

HE IMPACT OF FORGIVENESS ON EARLY ADULTS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE

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Abstract

Divorce often leaves wounds or deep trauma that affects the emotional development and social relationships of children into adulthood. These wounds can cause heartache or resentment which can affect the psychology of the victim of divorce. This research aims to investigate the impact of forgiveness from parental divorce on early adults. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach through in-depth interviews with four female respondents aged 20–24 who experienced parental divorce in childhood. The results of the study found that the causes of divorce were domestic violence, infidelity, and poor communication. The psychological impacts included trauma, lack of self-confidence, loss of a father figure, verbal and physical violence, difficulties in establishing social and romantic relationships, and economic difficulties. Two respondents experienced verbal violence because their faces resembled their father's, with different perpetrators of violence being their mother and grandmother. This study also found that respondents were able to achieve forgiveness through four main phases: the uncovering phase, the decision phase, the work phase, and the deepening phase. One respondent experienced the uncovering phase twice due to divorce and the death of her father. Two of the respondents achieved forgiveness due to religious influence, while others did so through consultation with psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as support from friends, and the families of both their father and mother.

Keywords: *Divorce, Forgiveness, Early Adults*

INTRODUCTION

Parental divorce is not an easy experience for any family. Everyone desires a harmonious and ideal family; however, in reality, not all family members are able to fulfill their roles effectively. At times, family functions do not operate optimally, leading to conflicts that ultimately result in divorce and the loss of harmony necessary to maintain family unity (Waluya in Mauldya et al., 2024). According to Hurlock (in Untari et al., 2018), one form of negative relationship may arise from divorce within a family. Parental divorce is a significant problem for children at every stage of life, including early adulthood. The family environment greatly influences child development, and a disrupted household can hinder proper development, even leading to negative psychological impacts during growth. In general, a child's personality develops based on their experiences, including communication patterns. The following is a verbatim excerpt from DA, one of the research participants who experienced a lack of communication after her parents' divorce: "I have a good relationship and communication with my mother... she often contacts me to ask whether I have eaten or not... and other things. With my father, at first it was fine, but over time... some conflicts began to arise between us, so our relationship gradually became worse and less close." (DA.R1.W1.22/05.40). Parental divorce is a traumatic event that causes deep emotional wounds for children, including those in early adulthood. This experience often triggers feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, and loss of trust toward parents, which may later affect their relationships with the opposite sex. It is difficult for children to forgive their parents for such experiences, as the pain remains deeply embedded and traumatic. Mirza et al. (2022) state that losing someone deeply loved is extremely painful, especially for children, who are often considered the most vulnerable members of the family. This condition can lead to sadness, loneliness, stress, fear, emotional instability, emptiness, and even depression. However, forgiveness can have a significant positive impact in helping individuals accept such experiences. According to McCullough (in Farhanindya & Rista, 2019), forgiveness is a motivational transformation that reduces the desire for revenge, avoidance, and withdrawal from the offender, while encouraging goodwill and reconciliation toward the person who caused harm. Furthermore, Enright (in Azra, 2017) suggests that several factors influence forgiveness, including empathy, judgment of the offender's actions and

personality, the level of hurt experienced, individual personality, and relationship quality. The following excerpt from DA illustrates forgiveness after understanding her parents' perspectives: "For me personally, forgiving my parents' divorce took a long time. Over time, I began to forgive... through advice, sharing, and also through God's word about family. Now I no longer focus on the idea that a family must reunite, but rather on making peace with the current situation and accepting what has been destined for my family. I focus more on peace and happiness for each family member." (DA.R1.W2.09/06.12) The process of forgiveness following parental divorce is not easy and involves complex psychological dynamics over a long period. The following excerpt describes this process: "The process of forgiving everything was honestly quite long, starting from... blaming myself and questioning why my family had to experience this. But over time, I learned to make peace and accept what God has destined. The process was not easy, but I was strengthened and guided by people around me. Now I focus more on the future of my siblings and the happiness of my parents." (DA.R1.W2.09/06.14)

