



## The Influence of Parental Divorce on Children's Character Development

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to investigate the impact of parental divorce on children's character development in a city in Indonesia. This used a case study qualitative method. Data was collected through direct observation, and in-depth interviews with divorced parents, children, and religious court staff. Written materials were also analyzed to find out the divorce cases handled at the city religious court. This study found that the causes of divorce are included economic limitation, domestic violence, betrayal, and longer conflict. The impact of the divorce on children's character development included unstable children's emotions, such as stress and mental pressure, dropping out of education, decrease children's confidence and a lack of trust of the children to their parents. However, this study also found that the divorce also caused a positive impact on the children's character in which the children become more independent and stronger in their lives. We suspect the divorce might have caused some children to build positive perceptions from their painful life. As such they take it as a positive life experience and then caused them to become more stronger and independent. Future research should focus on why some children perceive their parent's divorce as a negative experience, while others accept it as a positive life experience and use it as a factor to be independent and stronger.

**KEYWORDS:** Children, Character, Parental divorce, The impact of divorce.

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a path all humans will pass because marriage is legal in religion, and marriage is something human if humans want to build a household to continue a perfect life (Razack, 2004). Marriage is also a problem involving various aspects of human life that quickly cause emotions and disputes between men and women. Therefore, legal certainty in a marriage is essential, and this legal certainty is called a marriage agreement.

In society, a term is often encountered, namely the nuclear family. The nuclear family is a small social group consisting of a husband, wife, and unmarried children (Collins, 1992). The inner family is also often called the household, a small unit in society as a forum and process of social life. An inner family is considered a social system because it has elements, beliefs, feelings, goals, power, and facilities.

Many family laws and problems are explained in the Qur'an, both in detail and globally, according to the situation and conditions (Haq, Solihin, Ahmad, & Jani, 2020). This is so that from the provisions and rules, laws can be derived under new events that develop in a society by sticking to *the Qur'an* and *Hadith*. From these sources, we can see how much Islam pays attention to family development. It is placed in an honorable position and is bound by *aqidah* as its central pillar. The importance of the integrity of a family is necessary to pay attention to avoid the fracture of the household. To avoid this rift, it is necessary to maintain the marriage bond according to the proper rules to realize the noble goal of grace, peace, and love (Muslih, Nurdin, & Marzuki, 2020).

A reality that occurs in Palu City is that various factors trigger the occurrence of divorce. One of the factors is a cheating husband or wife. This phenomenon is based on the fact that many divorces occur because one partner is cheating. As a result, domestic violence occurs, for example, being beaten by a husband. Furthermore, these fights have an impact on the character development of children.

Harmony in the household will make a *sakinah mawaddah warahmah* family. However, if in a household where husband and wife no longer understand the function and position of each, there will be a continuous commotion that ends in divorce. The impact of divorce is that children often get psychological pressure, which is inferior, naughty, quick to emotion, always late for school, and leaving school prematurely. In other words, divorce significantly impacts the child's future, so this must be responded to carefully by married couples who are going to divorce.



However, the impact of divorce on children's character development has not received much attention from researchers. Understanding the impact of parental divorce on children's character development is essential to know to prevent widespread impacts as a result of divorce. Thus various actions can be taken by the government and families to help the mental development of children whose parents are divorced. Therefore, this study will examine the impact of divorce in the city of Palu on the character development of children. This research will contribute to knowledge in the field of family law and education. This research also contributes to strategies to prevent the negative impact of divorce on children, the government, and society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Divorce

Divorce, in religious terms, means breaking the marital bond between husband and wife (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008), as Sheikh Sayyid Sabiq in his book, *Fiqh Assunnah*. He stated that divorce is:

حُلُّ رَابِطَةِ الزَّوْجِ وَأَنْهَاءُ الْعَلَاقَةِ الزَّوْجِيَّةِ.

the translation:

Releasing the ties of marriage and ending the husband and wife relationship.

Marriage is the beginning of living together in a bond that is regulated in-laws to form a happy family, as mandated by Article 1 of Law Number 1 of 1974 of Indonesia marriage law concerning marriage, which says "The purpose of marriage is also to form a happy family. Happy and eternal based on God Almighty". Because marriage aims to form a happy and eternal family, it means that in the household, there should be a harmonious relationship between husband and wife and their family members based on the principle of mutual respect, calmly, peacefully, and mutually love with growing affection (Alawi, 2007).

