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## **Identification of Emotional Development in Children with Divorce Parents: A Systematic Review**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Divorce is a complex event and demands special attention because it involves various aspects of a child's life, one of which is emotional development. Children with divorced parents tend to experience intense emotional changes that cause changes in behavior that lead to internal and external problems. This systematic review aims to analyze 11 accredited journals to help the emotional development of children with divorced parents. The results of systematic reflection show that there are several emotional variables that are often associated with children with divorced parents, including emotional regulation, emotional and behavioral characteristics, empathy, emotional reactions, emotional resilience, emotional intelligence, and emotional adaptation. These findings provide recommendations for conducting further research on emotional development and interventions that can be carried out in children with divorced parents.

Keywords: emotional development, emotion, divorced parents, children

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### **1. Main text**

Divorce is a more common phenomenon today. In Indonesia itself, divorce is a phenomenon that increases every year (Kristina, 2021). Based on data quoted on the website of the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri), it is stated that there are 3.97 million people who have divorced marital status as of the end of June 2021, which is equivalent to 1.46 % of Indonesia's total population which reaches 272.29 million people. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) on February 25 2022, regarding the number of divorce cases in Indonesia, 447,743 cases were recorded in 2021. This number increased by 53.50% compared to 2020, namely 291,677 cases (Cahyani, 2022). This often involves many emotional, financial and social aspects that affect both the divorcing couple and their families. It was even quoted from the *mediaindonesia.com* page (2022) where there are 900,000 to one million children every year who are affected by divorces filed in court.

Divorce is not only legal; many individuals also experience emotional detachment. This often happens because parents are reluctant to share custody, especially mothers who recognize that Islamic law grants custody of children to men after the age of 3 for boys or 7 for girls (Aghajanian, 2001). Consequently, many women frequently encounter dissatisfaction in their marital relationships but choose not to divorce. They typically continue to function as a social unit but often lose interest in and trust for each other (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017).

Parental separation is indeed a complex event that demands special attention due to its impact on various aspects of a child's life. This is because the family, particularly parents, play a crucial role in a child's development, serving as the primary environment for psychological growth and emotional support (Swastika & Prastuti, 2019). This aligns with the perspective of Hurlock (1973), who suggests that children raised in households with harmonious marital relationships perceive their home as a source of happiness. The stability of parental relationships directly influences the well-being of children, as fewer parental issues correlate with fewer challenges for their offspring. Conversely, conflict and tension within familial relationships can negatively affect all family members. Adolescents, in particular, experience significant difficulties when their parents divorce, struggling more than their peers to adjust to new circumstances. According to Collins & Laursen (2013), teenagers with divorced parents often encounter challenges adapting, leading to feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger, and internal conflict (Umar et al., 2020).

Parental separation is not only problematic for teenagers; it remains an unsettling event for children of all ages. Several studies indicate that divorce often negatively impacts older children as well (Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018). Additionally, research has shown that emotional and behavioral problems, particularly behavioral issues, are more likely to manifest in preschool children following their parents' divorce (Theunissen et al., 2017). Divorce or separation is recognized as one of the ten adverse childhood experiences that can affect emotional well-being, health outcomes, disease susceptibility, sexual behavior, and other aspects throughout a person's life (Felliti, 2010). Furthermore, studies highlight that children from divorced families tend to experience physical ailments, emotional challenges, difficulties in social relationships, and academic underachievement (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). This review aims to delve deeper into the emotional development of children from divorced families.

Santrock (2007) defines emotion as feelings or affections that arise in response to situations or interactions that are perceived as significant by individuals, particularly concerning their well-being. Emotional development, on the other hand, refers to the enhancement of an individual's ability to understand and express emotions appropriately, as well as to manage them effectively (Sethi, 2022).