Enright (in Pratiwi, 2020) defines forgiveness as a process that involves shifting focus from pain and anger caused by others toward deeper understanding and meaning of the situation. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or justifying harmful actions, but rather releasing the emotional burden caused by the experience. Baumeister et al. (in Wulandari & Khoirunnisa, 2023) divide forgiveness into two dimensions: (1) intrapsychic, involving internal processes such as thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; and (2) interpersonal, which emphasizes forgiveness as a social act involving interaction between individuals. Baumeister et al. (in Pratiwi, 2020) also identify several forms of forgiveness: (1) hollow forgiveness, when forgiveness is expressed behaviorally without genuine internal feelings; (2) silent forgiveness, when forgiveness is felt internally but not expressed interpersonally; (3) total forgiveness, when individuals fully overcome resentment and restore relationships; and (4) no forgiveness, when individuals have no intention to forgive. Additionally, factors that hinder forgiveness include perceived benefits of not forgiving, prevention of recurrence, continued suffering, pride and desire for revenge, and adherence to personal principles or justice standards.

According to Enright & North (in Johanna et al., 2017), forgiveness occurs through four phases: (1) uncovering phase, where individuals recognize and express their emotional pain; (2) decision phase, where individuals begin to consider forgiveness as a solution; (3) work phase, where active efforts are made to forgive; and (4) deepening phase, where individuals internalize the meaning and benefits of forgiveness. Based on this background, the researcher is interested in examining "The Impact of Forgiveness on Early Adults Who Are Victims of Parental Divorce." This study has two research questions: (1) What are the psychological impacts of parental divorce on individuals in early adulthood? and (2) How is forgiveness experienced by early adults who are victims of parental divorce? The study also has two objectives: to describe the psychological impacts of parental divorce and to explore forgiveness among early adults who experience it. The study provides both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of psychological knowledge regarding early adulthood, parental divorce, and forgiveness, particularly within developmental and clinical psychology. Practically, it is expected to foster empathy among various parties. For early adults experiencing parental divorce, it may help them accept their experiences, achieve forgiveness, and improve their quality of life. For parents, it may raise awareness of the consequences of divorce and encourage wiser decision-making. For future researchers, it can serve as a foundation for further studies on early adulthood, parental divorce, and forgiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental divorce is widely recognized as a significant life stressor that affects children's psychological and emotional development into early adulthood. A disrupted family environment may lead to negative developmental outcomes, including emotional instability, low self-esteem, and difficulties in social relationships. Children who experience parental divorce often face challenges such as loss of a parental figure, particularly the father, which can influence their sense of security and identity development. Several studies indicate that the causes of divorce commonly include domestic violence, infidelity, and poor communication between partners. These factors not only contribute to family breakdown but also create long-term psychological impacts on children, such as trauma, anxiety, distrust, and emotional distress. In some cases, children also experience verbal or physical abuse, which further exacerbates their psychological condition. From a psychosocial perspective, parental divorce can affect self-confidence and interpersonal relationships. Individuals who grow up in divorced families may develop trust issues, fear of commitment, and difficulty forming romantic relationships. Social support from family, peers, and the environment plays a crucial role in helping individuals cope with these challenges and rebuild their emotional well-being. Forgiveness (forgiveness) is considered an important coping mechanism in dealing with the negative impacts of parental divorce. According to Enright, forgiveness is a process that involves transforming negative emotions into

more positive ones, leading to emotional healing. This process occurs through four main phases: uncovering, decision, work, and deepening. Through these stages, individuals gradually release resentment and develop acceptance toward their past experiences. Previous research also highlights that forgiveness is influenced by various factors, including empathy, religiosity, social support, and psychological interventions such as counseling or therapy. Individuals who successfully achieve forgiveness tend to experience greater emotional stability, improved relationships, and a more positive outlook on life

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2018), qualitative research is a type of inquiry in which researchers rely heavily on information obtained from participants within a broad context, use general research questions, collect data primarily in the form of participants’ words or texts, and interpret and analyze the data subjectively. According to Satori and Komariah (2017), the characteristics of qualitative research include: (1) having a natural setting with direct data sources, where the researcher serves as the key instrument; (2) being descriptive in nature; (3) focusing on both processes and outcomes; (4) emphasizing process as an essential aspect; (5) considering “meaning” as a central element; (6) defining a clear focus of study as the boundary of the research; (7) having a tentative and flexible research design; and (8) using specific criteria to ensure data validity.

