

## Research Article

# Readjustment of Children's Roles and Social Relationships after Parental Divorce

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**Abstract.**

This article examined children's adjustment to their social roles and relationships after their parents' divorce. This research was based on empirical data collected through interviews and observations of children aged 18 years and under. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively and interpretatively. Research revealed that the dynamics of the relationship between parents after divorce have a direct influence on children's readjustment. Positive adjustment was seen when parents maintained a good relationship (as friends), and children continued their normal activities such as school and social interactions. On the other hand, if the parental relationship is not friendly, children tend to make negative adjustments, which have a detrimental impact on children, such as boys often fighting, addicted to cigarettes and gambling, but are also found to work while going to school to contribute to the family income and get married at a young age. Girls tend to withdraw and stay at home. These findings emphasized the important role of parental relationships in helping children's adjustment after divorce. Establishing a healthy co-parenting dynamic is critical to supporting their successful adaptation to the new family structure.

**Keywords:** readjustment, parent's divorce, children's roles; social relationships

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## 1. Introduction

Divorce, especially life divorce, is a failure of husband and wife in carrying out their roles in carrying out married life. Divorce according to the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defined as "the formal legal dissolution of a legally constituted marriage." The word divorce traces its origin back to the Latin derivative, meaning "splitting of a unit." In other words, it is the permanent physical separation of spouses (Michael, 2015). The beginning of the divorce process is described as a breakdown in the negotiation process between husband and wife caused by the absence of an agreement that satisfies each party regarding various problems faced in married life. In this case, divorce is taken as an alternative. The decision to divorce made them live separately, leave each other, and stop their obligations as husband and wife. This means that after divorce there will be changes in social roles and relationships in the family. divorce is an event of official

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separation between a husband and wife and an agreement between them not to carry out their duties and obligations as husband and wife. It means the legal termination of marital union due to various reasons (Canbulat, 2017).

The causes of divorce vary between married couples. Causes of divorce in Indonesia include disharmony in the relationship due to continuous quarrels and conflicts, cheating, domestic violence, husband not working or not providing a living, polygamy, jealousy and suspicion, problems with sexual relations, not having children, interference of third parties and so on (Ahmadin, 2022; Ramdania, 2020, Fachrina, 2018)

Divorce not only married couples but also children. Divorce always has a deep impact on children. Several studies have identified the impact of divorce on children as being traumatized and potentially experiencing instability in their marriages. Children also experience feelings of inferiority and shame due to their parents' divorce, lock themselves up in their rooms, are stubborn, and become more emotional and expressive. Finally, children withdraw from social environments or are anti-social. Divorce also affects children's performance at school and there are even children who drop out of school and are forced to work to help their mothers (Fachrina, 2018; Ningrum, 2013; Ramadani and Krisnani, 2019). Another study states that the existence of a disharmonious family which results in the divorce of their parents causes a high level of delinquency, especially among teenagers, who tend to show: (1) naughty behavior, (2) experience depression, (3) have active sexual intercourse, (4) tendency toward illegal drugs (Lamers, 2012; Amato, 2001. Skyer et al, 2019). Parental divorce for children is a sign of the end of the integrity of their family where life will not be the same again because of the feeling of sadness and loss of their father or mother figure. It can be said that children whose parents divorce are twice as likely to experience difficulties in many ways (Mack, 2001; Scot et al, 2004). Although parental divorce hurts children, it has also been found to have a positive impact. Some children from families whose parents divorce are said to experience greater happiness, such as no longer experiencing violence, increased self-confidence, and more independence ((Amato & Booth, 1991; Jackson & Seruling, 2018).

Due to the various impacts as explained above, of course, children need readjustment to new situations after parental divorce. Goode (2007) and Skyer et al, (2019), state that the readjustment process is the main problem that must be faced after a divorce. For this reason, this article aims to describe the form of readjustment to children's social roles and relationships after their parents' divorce. There is relatively little research regarding children's readjustment after divorce in sociological studies, whereas this problem is mostly discussed from a psychological perspective.