Given the aforementioned explanation, numerous studies suggest that emotional development in children from divorced families tends to be dynamic. Therefore, this systematic review seeks to identify common emotional development variables among these children and explore which emotional skills they may need to develop. This research aims to enhance understanding in the fields of psychology and emotions related to children affected by divorce, offering insights into essential emotional variables that could mitigate psychological issues and problems such as juvenile delinquency. It is hoped that this systematic review will prove beneficial to parents, children, counselors, and experts in addressing the challenges faced by children from divorced families.

## 2. Method

There are several stages in conducting a systematic review, including planning *review* (identify benefits and develop), *do review* (searching journals, selecting primary journals, assessing journal quality, data extraction and synthesis), and reporting (Kitchenham, 2004). Planning *review* by the author (FI) began by creating research questions using a systematic review question formulation, namely SPIDER (*Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, Research Type*). The research question in this review is, what emotional development variables do children with divorced parents usually have? Next, the author (FI) determined the search terms and designed the search protocol. The authors derived terms from the research questions and expanded on those terms to create a comprehensive list of search terms. The search words used are, *emotional development, emotion, emotional regulation, empathy, emotional resiliency, divorce parents*. These search words are used to search for articles on *database* Google Scholar, Sagepub, Taylor & Francis Online, Elsevier, Scopus, Publish or Perish, Science Direct and Wiley Online Library. The next stage is that all journals are checked for duplication by the author (FI) using Rayyan. The author (FI) screens all journals that have passed the duplication check based on the title and abstract. Journals that have passed title and abstract screening are then analyzed based on the full version of the journal. After selecting 178 journals, 11 journals were found that discussed the identification of emotional development in children with divorced parents. The graph of the journal selection flow can be seen in Figure 1. The author determines the boundaries in this review, namely: (1) the journal discusses emotional development in children with divorced parents, (2) the subject is a child of parents who are legally and emotionally divorced, (3) journals published in English (SCOPUS) and Indonesian (SINTA), and (4) research conducted from 2017 to 2023. Journals that are not included in the criteria are: (1) journals that do not use children whose parents divorced legally or emotionally, (2) written in languages other than English and Indonesian, (3) articles with types *review, reports, books, literature review, and research* where the methods are not clearly described.