The subjects of this study consist of four individuals with the following characteristics: early adults aged 18–25 years, who are victims of parental divorce, and who have experienced the impact of forgiveness related to their parents’ divorce. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves intentionally choosing individuals who meet the research criteria and obtaining their consent through informed consent procedures. According to Hinam and Anam (2026), purposive sampling is conducted by considering characteristics relevant to the research objectives, such as knowledge, experience, and diverse perspectives that provide deep insight into the phenomenon being studied. Data collection in this study was conducted through interviews and observation techniques. According to Esterberg (in Pahleviannur et al., 2022), there are several types of interviews: (1) structured interviews, used when the researcher has predetermined the information to be obtained; (2) semi-structured interviews, which are categorized as in-depth interviews and allow more flexibility than structured interviews; and (3) unstructured interviews, which are conducted without a systematic interview guide.

In addition to interviews, observation is also a commonly used data collection technique in qualitative research. Observation involves the use of the senses—such as sight, hearing, and even smell—to obtain information necessary to answer research questions. According to Guba and Lincoln (in Pahleviannur et al., 2022), observation is conducted to obtain real and direct information about events or phenomena. Types of observation include: (1) participant observation, where the researcher is directly involved in the daily activities of participants; (2) unstructured observation, which is conducted without a predefined observation guide; and (3) group observation, which involves a team of researchers observing a particular issue or phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Findings

A.1 Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Identity	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4
Initial Name	DA	RA	NH	FA
Age	20 years	24 years	23 years	22 years
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Religion	Christian	Muslim	Christian	Christian
Ethnicity	Batak	Mandailing	Batak	Acehnese
Education	High School	High School	High School	High School
Parents’ Occupation (Father/Mother)	Military (Father) & Nurse (Mother)	Civil Servant Teacher (Mother) & Entrepreneur (Father)	Entrepreneur (Mother) & Father (Deceased)	Entrepreneur (Father) & Employee (Mother)
Year of Divorce	13 years ago (2012)	15 years ago (2010)	19 years ago (2006)	18 years ago (2007)
Living Arrangement	Lives with father	Lives with mother	Lives with mother	Lives with mother

A.2 Interview Data Analysis Results**A.2.a Psychological Description of the Impact of Parental Divorce in Early Adulthood****1) Causes of Divorce**

In DA's case, her father committed domestic violence both before and after the divorce. The violence included physical abuse, such as beating the children with a belt. Her father also frequently came home late, intoxicated, and engaged in extramarital affairs. He was eventually imprisoned after being reported by DA's mother for domestic violence. DA does not clearly remember the exact time of her parents' divorce but recalls that it began when she was in the first grade of elementary school, around 2011. The divorce was caused by her father's behavior, including late nights, alcohol use, violence, and infidelity. In RA's case, the parents initially lacked compatibility in communication. Her father's infidelity began before the birth of her third sibling, which her mother endured silently. When RA was in the fourth grade, a major conflict occurred at night, leading her mother to release long-suppressed emotions and ultimately resulting in divorce. RA recognized that poor communication contributed to the conflict, although she did not fully understand the reasons. NH realized that the conflicts in her family were caused by her father's infidelity. After bringing another woman into the house, her father left the family. This experience, along with her mother's suicide attempt, created an unstable and conflict-filled family environment. These events occurred when NH was three years old, causing deep trauma and emotional distress. FA often witnessed her parents arguing when she was around 6–7 years old. After the divorce, her family faced economic difficulties because her father did not take responsibility, making her aware of the long-term impact of the divorce.

