has occurred. Support from close individuals also allows the student to be inclined to think positively and they can accept parental divorce.

In the study of Wolchik *et al* (2019), the findings show that children have a variety of emotions felt when parents' divorce. Among the feelings they showed was feeling insecure and thinking that their future would be bleak. They also show feelings of sadness, anger, loneliness and self – blame. When they feel less of the love given by their parents after a divorce, they will tend to show unstable emotions. This study also shows that the involvement of parents in motivating children as well as providing support between methods of managing children's emotions so that children can perform daily routines without limits. Parental involvement in children's emotions is very important because when a divorce occurs, the children still do not fully understand what is happening.

### ***Emotional Support***

In the study by Zulkefli *et al* (2016), families, especially parents, are responsible for providing support to children even when divorce has occurred. Therefore, support from the point of view of internal needs, for example emotional support, should be given to children even if the parents are divorced. Furthermore, family harmony is also achieved through good family relationships in a family. The involvement of peers in providing support to students can also increase the motivation and enthusiasm of a student in continuing his life well (Zardini *et al.*, 2021). According to Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley and Markman (2008), this is because adolescents spend more time with friends and make it easier for them to express all their feelings towards their own friends. This statement is supported by Schaan *et al* (2019), which in their studies stated that most students express their sadness and anger to friends who they are comfortable with and who understand the situation they are going through. In

addition, support from friends is very important, especially when students have difficulty controlling their emotions so that they do not do or get caught up in negative things.

It is clear that divorce leads to more negative effects, especially on the emotional, emotional, and psychological aspects of the children. This condition can impair self-development and prevent them from getting perfect love, as well as interfere with their academic achievement. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the emotions experienced by students whose parents are divorced and how they manage those emotions. In addition, the study also tries to describe the driving factors of excellence.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a qualitative study using a case study approach because it aims to explore the experiences of adolescents consisting of divorced parents. Since this study is preliminary research, the selection of the four study participants is based on the following two criteria: i) parents who have divorced, and ii) adolescents who are students. All four study participants were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. The interviews were recorded using audio recording software on a smartphone. These recordings were converted into verbatim form before being analyzed using thematic analysis in stages. The first stage involved open coding where the researcher had coded all the words and sentences that gave meaning throughout the interview period. Upon completion of open coding, the researchers next performed category coding involving analysis of the same open codes categorized under the same category name. Next, to get a theme, each of the same categories is grouped into one theme. As a result, the researchers have removed three themes from this phased thematic analysis.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The results of the study show three main discussions, namely (i) *the understanding of divorce*, (ii) *the effect of divorce on emotions* and (iii) *the method of emotional management*.

#### ***The Understanding of Divorce***

The first objective of this study is to explore the understanding of divorce among adolescents. All four study participants expressed an understanding of divorce of the same meaning. All the study participants argued that the definition of divorce is the separation of the relationship between two parties or individuals, namely, a husband and a wife who are no longer legally allowed to live together. The following is the statement of study participant 1 (PK1): -

*"In my view, the divorce is where my parents don't have any legal relationship or bond anymore."*

(PK1/59/3)

The stated meaning of divorce not only refers to a relationship that is nothing but also a bond that is no longer valid. This is in line with some definitions of divorce stated by previous studies where the divorce refers to the non-existence of a relationship between two parties as well as an invalid bond (Obeid *et al.*, 2021). This can be seen in terms of the context of Islam, wherein establishing a relationship between husband and wife is forged from a valid bond through a marriage contract, and when there is a divorce, then indirectly the relationship does not exist along with an illegal bond (Wauterickx *et al.*, 2006).

This study defines divorce as a context of separation between husband and wife not only in terms of words but also in physical terms. This is because the purpose of the divorce is that the husband and wife do not live in the same house. It can be seen from previous studies where when a couple divorces, then indirectly the husband or wife will leave the house and only one of them is responsible for their children at the same time with reference to the established law (Moktar & Omar, 2018). The following is the statement of participant 2 (PK2):

-  
*"Divorce is a separation between husband and wife. They are not living under the same roof anymore."*

(PK2/59/3)

Divorce and separation are two different but still closely related contexts (Supratman, 2015). A divorce is the termination of the marriage wherein it states that the separation happened between the husband and wife and ends immediately. Meanwhile, separation is where both parties no longer live together, but are still legally married. It only applies if it involves the jurisdiction of the court (Collardeau & Ehrenberg, 2016). However, this study reveal that the understanding about divorce is misleading among adolescents. This can give negative perception towards their parents who can be together in all aspects. Thus, the following is the statement of participant 3 (PK3):