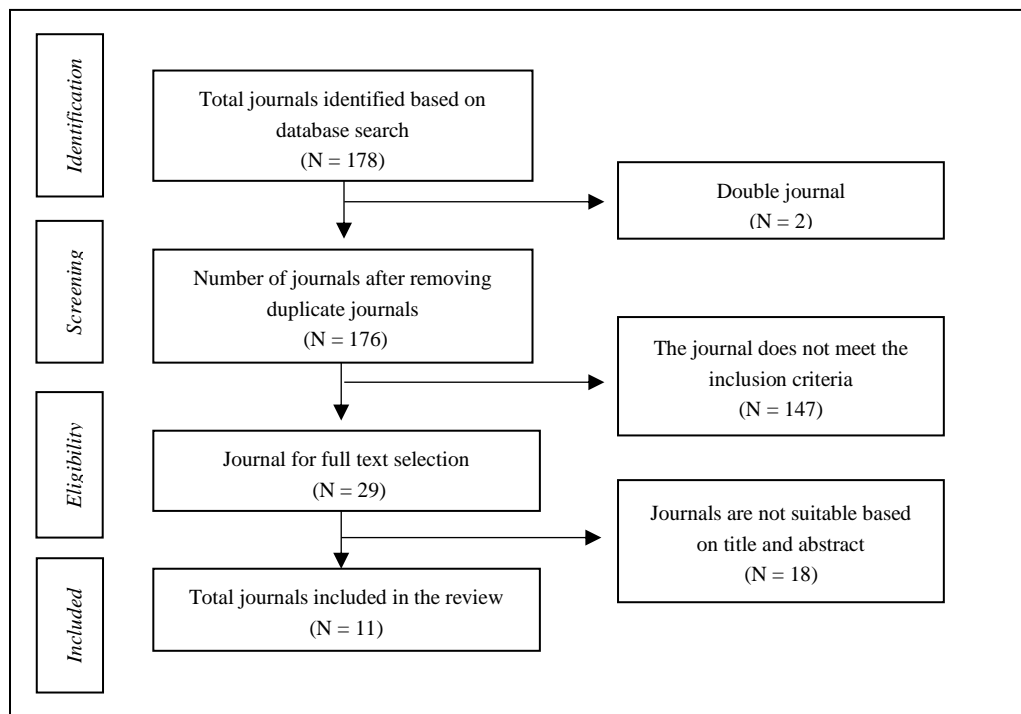


Fig. 1 - PRISMA Chart for Journal Selection Flow

### 3. Result and Discussion

Divorce is divided into 2 types, legal divorce and emotional divorce. Legally, Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 1974 article 38 defines divorce as a type of dissolution of marriage between husband and wife who are bound by a legal bond. Meanwhile, emotional divorce is defined as a phase in a relationship where positive feelings of love and affection are replaced by increasing feelings of anger, frustration, hurt, hatred, dislike, and the perception that positive feelings are lost and are usually forever (Hashemi & Homyuni, 2017). In emotional divorce, individuals tend to become hostile and imprisoned, and develop feelings of hatred towards their remaining dependency (Kaslow, 2007).

Divorce events in the family often have a deep impact, which can cause stress, pressure, and even impact physical and mental changes that are usually experienced by all family members (Rahayu, 2020) especially children (Wasil, 2014). These problems will then affect the child's psychology and will have an impact on changes in the child's emotions, which often reach extreme levels (Mahrani, 2021). Therefore, emotional development is something that is definitely affected when divorce or parental conflict occurs. Sethi (2022) suggests that Divorce can result in impaired emotional development in children which causes the situation to become more complicated, this is because good emotional development will encourage children to form positive relationships with other people, express emotions freely, and have a proper understanding of other people's emotions.

There are many forms of emotional development that are often discussed, especially in children with divorced parents. In this review, the author discusses several emotional variables, including: emotional regulation, *emotional and behavioural problem/characteristics*, empathy, *emotional resiliency*, *emotional adaptation* and emotional intelligence.

**Table 1. List of Emotional Development Variables in Children with Divorced Parents**

No	Writer	Subject	Subject Age	Emotional Development Variables	Family Type
1	Swastika, G & Prastuti, E (2021)	150 adolescent participants	12 – 20 years	Emotion Regulation	Parents divorced
2	Mohsenpour, M., Rahmati, R., & Meidani Mahmoud (2018)	120 participants (60 participants children with divorced single parents and 60 participants children with intact families)	7 – 11 years	<i>Emotional Behavioral Characteristics</i>	Single-parenting due to divorce
3	Shimkowski, J. R & Ledbetter, A. M (2018)	419 early adult participants	18 – 30 years	<i>Emotion regulation strategies</i>	Parents divorced
4	Umar, M., Daud, M., & Faradillah (2020)	79 adolescent participants	14 – 21 years old	Empathy	Parents divorced
5	Esmaelian, N., et al. (2018)	83 participants	10 – 13 years	<i>Emotional Resiliency</i>	Parents divorced
6	Cahyani, Y., Faradiba, A., & Reksoprodjo, M (2022)	188 adolescent participants		Emotional Intelligence	Divorced parents (child lives with mother)
7	Zhan, C., et al (2022)	2708 adolescent participants	15 – 20 years	<i>Emotional Regulation Strategies</i>	Parents are divorced, have conflict, as well as parents who are harmonious
8	Spremo, M (2020)	590 participants	14 – 18 years old	<i>Emotional Reactions</i>	Divorced parents
9	Milling, A., et al (2020)	573 participants		<i>Emotional Adaptation</i>	Separated parents
10	Theunissen, M., et al (2017)	2600 participants		<i>Emotional and Behavioral Problems</i>	Parents divorced

