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A study of post-separation family dynamics and child mental health

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Abstract

Divorce refers to the end of the marital relationship between husband and wife, often arising from various causes, including poor communication. Beyond its impact on the couple, divorce also negatively influences the mental health of children within the family. This study seeks to explore the psychological effects of divorce on children through a literature review approach. Data were collected by analyzing diverse sources such as books, academic journals, and research reports. Findings reveal that divorce can lead children to experience stress, trauma, loneliness, social withdrawal, and difficulties with concentration in their studies. Moreover, children from divorced families often demonstrate lower academic achievement and face challenges in forming social relationships. In summary, parental divorce significantly affects children's mental health, with long-term implications for their emotional and social development. Consequently, it is essential for parents and other stakeholders to provide psychological support to help children navigate this situation more effectively.

Keywords: Children, divorce, family support, mental health, psychological impact

Introduction

Mental health represents an individual's emotional, psychological, and social equilibrium, enabling them to manage life's challenges, establish healthy relationships, and make sound decisions (Çaksen, 2021; Cao *et al.*, 2022; Pang *et al.*, 2024) ^[4, 5, 30]. When mental health is well maintained, a person experiences inner peace, adopts a positive perspective, and functions effectively in daily life (Ariani, 2019; Casas-Muñoz *et al.*, 2024) ^[2, 6]. In contrast, mental health disorders may manifest as emotional instability, excessive anger, or even physical symptoms without identifiable causes. Preserving mental health is vital across all stages of life, from childhood through adulthood (Pellón *et al.*, 2024; Sukmawati & Oktora, 2021) ^[31, 28]. Within this context, parents play a pivotal role, as the family environment serves as the primary foundation for shaping a child's psychological state. A lack of parental attention or household conflict—such as divorce—often places children at the greatest risk (Dadi *et al.*, 2023; Eldasari & Diana, 2024; Niu *et al.*, 2023) ^[8, 10, 27].

Children who experience parental divorce are vulnerable to a range of psychological and behavioral challenges, including difficulty regulating emotions, heightened anxiety, and feelings of loneliness. They may also struggle with learning difficulties and concentration disorders, which can negatively affect their academic performance and reduce their prospects for a successful future (Indriani *et al.*, 2018) ^[19]. Divorce, as a form of domestic instability, is often pursued as a last resort to resolve marital conflict. Nevertheless, it carries profound consequences for children's mental health (Tullius *et al.*, 2022) ^[39].

Children from divorced families often lose consistent emotional support from one parent, which can trigger feelings of insecurity, isolation, and heightened stress. Over time, this condition may contribute to maladaptive behaviors such as juvenile delinquency, school dropout, or difficulties in establishing healthy interpersonal relationships later in life (Asanjarani *et al.*, 2022; Øverup *et al.*, 2025) ^[3, 29]. These challenges are further intensified by social factors, including the stigma frequently associated with children of divorced families. A negative social environment can reinforce low self-esteem, making it even harder for children to recover from the trauma they have endured (Enami *et al.*, 2024; Riaka Ayu Lestari *et al.*, 2023) ^[11, 33]. Consequently, the presence of emotionally supportive parents and professional guidance from psychologists is essential in helping children cope with the

consequences of divorce (Mahendra *et al.*, 2022; Mone, 2019a) ^[21, 25]. This paper examines the impact of parental divorce on children's mental health, aiming to highlight the critical role of both family and society in providing adequate support. With appropriate measures—such as open communication and empathetic approaches—the negative effects of divorce can be mitigated, enabling children to grow with resilience, mental stability, and optimism for their future.

Review of Literature

Amini *et al.* (2024) conducted a study examining the effects of divorce on Iranian children. Participants completed a series of questionnaires addressing adjustment to divorce, personal beliefs, anxiety, stress, cultural identity, and the role of culture in divorce, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings indicated that adjustment to divorce and personal beliefs were negatively and positively correlated, respectively, with current levels of stress and anxiety.

Hooshmandi (2023) carried out a review exploring the implications of parental divorce on children's adjustment, emotional regulation, and depression. The study concluded that divorce significantly affects emotional adjustment. Children tend to evaluate their quality of life negatively when they perceive a gap or conflict with their parents. However, proactive coping strategies were found to enhance children's happiness.