Self-adjustment according to Willis (2008) is a person's ability to live and get along naturally with the environment so that the individual feels satisfied with himself and his environment (Ningrum 2013). Adjustment needs to be done to break away from various obstacles that arise to achieve balance based on the values and norms that apply in society. Self-adjustment is a continuous process in life according to the changes that occur in the environment (Runyon and Haber, 1984). Furthermore, Runyon and Haber provide five characteristics of individuals who can adapt well, namely perception of reality, being able to deal with stress and anxiety, having a positive self-image, being able to express feelings, and having good interpersonal relationships.

Physiological or physical factors, psychological factors, environmental or social factors, and cultural and religious factors are referred to by Fatimah (2006) as factors that influence individual adjustment. According to her, self-adjustment can be in the form of positive self-adjustment and negative self-adjustment. Someone who can regulate the emergence of impulses in his/her thoughts, emotions, and attitudes so that they can direct behavior and habits towards demands from themselves and society, including positive adjustment criteria. Positive adjustment is also related to the ability to take advantage of new situations properly and perfectly in meeting post-divorce needs. The opposite condition is a form of negative adjustment.

Self-adjustment is also determined by the role that society expects of the status attached to a person. Society assigns different gender roles to boys and girls in the family. This difference is understood based on the theory of nature and nurture. The difference between men and women according to the theory of nature is natural and has been determined (given by Allah) related to the biological anatomy of men and women is indeed different. This difference determines their social roles. Women naturally experience menstruation, become pregnant, give birth, and have a weak physique, so they have limited space for movement and are considered appropriate to be at home. At the same time, men are considered stronger and more productive. Finally, these differences lead to different functions and responsibilities between men and women. Men play a role in the public sector and women in the domestic sector. On the other hand, the theory of nurture assumes that the different roles between men and women are not determined by biological factors but are the result of community construction (Megawangi, 1999).

## 2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative method. Research in which data is collected in the form of words, images, and not numbers (Moleong, 2008). Free interviews based on interview guidelines were conducted to obtain in-depth data and information regarding the adjustments made by children after the divorce of their parents based on the experiences and perspectives of the research subjects. Through this technique, researchers can be creative in obtaining data and information and responding to any stimulus that is thought to be meaningful to research problems. The research subjects are children whose parents have been divorced for at least one year, which is assumed to have undergone an adjustment process. The child's age when the research was conducted was under 18 years by the definition of the concept of child according to the Child Protection Law. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, that is, they were determined deliberately based on the criteria above. There are 6 informants based on the principle of data saturation. Data triangulation was carried out by interviewing the informants' parents and neighbors. Data analysis was carried out from the beginning of the study and interpreted qualitatively based on a review of relevant literature.

The location of this research is in the city of Padang, which is known to have the highest divorce rate in West Sumatra. As an urban area, the city of Padang is assumed to have complex causes of divorce (BPS, 2020).

## 3. Result

Research informants obtained during the research were generally under 18 years old and the age at which their parents divorced varied. The reasons for their parents' divorce varied in each informant's family. Starting from the occurrence of continuous quarrels between father and mother which are triggered by various things such as the problem of insufficient fulfillment of family needs, the father not working, the behavior/character of one of the fathers or mothers, differences of opinion in educating children and the involvement of third parties (parents' families) in their married life. Another cause is the occurrence of physical violence often committed by the father to his mother and the informant himself, and the father leaves the house without any further news.

Here, almost all informants after their parents' divorce lived with their mother or with their mother's side of the family. Only one informant (DR) joined his father with his 2 younger siblings. The mother was found to be having an affair and left the house and remarried her lover. Not long after, about one and a half years, the informant's father

remarried a widow who had no children and now has four children. This means that the informant lived with his father, stepmother, and six younger siblings until he finished school at vocational school. After graduating from school, he worked at a car dealer and married at the age of 20.

According to the informant's confession, the first time he found out that his parents were divorcing, he was confused, very sad, and disappointed. Children are confused about why their parents got divorced, with whom to live, or whether they can later meet their father or mother, what about school, and so on. I was sad because my father was no longer at home with me and I was disappointed because I didn't realize it and I wasn't told my father and mother were going to get a divorce because I had not been explained beforehand. Feelings of sadness also arise after spending days without the presence of one of these parents, rarely communicating with the father, and being disappointed when the father is irresponsible by not providing financial assistance. I was also disappointed because my mother left the house and her children to marry another man, as experienced by informant DR. In situations of sadness and disappointment, children end up experiencing stress or depression. Informant AD experienced stress after his father and mother divorced. He often cried didn't want to eat and didn't want to go to school for several months. This results in weight loss and poor performance in school. This informant did not go to class because many bad or red grades were reported due to not going to school and not taking school exams. Finally, this AD informant stopped going to school in grade 1 of junior high school.