-  
*"Divorce means separation between husband and wife."*

(PK3/59/3)

This study described the meaning of divorce is happen when a husband and wife did not like each other and chose to separate. In this context, it involves the internal aspect of a person where the prominence of dislike refers to the non-uniformity of perspective between the two parties then the divorce occurs (Cummings, Goeke-Morey & Papp, 2003). The following is the statement of participant 4 (PK4):

-  
*"Husband and wife separate because they are no longer like each other."*

(PK4/59/3)

### **The Effect of Divorce on Emotions**

The objective 2 has produced three sub themes related to the effect of divorce, namely (i) effects before divorce, (ii) effects during divorce and (iii) effects after divorce.

#### **Pre – Divorce Effects**

All four participants of this study had happy emotions, were in good shape and had no problems before the divorce occurred. The following are the statements of study participants:

-  
*"The emotions I felt before the divorce was definitely happy. Happy like everyone else's family. I don't have any problems."*

(PK1/63/4)

*"Before my parents' divorce, we lived in a happy state."*

(PK2/62/3)

*"Before my parents' divorce, I felt okay, happy."*

(PK3/62/3)

*"Before my parents divorced, everything was okay. Fine."*

(PK4/62/3)

The conditions experienced by adolescents in this study, before the divorce, feature a normal family where they are a blessing for marriage and bring joy and happiness. At the same time, the parents did indeed practice many dynamics to raise their children depended

on the parental values and their ability to have a unified cohesion in maintaining integrity in their family. Each parent in this study assigns the best responsibilities to their children without looking at what actually happens between their parents (Sands et al., 2017). However, there are some previous studies not in line with the findings of this study in which interviews conducted among children in the United States argued that most of them experienced unhappy emotions before divorce occurred (Mohammad & Masroom, 2019). This is most likely due to the factor of neglecting the responsibilities of children and there is already a conflict between parents that can be seen or felt by their children. As a result, their emotions are mostly unhappy and unstable.

### ***Effects During Divorce***

Referring to the emotions that result during divorce, all case studies have provided different perspectives and understandings about the emotions that the adolescents experienced. However, according to the findings, the adolescents experienced negative emotions. The details are as follows: -

*"But during the divorce process, I didn't feel anything...numb"*

*(PK1/64/4)*

*"During the divorce process, I felt angry, sad and frustrated."*

*(PK2/62/3)*

*"During the divorce, I felt sad and depressed."*

*(PK3/62/3)*

*"During the process of getting a divorce, everything was a mess, chaotic. I feel sad."*

*(PK4/63/3)*

The result shows the negative impact on emotion among the children. Not feeling anything does indeed exist in the process of emotional development when one is confronted with something (Wolchik *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies have said that the expansion of emotions from real emotions to emotions that have no element of anger or sadness symbolizes a person's personality where his premonition is like knowing it will happen, then when it does, the resulting emotion has no such elements (Zulkefli *et al.*, 2016). The resulting emotion showed that the real emotion was when the hiding was done by the parents and therefore, the disclosure made by them at that time did not surprise the study sample and the emotion was only able to feel nothing.

Meanwhile, for case study participants 2, 3 and 4, each produced similar emotions, namely anger, sadness and frustration. It is in line with previous studies where the emotions expressed were normal emotions for loss. This is because, for them, divorce is very scary, regardless of age. It is fraught with fighting, anger and manipulation felt from both sides (Ningrum, 2013). There are study participants who do not feel anything at first and it is likely that the act of hiding the emotions of anger, sadness and frustration until they can overcome it. When a person is coping, then he or she can open up to venting his or her emotions (Murat *et al.*, 2019).

### ***Post – Divorce Effects***

The findings have shown a variety of effects on the emotions that result after a divorce occurs. Overall, each case study displayed a different emotional concept no matter what type of situation. The following are the statements by the study participants: -



*"I often feel sad because of jealousy when I see my other friends and cousins having complete family members."*

*(PK1/70/4)*

*"After the divorce, I felt empty. It's as if I have nothing else in this world."*

*(PK2/65/4)*

*"After their divorce, sometimes it's okay, sometimes it still feels sad even though they've been divorced for almost 10 years."*

*(PK3/63/3)*

*"After the divorce, sadness is still there. Who likes divorced parents? Your own family is ruined?"*