2) Impact of Divorce**a) Relationship with Parents**

Before the divorce, DA had a close relationship with her parents, especially her father. However, frequent conflicts and domestic violence led to feelings of sadness, anger, and hatred toward her father. RA felt the loss of a father figure after the divorce. Initially unaware of the situation, she later realized her parents had separated. She became closer to her mother but experienced limited communication with her father. NH experienced a broken family environment and lost contact with her father after he left. Her relationship with her mother was distant and often conflicted, including verbal abuse where she was compared to her father. FA maintained a relatively good relationship with her parents, although she initially struggled to forgive her father. Over time, after meeting him again, her perception improved.

b) Self-Confidence

DA experienced low self-confidence and often compared her family with others, leading to feelings of loneliness. RA had difficulty forming romantic relationships due to the absence of a father figure. NH developed trust issues, while FA felt insecure and envious of peers with intact families.

c) Psychological Impact

DA experienced loneliness, confusion, and emotional distress, especially when living separately from her mother. RA experienced mixed emotions, including sadness and anger, but gradually developed understanding and acceptance. NH experienced severe trauma, emotional instability, depression, anxiety, and difficulty regulating emotions. FA experienced emotional pain, anger, and long-term psychological pressure due to her family situation.

d) Social Impact

DA felt uncomfortable in her father's family environment and coped by engaging in activities with peers. RA received strong social support from family and community, which helped her recovery. NH became more withdrawn due to stigma and trauma, while FA became selective in social relationships due to past experiences.

e) Economic Impact

After the divorce, DA's father supported her financially, while her mother also worked. In contrast, RA, NH, and FA experienced financial hardship due to lack of paternal support, forcing their mothers to become the primary providers.

Description of Forgiveness in Early Adulthood

1) Uncovering Phase

All respondents began expressing their emotional pain by sharing their experiences with trusted individuals such as friends, family, religious communities, or professionals. This process helped them release emotional burdens and gain relief.

2) Decision Phase

Respondents made decisions to forgive through different influences, including religious teachings, personal reflection, family support, and professional guidance. Forgiveness was chosen as a way to achieve emotional stability and inner peace.

3) Work Phase

In this phase, respondents demonstrated forgiveness through actions such as maintaining communication, accepting their situation, praying, and engaging in positive activities.

4) Deepening Phase

All respondents experienced personal growth, emotional relief, improved relationships, and a more positive outlook on life. They developed broader perspectives and greater self-confidence, recognizing that individuals from broken families can still achieve a positive future.

C. Research Limitations

This study has several limitations:

1. The small number of respondents limits generalizability.
2. Data collection relied on interviews, which depend on participants' memory and openness.
3. The study used only one perspective, namely the children, without including parents' perspectives.
4. Interviews conducted in public spaces may have affected data depth.
5. The forgiveness process is dynamic, meaning findings reflect participants' conditions at the time and may change in the future.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that: (1) the psychological impact of parental divorce on early adults shows that the main causes of divorce include domestic violence, infidelity, and poor communication between parents. One respondent experienced trauma due to parental divorce at the age of three, having witnessed parental conflicts and experienced verbal abuse in which she was blamed because her appearance resembled her father. Two respondents experienced verbal abuse related to the divorce, being blamed for resembling their father, which resulted in emotional wounds. However, the perpetrators differed, with one case involving the mother and the other the grandmother.

Three respondents experienced the loss of a father figure, which led to low self-confidence in social relationships and relationships with the opposite sex, and even caused them to seek substitute father figures in their social environments. One respondent did not lose her father figure because she continued living with him; however, she experienced both physical and verbal domestic violence, resulting in an unharmonious relationship, feelings of loneliness, and even hatred toward her father, including threatening to report him to the authorities. Another respondent experienced social stigma in the form of verbal ridicule due to the absence of a father figure in the family, which led her to withdraw and develop trauma. (2) The description of forgiveness among early adults who are victims of parental divorce shows that all four respondents were able to reach the uncovering phase through support from close friends. Two of them also received support from church communities, while one sought help through consultation with a psychologist and psychiatrist. One respondent experienced the uncovering phase twice due to both parental divorce and the death of her father.

In the decision phase, two respondents achieved forgiveness through insights gained from religious teachings during church services. One respondent reached this phase through support from both parents, while another gained insight through consultation with a psychologist and psychiatrist. In the work phase, all four respondents demonstrated forgiveness by accepting their situations, maintaining communication, and rebuilding relationships with their parents and grandmother. One respondent also expressed forgiveness by praying for her deceased father's peace. Finally, in the deepening phase, all respondents experienced emotional relief, inner peace, improved self-confidence, more positive thinking, and broader perspectives for their future. They also realized that not all

individuals from broken families will have a negative future, as forgiveness enables them to develop a more positive outlook, broader perspectives, and stronger self-confidence.

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