11	Hashemi, L & Homayuni, H (2017)	81 participants	10 – 12 years	<i>Emotional Behavioral Problems</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>Emotional Divorce, Legal Divorce</i>
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Table 1 shows that there are several emotional variables that are often associated with children with divorced parents. Four of the 11 journals conducted research related to emotional regulation in children with divorced parents (Swastika & Prastuti, 2021 ; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018 ; Zhan, et al., 2022). 3 other journals discuss related matters *emotional and behavioural characteristics/problems* (Mohsenpour, et al., 2018 ; Theunissen, et al., 2017 ; Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017), while other journals discuss empathy, *emotional reactions*, *emotional resiliency*, emotional intelligence, and *emotional adaptation* (Umar, et al., 2020 ; Cahyani, et al., 2022 ; Milling, et al., 2020).

*Emotional reactions* or what is usually called emotional reactions in children with divorced parents will of course appear varied. Children tend to respond to their parents' divorce with emotional feelings such as loneliness, sadness, and even at the most extreme, thoughts of ending their life. With parental divorce, children often feel the loss of someone they trust because one of their parents moves, which can then increase feelings of loneliness, abandonment (Spremo, 2020) and even emotional and cognitive behavioral disorders. Not only felt by children with *single parents*, or legally divorced. This can also be experienced by children with emotionally divorced parents. The results of research conducted by Spremo (2020) found that health problems occurred more often in participants who came from incomplete families than in children who came from complete families. He also revealed that children with divorced parents tend to learn that expressing negative emotions is their way of dealing with conflict, and then the anger that develops between children will cause changes in behavior. In line with the statement made by Zhan et al (2022), parental conflict or divorce has a negative impact on children's psychological well-being.

*Emotional behavioural characteristics* in children with divorced families or families with *single parent* often show weaknesses in emotional and behavioral characteristics (Mohsenpour, Rahmati, & Meidani, 2018). Likewise, children aged 2-4 years in families with a lifetime of divorce (or separation) are more likely to experience *emotional behavioural problem* (Theunissen1, Velderman, Cloosterman, & Reijneveld, 2017) such as depression, anxiety and stress, as well as aggression. The results of research conducted by Hashemi & Homayuni (2017) found that children from emotionally divorced families also tend to have more external and internalized behavioral and emotional problems. This makes them less able to adjust compared to children from officially divorced families, which often cause more problems with their emotional behavior, as mentioned previously.

There are several forms of emotional development that children with divorced parents need to have, such as *emotional regulation*, *emotional resiliency*, and *emotional intelligence*. These three variables are discussed in several journals that have been reviewed.

*Emotion Regulation* is one of the emotional variables that is often discussed regarding children with divorced parents. Gross, Richards, and John (2006) define emotional regulation as an effort made by individuals to manage the emotions they have, when they should have them, and how these emotions should be expressed. Individuals who have high emotional regulation tend to be able to manage the emotions they feel, so that when they have problems, they are not affected by the negative emotions that arise (Endaryani et al., 2020). In emotional regulation there are two commonly and widely known emotion regulation strategies. According to the process model formulated by Gross et al., (2006) the two strategies are *cognitive reappraisal* (for example, reinterpretation of an emotional situation by interpreting a situation or event that influences the emotions the individual has) and *expressive suppression* (for example, inhibition of emotional expression where individuals consciously suppress or restrain the expression of emotions they feel).

In research conducted by Swastika & Prastuti (2021), it was found that there are differences in emotional regulation when viewed from the age range of children with divorced parents, where early and middle adolescents tend to have low emotional regulation, while late adolescents have lower emotional regulation. higher category. The same is true for older children (*young adults*) from divorced families have also been found to be more likely to face a higher risk of emotional and behavioral adjustment problems (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Baxter et al., 2011). This can happen when parents reveal too much about the divorce, *cognitive reappraisal* in children it can decrease which will then hinder effective emotional management techniques in children even if they have entered young adulthood (Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018).