Agusiobo *et al.* (2023) investigated the influence of divorce on the academic performance of primary school children. The study, conducted with 800 students using a structured questionnaire, revealed that children from divorced families encountered multiple educational challenges, including insufficient learning materials, poor concentration during lessons, and overall lower academic achievement.

Guetto *et al.* (2022) provided a comparative analysis of the impact of parental separation on children's educational attainment, taking into account parental socioeconomic background. The results demonstrated a stronger negative association between parental separation and the likelihood of obtaining a university degree among children of highly educated parents.

Sanayeh *et al.* (2022) examined the relationship between parental divorce and nicotine addiction among Lebanese adolescents. The study involved 1,810 participants aged 14-17 years from 16 schools, with data analyzed using linear regression. Findings revealed that adolescents from divorced families showed higher dependence on cigarettes and water pipes compared to those from intact families.

Tullius *et al.* (2022) investigated the timing of emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents following parental divorce and their long-term effects. The study included 2,230 children aged 10-12, with data assessed using the Youth Self-Report. Results indicated that parental separation often triggers emotional and behavioral difficulties in adolescents, which persist over time and require targeted attention and care.

Lange *et al.* (2022) hypothesized that children exposed to high-conflict divorces are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress symptoms. Using the Children's Revised Impact of Event Scale with a sample of 167 parents, the study found a positive correlation between parental conflict and children's PTSD symptoms.

Juwariah *et al.* (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of 715 articles across databases such as CINAHL, PubMed, and Scopus to explore the link between emotion regulation and academic achievement in children of divorce. The findings highlighted a significant relationship between parental separation, emotion regulation, and academic performance.

Muskan (2022) studied the impact of divorce on children's emotional development. The research concluded that children experiencing parental separation often struggle to form and sustain relationships with peers and family, withdraw socially, and become inattentive in classrooms, which negatively affects academic performance. Furthermore, these children are more vulnerable to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Issen (2022) analyzed the connection between divorce and the academic performance of high school students. The study emphasized that divorce imposes considerable stress on children, disrupting their daily routines and lowering self-esteem. Feelings of loneliness and abandonment were found to contribute to hostility toward teachers, rejection of school rules, and disengagement from academic responsibilities.

Research Methodology

This research employs a literature review method by examining a range of credible sources, including journals, academic articles, books, and other relevant documents. The purpose of this approach is to gather essential information regarding the impact of parental divorce on children's mental health. The analysis was carried out by comparing and evaluating findings from previous studies to achieve a deeper understanding of the issue. Through this method, researchers are able to identify recurring patterns, themes, and recommendations without the need for direct data collection. The outcomes of this literature review provide a comprehensive, theory-driven perspective on the effects of divorce on children, while also suggesting strategies to mitigate its negative consequences (Dzando *et al.*, 2025; Gharaibeh *et al.*, 2023) ^[9, 14].

Results and Discussion

Factors Contributing to Parental Divorce

Divorce signifies the dissolution of the marital bond, wherein a couple decides to terminate their relationship. In Islamic law, divorce becomes valid once the husband pronounces *talak*; however, in Indonesia, it must also be legalized through a religious court to gain formal recognition (Miralles *et al.*, 2023a; Sary, 2022) ^[24, 35]. Several factors contribute to divorce, including infidelity, lack of responsibility, and differences in education, cultural background, or life expectations. Additionally, the failure of either spouse to fulfill religious obligations is frequently cited as a cause. Although marriage is ideally intended to last a lifetime, in practice, various challenges often render the relationship unsustainable (Amalia *et al.*, 2018) ^[1].

Economic Factor

Approximately 45% of respondents identified economic difficulties as the primary cause of divorce. These challenges often stem from irregular income or the inability of the husband to meet household needs, resulting in financial instability (Smock *et al.*, 2024) ^[37]. The failure to provide for basic family necessities frequently triggers

tension within the household. Additional contributing factors include inadequate income, low morality, and limited human resource skills. Moreover, poor financial management is a significant source of marital dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Mone, 2019b; Rosado *et al.*, 2024) ^[25, 34].