*(PK4/64/4)*

These findings suggest that the emotions that result after divorce on average have a significant impact on the longevity of their lives. This is because, as seen from the study, 3 participants who expressed their emotions in a situation that was still not stable and sad, even though their parents had divorced 10 years ago. In addition, participant 1 gave a somewhat different perception after the divorce occurred. There is no denying that the sad emotion is there after the divorce, but it is due to the jealousy factor of seeing other happy families. This comparison had a significant impact on them because they were not able to accept statements about their family that were not the same as statements about other families (Jackson & Fife, 2018). This comparative jealousy and liking factor can be seen in past studies where adolescents reported increased stress, anxiety and feelings of loneliness and abandonment (Abdullah & Fitrah, 2019). Some even complained that they felt embarrassed and felt a significant loss of self – esteem. This is similar to the emotions highlighted from case studies 1 and 4 where by reason of the divorce occurring and the abnormality experienced other than the other family, then these emotions of jealousy and comparisons often occur.

The findings show that the participants seemed to have nothing else in this world after the divorce took place. This is because adolescents are very vulnerable and divorce occurs when they are unable to fully articulate what is going on, making them confused and far from reality (Shanoora et al., 2020). The emotions expressed by the children indicated that they were suffering from poor mental health because of long term stress and feeling hopeless after the divorce took place. Thus, such emotions can lead to bad things happening, such as mental health, trauma and unexpected death. In another perspective, this emotion will also make a person have no direction in life in continuing life because of their stance on having nothing after divorce (Roper et al., 2020). The entire above case study suggests that comprehensive emotional support should be provided to those experiencing divorce so that it does not linger until they are older.

### ***The Method of Emotional Management***

The findings show the methods of managing emotions is different depending on their preference to release the tense and negative emotions. All the methods seem functioning as coping mechanisms. The following are the statements by the participants: -

*"I often think positively, listen to songs, pray a lot, cry to my heart's content and then get up again to move forward."*

*(PK1/92/5)*

*"I keep quiet and sleep a lot."*

(PK2/80/4)

*"I talk a lot with my good friends. Sometimes I listen to songs to enjoy more."*

(PK3/83/4)

*"I spend a lot of time with friends and listen to songs to calm my emotions."*

(PK4/78/4)

Participants 1 displayed ways of managing emotions as discussed by previous studies to transfer highly negative emotions such as sadness and anger through a simple four-step process of accepting, metabolizing, reorganizing and releasing emotions (Orcullo & Ismail, 2013). It can be seen from the way of emotion management practiced by the participants 1. Experiencing negative emotions is part of the human condition together. The acceptance continued by examining the reasons that made emotionally disturbed and how to overcome the challenges. Then, accompanied by rearranging the way the children want to use, such as listening to songs and thinking positively, the children release their emotions so as to be able to survive (Mohammad & Masroom, 2019). However, the methods used by all case studies are based on two different aspects, namely the physical aspect and the spiritual aspect (Xerxa *et al.*, 2020). For example, listening to songs, communicating and spending time with friends.

This applied physical aspect, to some extent, is able to give them the freedom to reduce their thoughts about the actual emotions that they are facing. These temporary disturbances or temporary deviations help them to less isolate themselves from reality, so that their emotions do not affect the health of the individual (Garriga & Pennoni, 2020). However, there are adolescents who have divorced parents are not fond of using methods that involve people around them, but are more solitary. This method is no stranger to the conventional methods adopted by others. Based on surveys in several countries, respondents assume that the most effective way of handling emotions is through self reflection, as it calms the mind and helps them understand their needs and wants (Abdul Rahman *et al.*, 2021). The same goes for the way of emotional management with sleep because it can momentarily separate a person from the problems that they facing. Based on previous studies, sleep is recommended for controlling emotions because of its potential for emotional balance (Lee & Bax, 2000). Along with past studies, there is also the suggestion of sleep as it refills the mind with positive things (Anderson, 2014). However, it does not guarantee effective management as it varies according to their respective capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study show three themes include an understanding of the meaning of divorce, the effects of emotional stress and ways of managing emotions. In terms of the definition of divorce, all case studies give the meaning of divorce the same understanding and answer the objectives to be achieved. As for the theme of the effect on emotions before, during, and after, it has a high similarity where the emotions of anger, sadness and frustration are the emotions produced by them and it is indeed impossible to escape the existence of those emotions. There is no denying that the concept of emotion is emphasized to look at the whole situation when a divorce occurs. Finally, only the theme of emotional management methods featured a different method for each case study because that method was guided by the comfort of the study sample. In conclusion, the findings of this study can be used as a guide for future study to further research, qualitatively or quantitatively on the issue of divorce and the long term effects toward the children. Taking into account their



understanding and the way they deal with the issue, a drastic and comprehensive strategy or approach is essential to maintain their well-being for the long term.

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