Sadness, disappointment, and stress are experienced by children even though they come from capable families as experienced by the informant SR. Even though the mother worked as a civil servant and could fulfill their needs after the divorce occurred, the informant could not accept the departure and absence of his father by his side. This informant feels very close and familiar and is always cared for or cared for by his father rather than his relationship with his mother. His parents' divorce made him lose his father figure so he often cried and was silent both at home and at school. The informant admitted that his parents' divorce made him tend not to have friends. But finally, he was able to finish school at vocational school (SMK).

Unlike the case with IN informants, although initially sad and disappointed about his parent's divorce, he was finally able to understand the steps taken by his parents. He did not drag on with the situation and tried to occupy himself with college activities, participated in English lessons, and studied diligently, in addition to helping his mother's work by selling rice cakes in front of the house. He is not lonely because he lives in a large family environment on his mother's side. He also gained the support of his

mother and extended family. Two years after the divorce, the relationship with his father also improved, and his father also helped smooth his studies. This is reinforced by the statement from the informant's parents, where their children are seen to live life as usual, there are no complaints or questions about the divorce decision he took, and they still get good academic performance in school, likewise with his sister and brother. As a mother, she still provides understanding and explanation for the occurrence of divorce. Guidance is also carried out to provide insight and hope to be able to run the next life. That way, children can be more accepting and independent.

Likewise, DR informants, whose divorced parents were studying in grade 2 of vocational school. Although he lives with his father, he does not want to fail to live a life due to the divorce of his parents. He was determined to finish vocational school and work because he felt sorry for his father, who only worked as a driver and used to be a car sales agent and had to support three children. The role of the mother is carried out to take care of and nurture the younger siblings. He and his two younger sisters help Dad with household chores such as washing, cleaning the house, and sometimes cooking. After graduating from vocational school, he worked at a car dealership, and three years later, at the age of 23, he got married. His two younger sisters also got married after graduating from high school because they wanted to ease the burden on their father. The decision to marry was also because his father was married to another woman and had two young children.

In the case of the IW informant, after the divorce of his parents, he was entrusted by his mother to live with his grandmother, who spoiled him very much in the village. The informant continued to study because there were no cost constraints. After school, the time is more used to play with friends. This is done to anticipate a lot of time after school. Being alone at home often makes him sad, and he always remembers his father and mother and wonders why he has to experience life like this. This condition made this informant a naughty child who smoked and 'their friends, and school were disrupted because he often skipped class. After two years in the village, he was finally moved back to Padang to his aunt's house because his mother had remarried.

Changes experienced by children after parental divorce relate to changes in attention, quality and quantity of interaction, and outpouring of affection, as well as parental support both physically and emotionally, such as meeting the needs of clothing, food, and education. This change is related to changes in the pattern of living habits that were originally gathered completely together with parents, lived a life of joy, and faced or solved problems together, but changed into their respective lives with father or mother after divorce. Since almost all informants lived with the mother after the parents'

divorce, the intensity of communication and meetings with the father were reduced and less likely to exist. Even if there is, it will feel stiff as the relationship becomes more tenuous. According to Sinolungan (1997), the loss of one parent means the absence of an identifiable figure in the family. Losing one parent can cause delinquency in a child. Often, after divorce, the mother or father no longer gives the rules to the child. The child is allowed to do anything because the mother or father feels guilty.

Although parental divorce changes many things as described above, it does not change the status of children as children of their father and mother. After divorce, there is an ex-husband or ex-wife, but there is no such thing as an ex-child. Various forms of adjustment to the changes that occur after the divorce of parents are carried out by children. As time goes by, the child tries to accept the decisions of the parents. Children try to accept the condition of living life or daily activities in the absence of one of their parents. One way to reduce and drive away sadness and disappointment is to participate in more extracurricular activities at school or gather with friends, as in the case of IN. He realizes that many things can happen when his parents divorce, and he does not want it to happen to him. Learning from the case of the impact of divorce on children that he learned from books and the internet made him have to be able to prove to family and neighbors that he would not be like that if he did not drag on with grief, disappointed with the situation at that time. In this case, children who come from parental divorce with academic performance that is quite successful or satisfactory in school can be said to tend to try to show another side of themselves. He did not want to show and prove to others around him that he did not experience psychological disorders due to the divorce of his parents. Usually, this is done by children to survive in the process of living a post-divorce social life.