Creating a peaceful household based on love that becomes a performance is a dream for every married couple and is an effort that is not easy. Not a few married couples fail and end up in a divorce. The above facts prove that maintaining sustainability and continuity of life in the household is not easy to implement. Psychological, biological, economic factors, different views of life, etc., sometimes appear in domestic life and can even cause crises and threaten the joints of the household.

According to Islamic law, the institution of marriage can be threatened by various acts of the perpetrators of the marriage itself, whether done by men or by women (Abubakar, 2019). These actions can damage a marriage, stop the relationship for a while, or even break up forever, depending on the type of action they do. In general, it can be said that it is the will of the people who carry out the marriage so that the marriage will continue and only be interrupted when one of the husbands or wives dies. However, in reality, many married couples are forced to break their marital ties in the middle of the road.

### B. Children's Character Education

Education is a symptom of human behavior and efforts to fulfill the primary basic needs of survival, part of activities to improve life to make it more meaningful or valuable (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2007). Meanwhile, according to the National Education System Law, no. 20 of 2003 stated that Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious, spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, the community, nation, and state.

From the law above, the author can conclude that children's education must be done consciously, namely by educators and parents, so that children can implement and develop all the potential that exists in themselves, such as spiritual strength for the maturity of their souls and personality. Character is a state of the soul (Quinton, 1962). This state causes the soul to act without thought or deep consideration. This is natural, which departs from character and is created through habit and practice. In the Indonesian Dictionary, the language center of the Indonesia Ministry of National Education, the word character means psychological, moral, or character traits that distinguish one person from another or innate, heart, soul, personality, character, behavior, personality, and temperament (Galton, 1949).

This understanding can be interpreted as that character is the original state within a person's individual, distinguishing himself from others. Thus, it can be explained that character is human behavior related to God Almighty, oneself, fellow humans, and their



environment, manifested in their actions based on existing norms. An appropriate education system to produce quality people with positive character is humanistic, which positions students as individuals and community members who need to be assisted and encouraged to have effective habits, and a combination of knowledge, skills, and desires (Kirschenbaum, 2000). According to Van Knippenberg (2000) character refers to a series of attitudes, behaviors, motivations, and skills, including the desire to do the best. Character education is also understood as an effort to educate children so that they can make wise decisions and practice them in everyday life so that they can make a positive contribution to their environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The research approach used in this study is qualitative because researchers want to obtain information directly from participant perspectives (Nurdin, 2018; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014). This approach is used as a basis for processing data on planning, processing, evaluating, and internalizing politeness values through learning Arabic. This research has been conducted in the religious court of Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. A qualitative approach is also understood as an approach in which findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or other forms of calculation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research is a process of understanding the tradition of specific methods by investigating social or human problems that are the object of research (Myers, 2000).

Data analysis began when the researcher conducted a preliminary study, and the analysis was carried out during and after the data collection was collected and completed. The data analysis technique used in this study consists of three activity components: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Jismin, Nurdin, & Rustina, 2022; Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021). Finally, from the data analysis, the researchers built themes based on major issues found in the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Factors Causing Divorce

#### Economic Factor

The economic factor is one of the factors that cause the condition of families living below the poverty line (Handayani & Nurdin, 2021). To ease the burden on the parents, the woman married her lover too soon so that the woman would no longer depend on her parents. At the same time, the economic situation of the young couple had not been able to afford a job that required physical strength. Economic factors are one of the factors that cause their divorce. One of the informants who got married when she was 17 years old and then divorced said as follows:

After getting married, my husband and I stayed at my parent's house, and after two months of marriage, I got pregnant and gave birth. As a result, I needed a lot of financial needs, but my husband didn't want to work anymore, so my mother and I advised him gently, but my husband did not accept my mother's advice. Then my husband got angry and went to his parent's house. After that, my husband never saw me again and did not provide for me; that's when I filed for a divorce.

From the interview results above, the researcher concludes that economic factors are included in deciding to divorce at a young age. On average, this couple has a husband who works as a farmer to support his family.