Poor Communication Factors

Effective communication plays a vital role in sustaining marital harmony. Positive or associative communication fosters cooperation and mutual understanding between spouses. Conversely, poor communication often becomes a major source of conflict, leading one partner to feel undervalued or unable to express their emotions. A lack of dialogue and shared understanding regarding marital goals can escalate into more serious disputes, ultimately resulting in family disharmony (Hafiza & Mawarपुरy, 2018a; Song *et al.*, 2023) ^[15, 38].

Presence of a third Person

Infidelity remains one of the most common causes of divorce, manifesting in various forms such as physical relationships or emotional affairs conducted through online platforms. When dissatisfaction or disharmony arises within a marriage, one partner may seek comfort and emotional support outside the relationship. Such betrayal erodes trust and creates emotional distance, making it increasingly difficult to sustain a healthy partnership. Continued infidelity often exacerbates household instability, fueling resentment, anger, and disappointment, which in turn lead to frequent conflicts and communication breakdowns. In many cases, unresolved infidelity culminates in the dissolution of the marriage, as rebuilding trust proves to be both challenging and emotionally exhausting. Consequently, divorce is often perceived as the final resolution when reconciliation is no longer possible (Liu *et al.*, 2023; Miralles *et al.*, 2023b; O'Hara *et al.*, 2023) ^[20, 24].

The Impact of Parental Divorce on Children

Parental divorce has profound consequences on children's lives, often manifesting as stress, fear, sadness, confusion, and difficulty in expressing emotions (Mikrani & Sari, 2024) ^[2]. Children undergoing this experience frequently feel a sense of loss and diminished self-confidence, both within the home and in school settings. These negative effects are particularly pronounced among children aged 6 to 12, a developmental stage where emotional well-being is strongly shaped by family dynamics. For this reason, parents must carefully weigh the potential impact of divorce on their children before making such a decision (Hafiza & Mawarपुरy, 2018b) ^[15].

Strategies to Mitigate the Impact of Divorce

Reducing the adverse effects of divorce requires deliberate efforts, such as fostering open communication between parents and children, and ensuring consistent attention and affection from both sides of the family. Support from teachers and schools also plays a vital role in helping children remain resilient in the face of family challenges (Ciacci, 2023) ^[7]. Remedial measures may include counseling, positive reinforcement, and the creation of a supportive learning environment. Despite living in separated households, many children retain the motivation to learn and succeed academically when provided with adequate support (Hasanah, 2020; Huang & Ma, 2024; Matsukura *et al.*,

2023a) ^[16, 18, 22].

The Meaning of Happiness for Children from Broken Homes

For children from broken home families, happiness is often defined through a life filled with meaning, purpose, and positive relationships. They perceive fulfillment not merely as self-centered, but as encompassing concern for others. By actively engaging with their surroundings and cultivating healthy social connections, these children can lead more meaningful lives, even when faced with disadvantaged family circumstances (Faizah, 2022; Garriga & Pennoni, 2022; Matsukura *et al.*, 2023b) ^[12, 13, 22].

Conclusion

Parental divorce exerts a profound influence on children's mental health, often leading to depression, trauma, acute sadness, feelings of worthlessness, and emotional withdrawal. Many parents fail to fully involve their children in the divorce decision-making process, leaving them feeling unappreciated and insignificant. Among the psychological consequences, depression is particularly common, marked by persistent negative thoughts, difficulties in forming social relationships, and pessimism about the future. Because children are often reluctant to express their emotions, these impacts frequently go unnoticed by parents, making recovery more challenging. Preventive measures such as marriage counseling or mediation prior to divorce are essential to reduce these risks. When divorce is unavoidable, parents must prioritize open communication and consistent emotional support to help children navigate the transition. Beyond the family, the role of the social environment—including peers, community, and schools—is equally important. Teachers and school counselors can provide valuable assistance in fostering resilience. Furthermore, educating parents on how to recognize their children's emotional needs and engage them in constructive discussions about divorce is a critical step. Developing effective communication skills enables parents to ensure that children feel valued and supported. Long-term strategies, such as monitoring children's mental well-being and encouraging participation in positive activities, can further aid in coping with the aftermath of divorce. In conclusion, a combination of preventive approaches, strong familial support, and active involvement from the wider social environment can significantly mitigate the negative effects of divorce. These measures provide children with the opportunity to maintain stable mental health and cultivate optimism for their future.

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