Another adjustment that informants make after parental divorce is in the form of work. Work to earn money to help mothers meet their daily needs. DP informants were forced to quit school because of difficulties in meeting all school needs. Her mother, who did not work after the divorce, was only able to open a small stall in front of the house, unable to pay for all school needs. Work is also done to be able to help mothers support two younger siblings who are still in elementary and junior high school. Initially, he makes money by busking in the supermarket with a salary of approximately forty thousand to sixty thousand a day if the situation allows, but if it rains or the market is quiet, he only gets twenty thousand. After busking for about 10 months, I was finally able to work in a shop helping people sell and lift goods with a fixed income of seventy thousand a day. Succumbing to not going to school or work is the path taken after parental divorce. Economic limitations make him not want to create new problems for



the family if he continues to be disappointed with the situation of divorced parents. Pity and concern about the mother's condition that's what she felt. She didn't want to increase her mother's burden because her father did not provide any help or livelihood at all after the divorce occurred. In fact, until now, there has been no communication with my father. Based on the explanation above, it can be said that in adolescence, a child whose parents are separated will tend to leave education early and become a parent at an early age. Meanwhile, during school days, problems that usually arise are related to school attendance and academic performance.

However, contrary to what has been described above, one informant stated that it could go through the process of adjusting after parental divorce normally. Normal in the sense of carrying out daily activities is relatively no different from before parental divorce and does not feel significant changes even though faced by the situation of parental separation. Here, it can be said that she did not experience significant adjustment problems in her life. Adjustments are more likely to be made regarding meetings with fathers. If you want to meet and miss your father, you need to communicate in advance, namely about when, where, and what he needs.

#### 4. Discussion and Analysis

If we look at the presentation of the results of the study above, it can be said that there are two forms of readjustment for children after the divorce of their parents, namely positive and negative readjustments. The category of positive readjustment is a process of adjustment undertaken by children realistically and objectively. This means that the living conditions created by parental divorce are accepted as they are, with rational considerations. The occurrence of parental divorce is addressed positively by not showing an emotional attitude but showing emotional calm. In addition, it does not display behaviors of resisting changes in the situation created by parental divorce. Children have enough understanding and awareness of the divorce decision taken by parents that it is the best decision to make. Usually, this is done by a child who was previously close to both or one of the parents, especially his mother.

However, the child's awareness is also inseparable from the age of the child when the divorce occurs. It also depends on the situation faced by the child before the divorce occurs. Are children prepared by parents to face the divorce that will be carried out? Parents are open by first providing information and discussing it with children. The quality of the relationship between children and parents in everyday life, with the provision of affection and the fulfillment of sufficient needs, can help children make



social adaptations. Although children are faced with a situation of disharmony in the relationship of parents in the marital relationship, children are expected to be able to accept the divorce of their parents. The acceptance of children here can be seen in attitudes and behaviors that have not changed significantly before and after divorce. Children's academic performance at school still does not show a decrease; maybe even here the child will prove themselves to be more accomplished.

Unlike the adjustment process that runs positively, the opposite occurs in the form of a negative adjustment. Negative adjustment is characterized by more emotional and aggressive attitudes and behaviors. Undirected behavior because they are less able to be realistic in dealing with changes that occur after parental divorce. Negative behavior is displayed by children as a form of protest against divorce actions carried out by parents. Children are not confident in their social environment, leading to learning difficulties and demotivation in living life, which will eventually affect academic achievement (Daryo, 2003). It is known that children who come from divorced families tend to engage in deviant behavior such as being involved in bullying, motorcycle gangs, brawls, drugs, and others (Wijaya, 2016). The attitude and behavior of children here can also be said to be related to the attitudes and behaviors of parents when facing divorce itself. If parents, especially mothers, dissolve in sadness and are emotional, live a post-divorce life, and then tend to give less attention or affection, leading to child neglect, it will affect the child's adjustment process. The child will make negative adjustments.