#### Factors of Immaturity Attitude

In developmental psychology, it is explained that around the age of 18 to 24 years is the age of adolescence and young adulthood. At this age, every individual is in times of "hurricanes and storms" in the journey of seeking self-identity to prove who he/she is. Many wishes, dreams, and ideas are to be realized, but the process is not easy. The teenager wants to prove that he/she has been able to make good decisions for him/herself. On the other hand, they unconsciously still need adult help, both in terms of material assistance and directions, because their experience is still limited. At this age, their horizons and thoughts are still not broadened, and their attention is mainly focused on their interests (individualists). In this situation, giving in is complex, and a sense of responsibility cannot be expected much. One's attitude, one of which is seen from egoism or a partner who is always dominant and wants to win alone, is a bad trait possessed by humans. This trait also triggers the impact of divorce between husband and wife. An interview with another informant said the following:

I got divorced because there was no longer a match between my ex-husband and me. We also often quarreled in the household even though it was trivial, which made me no longer strong enough to carry out domestic life with him. I asked for a divorce.



From the results of the interviews above, it is clear that the differences that were not initially visible will surface. If this difference is not resolved when it comes to the principal aspects of life, then there is a possibility that the life of the household is threatened. There are also significant differences in the principles of life background to limit it. If it is ignored and there is no understanding from both parties, and there is no desire to improve and overcome it, the gap that will separate the two individuals is also increasing, which leads to divorce.

### **Lack of communication**

Communication is essential in family relationships (Rusli, 2020). The lack or breakdown of communication between families triggers the fracture of the household. Because essentially, every married couple always communicates to build a harmonious household to avoid problems that arise in the family, which can later lead to divorce. Communication is a strong need to build a harmonious family relationship. Through good communication between husband and wife, it will provide benefits in building survival in the family and being an inseparable part of the lives of individuals in the family, especially in interacting with the family environment and community life. Likewise, in the family, failure to understand the message that arrives due to the wrong communication pattern between husband and wife can trigger differences of opinion that can trigger debates that can lead to a lack of household harmony.

Over time this condition will lead to various problems in the family, which in turn has an impact on the decline in interpersonal relationships between husband and wife due to lack of communication. For this reason, it has become a must for every couple to always have good communication by always being open and honest with each partner to build a good relationship so that conflicts can be resolved. For this reason, the author is more interested in knowing more about how interpersonal communication is between husband and wife to prevent divorce, where divorce cases continue to increase yearly. This condition cannot be separated from how communication is built in the family, especially when both are busy working, so their communication activities in the family decrease. Communication is essential in fostering and maintaining marital relations, and not a few household problems arise because of the lack of intensity of communication carried out by husband and wife. An interview with one of the informants who got married at the age of 18 said the following:

I got divorced because there was no openness between my husband and me, every time I asked my husband, he was silent and often shut himself from me. He never came home again for months. He also never communicate with me properly. I finally asked my husband for a divorce, and he agreed.

Based on the interview results above, it is known that men and women are different in dealing with communication problems between the two. The thing that is vulnerable for men is that men tend to maintain their ego and self-esteem and are not strong enough to be criticized by their wives continuously, and husbands do not want to communicate. Things that are vulnerable for women tend to be emotional, like criticizing and crying. These different attitudes often trigger fights and continue with divorce if you do not have the emotional intelligence to understand the feelings of each partner

### **Affair Factor**

The need for sex between husband and wife is a sensitive matter in family life. Although other needs have been met, if their sexual needs are not met, they feel dissatisfied with their respective partners. Because the wife cannot provide sexual satisfaction, the husbands seek satisfaction outside the home (cheating). As happened to a wife who recounted her experience as follows:

I filed for divorce with the Palu Religious Court in 2013 because my husband had an affair with another woman. I am very disappointed with my ex-husband because he cheated on me. Which woman is willing to see her husband having an affair with someone else? Even though we have been blessed with one daughter who is five years old.

According to Ms. S's narrative, her household became disorganized because her ex-husband had an affair. The money from her husband's work is not given to the family but is used to have fun with other women. At first, I could not believe that my husband had done this. But after I saw it myself, I finally believed it. Feeling hurt, Mrs. S could not forgive her husband's mistakes, and finally, Mrs. S filed for divorce.

The infidelity factor is indeed often the case; lately, it has become an exciting topic of discussion and a flashlight because infidelity itself is dominated by men and women in all walks of life and groups, even regardless of age. This phenomenon does not only occur



in big cities but also infidelity often occurs in villages. Gifari in Harjianto states that the factors that occur in infidelity include: Opportunities, conflicts with wives, unsatisfied sex, abnormal or animalistic sex, empty faith, and loss of shame.