Apart from that, research conducted by Zhan et al (2022) found that the use of *emotion regulation strategies* maladaptive characterized by use *suppression* which is high and use *reappraisal* Lower levels in emotional regulation strategies have an influence on psychotic experiences or distress in children with divorced parents. In his research, it was stated that the use of emotional regulation strategies and parental relationships can influence the level of stress experienced by individuals experiencing PLE (*Psychotic-like Experiences*). Family conditions, such as conflict or divorce, can amplify the negative effects of low use of emotion regulation strategies on the stress experienced by individuals experiencing PLE (Zhan, et al., 2022).

This reveals that in early and middle adolescence, children tend to find it more difficult to manage their emotions, which makes it difficult for them to forgive their parents. Astuti et al (2019) stated that if someone can manage their emotions well, they tend to forgive more easily and can even experience a significant reduction in anxiety, anger and depression. Apart from having good emotional regulation, forgiveness towards divorced parents can also be improved by the presence of other forms of emotion such as *empathy*. Research conducted by Umar, Daud & Faradillah (2020) found that high empathy in teenagers with divorced parents will increase forgiveness in teenagers towards their parents.

*Emotional resiliency* It is also a form of emotion that children with divorced parents need to have. Hett and Rose (1991) stated that children who face their parents' divorce tend to need emotional resilience to be able to overcome their emotions so they can adapt to the psychological and social challenges that arise as a result of their parents' separation. Emotional resilience tends to help children respond more effectively to negative emotional situations, overcome life challenges, manage stressful experiences, and move forward in their lives (Barrett et al. 2006 ; Walsh 2006 ). This can be improved with

some intervention or therapy. In the results of research conducted by Esmailian, et al. (2018) found that *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy* proven effective in improving *emotional resiliency* which can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression and anger in children with divorced parents.

*Emotional Intelligence* is another form of emotional development that is often discussed as well. Yes (2021) found that aspects of emotional intelligence, namely emotional awareness, motivation, empathy in adolescents, have lower levels in children with divorced parents compared to adolescents who have intact parents, which means that adolescents are less able to identify and understand emotions, both his own emotions and the emotions of others. Research conducted by Cahyani, et al. (2022) found that significant relationship between parenting styles *authoritative* and *permissive* with emotional intelligence but not significant on the relationship between parenting patterns *authoritarian* with emotional intelligence.

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#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the journal described above, it can be concluded that parental divorce has a significant impact on children's emotional development. Children with divorced parents often experience various emotional feelings, such as loneliness, sadness, and even thoughts of ending their life. They are also susceptible to experiencing behavioral and mental health disorders at a higher rate compared to children from intact families.

Several journals reviewed in this systematic review revealed that emotion regulation in children with divorced parents can differ depending on the age range. The use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as high use of suppression and low use of reappraisal, has also been proven to have a negative impact on psychotic experiences or stress in children with divorced parents.

However, there are several factors that can help children deal with their parents' divorce and develop better emotional abilities. Good emotional regulation, forgiveness towards parents, and a high level of empathy can improve children's psychological well-being. Apart from that, having emotional resiliency or emotional intelligence is also an important factor in helping children overcome the psychological and social challenges that arise as a result of their parents' divorce.

Thus, it is important for parents and other stakeholders to provide sufficient attention and support to children who experience parental divorce. Through a holistic approach and paying attention to aspects of emotional regulation, forgiveness, empathy and emotional resilience, it is hoped that it can help children develop strong emotional skills and promote their well-being in facing these complex life changes. The findings in this systematic review can be used as a basis for conducting research related to emotional development in children with divorced parents. Apart from that, the results of this review provide recommendations for researchers, policy makers and practitioners in Indonesia to conduct research *longitudinal* as well as other research methods related to the variables above.

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