The form of post-divorce relationship agreed upon or implemented by parents affects the readjustment made by children. Children tend to make positive adjustments to the form of parental relationships as friends, such as continuing to communicate, attending school, and participating in daily activities reasonably as when parents have not divorced. There is no difference between boys and girls. Conversely, in the form of parental relationships as enemies, where children are more affected psychologically, children tend to adjust negatively. Boys prefer to be outdoors, doing negative things such as fighting, smoking addiction, and even drugs. As explained by Davies and Cumming, as quoted by Nisfianur and Yulianti (2015), parental divorce causes sadness, anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders in children. Here, the child will vent his sadness by being aggressive in interacting both with family and with friends. However, they also worked while studying to supplement their family income. While girls are more likely to stay at home and rarely gather with friends, positive adjustments are also found in the form of parental relationships, not as friends and enemies. Children are more busy with activities at school, still running their lives as usual. Both boys and girls

show relatively similar forms of adjustment, but some boys are forced to quit school because they have to be the backbone of the family after parental divorce.

Even though parental divorce brings about many changes in the child's subsequent life, divorce itself does not indicate the end of the relationship between parents and children. The blood ties between parents and children will never be broken, where there is no such thing as an ex-child but there is an ex-husband or ex-wife. At this stage, according to Ahron (1979), "a binuclear family system" will be formed, a system that facilitates bonds between children and parents who are no longer at home (Karim in Ihromi, 1999). This family system consists of two inner families as the child's orientation family. Firstly, the family is formed by the father's side and secondly, the family is formed by the mother's side, where each of them has the rights and obligations to care for and educate their children.

Divorce in any family is a major transition and requires major adjustments for the children. The various reactions shown by children to their parents' divorce are closely related to the child's acceptance of the divorce itself (Aminah, Andayani & Karyanta, 2014). Children from disharmonious or happy families tend to think that divorce is the best way for their family, whereas children from happy families tend to express sadness and confusion about their parents' divorce. Children's emotional reactions and behavior will influence the implementation of social roles and relationships in the family due to the loss of one parent (Skyer et al, 2019).

Regardless of the positive and negative impacts, divorce is a period of major adjustment for children, and several factors influence children's adjustment to their parent's divorce. How children behave in adjusting to their parent's divorce is also determined by the form of relationship agreed or implemented by the parents after the divorce. Relational Styles developed by parents are categorized into 3 forms, namely (1) based on the perception of the ex-husband or wife as a friend, (2) as a hated enemy, and (3) not as an enemy or friend (Karim in Ihromi, 1999).

The pattern of relationship style that occurs after the divorce also determines the forms of child adjustment. In the form of a relationship as a friend is shown by a sense of togetherness, responsibility, and cooperation in educating and raising children. Here the child will be more inclined to make positive adjustments. Different from the relationship style as enemies. Usually, their relationship hates each other and there is no communication. This form of relationship hurts children and ultimately children tend to make negative adjustments. Meanwhile, in the third form of relationship, the togetherness of the child's parents tends to take place formally with minimal communication, namely at certain times such as school activities, birthdays, or holidays.

Parental support and involvement in their children's lives after divorce will provide better children's readjustment (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016). Here, after parental divorce, the family, especially parents, are tasked with (re)defining boundaries and roles (Coleman et al., 2013; Jensen, 2018; Russell et al., 2016)

## 5. Conclusion

Every child readjusts to the changes that occur as a result of their parents' divorce. Self-adjustment is positive when one responds realistically to the changes brought about by divorce by working while at school to help the family's income, not showing an emotional attitude, not getting lost in sadness, keeping oneself busy with activities at school, and continuing to carry out daily life as usual. A decline in academic achievement did not occur. However, it is also found that children stop going to school as a form of adjustment to the loss of family income, where they do not receive financial assistance from their father and their mother does not have a job or income. Marrying at a young age is also found to lighten the burden on the family.

Whatever the reason for divorce, parents are expected to remain realistic in facing life after the divorce and continue to devote attention and affection to their children to minimize the negative impact of the divorce on the children. These findings emphasize the important role of parental relationships in helping children's adjustment after divorce. Establishing a healthy co-parenting dynamic is critical to supporting children's emotional well-being and successfully adapting to a new family structure.

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