## **Domestic Violence Factor**

In domestic relationships, disputes or quarrels are common. Because with a fight or dispute between husband and wife can find out the weaknesses and strengths of each partner. However, sometimes the fight or dispute is not accompanied by physical actions such as beatings or persecution that leads to divorce. One informant expressed her experience as follows:

At first, my marital relationship was delicate, but lately, my husband often gets angry for no reason. I try to be patient, but I am not strong. Every problem must end in a fight. Usually, we fight because the income from work is only used alone without being shared with the family. Moreover, I still live with my parents. Besides that, I am also ashamed of myself because of constantly arguing in front of my child. And finally, I filed for divorce in the Palu Court.

According to the informant, whenever there is a problem, she and her husband try to resolve it amicably. However, it did not find a way out. The thing that usually causes disagreements with her husband is financial problems. It is not uncommon for her husband to use harsh treatment, such as hitting. While working, her ex-husband rarely gave money to his family. Moreover, the money he earned was never given to his family.

Marriage is a legal gateway to building a *sakinah* household. From this important institution, an order for family and community life is built. Marriage means entering into a love game that is blessed by Allah SWT, how to build a happy, *sakinah*, and harmonious household, because a household that is not decorated with nuances of love and affection, *sakinah mawaddah warahmah*, will often get out of control and do things that are not following the rules in religion, resulting in unresolved conflicts. Thus, divorce from year to year is increasing and not decreasing, indicating that the influence of stress levels and children's delinquency is increasingly insurmountable.

## **B. Impact of Divorce on Character Development of Children**

### **Child Behavior Development**

The young age (0-5 years) is a susceptible period for developing the child's soul. So that psychologists and education experts call it the value planting period. The values embedded in this period will be carried over into adulthood. If the values embedded at that age are positive, their attitudes and behavior will likely be positive in subsequent developments, and vice versa. The occurrence of an event that is very bad or unexpected will significantly affect the child's mentality and result in stress. Stressful situations can produce emotional reactions ranging from excitement (if the event is demanding but manageable) to the general emotions of anxiety, anger, disappointment, and depression. One example of a bad event from a parent's divorce is the change in the behavior of a child who was previously happy to be gloomy. One informant from the religious court said:

The divorce status that we see today influences the development of the child's character. As in the mass media and print media, which generally occur in Palu, many children disobey their parents after their parents divorce. The child is eventually raised by someone else, such as their grandmother or their uncle. So as parents, they must consider if they want to get a divorce because it will result in the mental breakdown of their children, and they feel that they have no future because only sorrow is what they can get, and they will never get the love of both parents like other children.

Therefore, every child expects that he, his siblings, and his parents live in harmony. Since he can recognize and understand the state of his family environment until the end, their parents' quarrels leading to divorce will undoubtedly destroy their children's hopes. So their children sometimes change their love for their parents and become hateful towards others.

### **Children Experiencing Stress or Inner Pressure.**

No child wants their parents to divorce. Children do not readily accept that their parents have separated due to divorce because they are used to living together with both parents. Alex Sobur says:

In essence, every child wants a father and mother who agree because they are the most influential people in the world for them. They wanted the world to be whole, not torn apart. If the parents did not get back together, he wanted to believe in both of them because he understands that he is the result of his father and mother, physically and psychologically.





The mental stress felt by children is exacerbated if the child is not informed about the divorce and the consequences of the separation of both parents. Children become confused and depressed with a simple way of thinking. The child feels that he/she is the one who caused the divorce. An informant says:

If the child is not informed about this (divorce), your child may think that his/her parents have kept something very terrible. This is fatal for the child because the child feels that he is the one who caused the divorce between his father and mother, so the child feels increasingly depressed.

This condition results from the loss of security experienced by the child before the divorce occurs. The child feels safe in the protection and care of both parents and is accustomed to living together. One of the informants said:

When the divorce happened between my father and mother, I did not know it because my father had just left. To this day, I do not accept the divorce between my father and mother. I want to be like other children having complete parents. I am devastated and frustrated by the divorce of my father and mother. Do they not think about my future, especially since my father has never met me until this moment.

When a divorce occurs, the child worries about their future without the presence of their parents. Therefore, this inner pressure will continue to haunt the child's soul in the first years of the divorce until they can develop their ability to adapt to the reality of their parent's divorce with increasing age and maturity.

### **Children become aggressive and naughty**

Some children become aggressive and tend to get naughty after the divorce between their parents. Leonard Berkowitz, citing the research results of Mavis Hetherington, said: If parental conflict is so intense that it causes the marriage breakdown, it often irritates the child and can encourage aggression. Mavis Hetherington of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville reports such aggressive reactions in his well-known longitudinal study of the effects of divorce on children. He and his friends recorded the social behavior of a sample of 4-year-old boys and girls over two years since their parents divorced. (in all cases, the mother has the right to care for her child).

Many of the boys in the Hetherington study appeared saddened by the breakup of their families, and the disorder persisted for a more extended period. Even a year after the breakup. Another indication of these children's emotional turmoil is that not only are they less likely to show outbursts of anger than those from intact families, but they are less likely to be effective at using aggression to achieve goals.

According to the experience of experts, the aggressive condition and increasing naughtiness of children after a divorce is caused by the attitude of children who get both parents to live in harmony again. Maybe they remembered the warmth of the old atmosphere they had experienced when their parents were still living together. Therefore, there is a reaction against the children and their parents, especially the parents they followed after the divorce. However, the child's aggressiveness and naughtiness are more influenced by the problems or conflicts of his/her parents that caused the divorce than the fact that their parents were separated. One of the informants said:

I love and need my dad, but the divorce happened, I feel very lost, and I act like a naughty boy, sometimes skip school, and rarely go home to mom or dad. Honestly, I do it to get my parent's attention, and I want mom and dad to get back together.

### **Children have guilt**

Children who are victims of divorce often have a great sense of guilt towards themselves. They always blame themselves that they are the cause of the divorce. Divorce is a critical period for children, especially regarding the relationship with parents who live together. At this time, the child must begin to adapt to the changes in new life. The adaptation process generally takes time. At first, the child will find it difficult to accept that his parents are no longer together. They never imagined that there would be a divorce in their family. The child's psychological state will be greatly shaken because of the divorce in the family. They will be devastated, lose hope, and tend to blame themselves for what happened to their family. Finding ways to help children feel through the difficult times of their parents' divorce is tough. One of the informants said:

Children who are victims of divorce are children who lack parental love. Parents should think about how the child is doing and their mental state due to the divorce—a sudden change in nature. Usually, children who are victims of divorce will



always blame themselves no matter what it is, not because of them or anyone else. Because they feel that every time their parents fight, parents will always mention their children. From there, a feeling of guilt will usually arise in the children. Before making a divorce, parents should consult first so that the child does not become a victim.

Many children experience parental divorce where the father and mother cannot play and function as actual parents. It is undeniable that the increasingly complex economic needs make everyone work harder and harder to meet the needs of their family. However, parents often do not realize that the psychological needs of children are as important as meeting the needs of life. Children need affection in the form of attention, touch, reprimand, and direction from their father and mother, not only from their caregivers or grandparents.

### Children have anxiety and fear

Children who are victims of divorce will usually suffer from high anxiety and fear due to their parent's divorce. They become closed and prefer to be alone. They are afraid and anxious about ridicule from those around them. They feel isolated from the situation around them. They feel that their parents do not care about them anymore. The adaptation process generally takes time. At first, the child will find it difficult to accept that their parents are no longer together. Fear of loss and excessive anxiety disturb the state of the child's character. As stated by one of the following informants:

Children who used to live happily with their complete parents suddenly turned unhappy, making the children think all kinds of anxieties and fears arise in them. How will they face the opinions of their friends on their parents' divorce? This should be a consideration for parents who are going to divorce. Do not just think about their respective egos, because in this case, the child is the victim of the parents.

The role of parents plays a vital role in the behavior of children. They must supervise their children in socializing and guide them in life so they do not get along with friends who can lead them astray. Family is their essential guide in life. If they lose their way of life, it will be difficult for them to get through a critical period in their life. This critical period is characterized by internal conflicts, critical thinking, irritability, and high ideals and desires that are difficult to realize, causing stress and frustration. The problem of families whose parents are divorced is the root of adolescent problems.

### CONCLUSION

The factors that cause divorce in South Palu District are economic factors, the immaturity of the attitude of husband and wife, lack of communication, infidelity factors, and disputes or quarrels. The impact of parental divorce on children's character education has a positive and negative impact. The positive impact is that the child has reasonable emotional control, shows a good attitude towards their future orientation, has high social relations, and shows an independent and responsible attitude. While the negative impact is that children experience stress or mental pressure. Children become aggressive and tend to get naughty, often have feelings of guilt, begin to suffer from high anxiety and fear, and can hate one of their parents. In addition, children whose parents divorced tend to have behavioral changes from before their parents divorced, namely in the form of denial, shame, sadness, and children being quiet.

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