

The Impact of Father's Absence on Psychological Conditions in Children from Commuter Marriage Families

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the impact of fatherlessness on the psychological development of children from commuter marriage families. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The subject of this study is an 8-year-old child. Data collection techniques in this study include interviews, observations, and psychological tests. Data analysis is conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data's validity is tested using source triangulation techniques. Based on the research results, the impact of fatherlessness on the psychological development of the child shows that: S does not get quality time with his father to engage in play activities because the father works out of town and returns only once a year. S's father verbally abuses his wife, indicating the loss of the father's role as a source of love and protection from harm. S's father makes rules and decisions within the house without first consulting his wife and children. Every decision made by the father must be followed by the mother and children, or else the father becomes angry. S's father believes that raising and educating children is solely the mother's responsibility, and a husband's role is only to provide for the family financially. S's mother is unable to establish the father's presence in the children's lives. S has difficulty following lessons at school and adapting to school life, as he always needs to be accompanied by his mother. When playing, S only interacts with close friends he already knows.

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Introduction

Family is where a child spends the majority of their time in life, making the family the primary key to a child's development (Mone, 2019). The family serves as the first and foremost educational environment for a child (Amalia, 2016). In the Republic of Indonesia's law, Article 26, paragraph 1, states that parents are obligated and responsible for nurturing, caring for, educating, and protecting their children. Parents are also duty-

bound to nurture and develop their children according to their abilities, talents, and interests. Good treatment and caregiving toward children are their rights. Article 14 explains the child's right to be raised and cared for by their parents.

Parents have a duty to teach their children self-control, values, and social roles. Every value taught by both parents is expected to equip a child for facing and dealing with life in the future (Amalia, 2016). Furthermore, the family plays a crucial role in shaping a child's positive character (Ramadhani & Krisnani, 2019). The process of forming a child's personality will be achieved when both the father and mother perform their roles well. A partnership relationship is formed between the father and mother, where they have equal rights in managing the household, especially in nurturing and educating their children. When parents interact with their child, the father has a different role than the mother. The mother is centered on caregiving activities such as feeding, changing diapers, and bathing the child. In contrast, the father's interaction tends to involve more active and spirited play activities like swinging the child in the air or tickling them (Amalia, 2016b). This was also noted by Palkovitz (2002), who outlined various aspects of a father's role in childcare, including participation in all of the child's activities, communication with the child, financial support, and engaging in play activities together.

Father's involvement in childcare encompasses both the quantity of interaction in caregiving and the quality of the relationship between the father and child (Lamb, 2010). There are five dimensions of father's involvement in caregiving: (a) Warmth and responsiveness, which means that father's caregiving involves not only the quantity of time but also the quality of warmth and responsiveness. (b) Control and supervision, which includes knowing the child's whereabouts and monitoring their behavior and decisions. (c) Positive involvement in activities, shown through efforts to spend time with the child, provide emotional support, offer daily assistance, monitor the child's behavior, and employ non-threatening discipline. (d) Indirect care by preparing for the child's future needs. (e) Responsibility by taking initiative in caregiving activities (Lamb, 2010).

Hart (as cited in Assa, 2016) emphasizes that fathers have various roles within the family, including being an economic provider, a friend and playmate, a caregiver, a teacher and role model, a monitor and disciplinarians, a protector, an advocate, and a resource. Conceptually, the construct of fathering is multi-dimensional. This means that a father's involvement cannot be assessed through a single dimension (Fagan et al., 2014). One multidimensional concept of fathering can be divided into three aspects (Palkovitz, 2020): (1) Paternal engagement, involving direct interaction with the child in caregiving, teaching, and other enjoyable activities. (2) Accessibility/availability, the child's access to care when needed. (3) Responsibility, efforts to care for the child through planning and caregiving agendas that differ from direct care.

Fathering is also highly contextual. A father's involvement in one culture may differ from that in another culture. For example, in Mexican-American families, warmth, discipline, and cooperation across all family members (including grandparents) are considered more critical than the behavior of any one parent, given the cultural emphasis on respect and family ties (Fagan et al., 2014). In Indonesia, as a country with a predominantly patriarchal culture where men are often associated with public roles and women (mothers) with domestic roles, fathers are sometimes perceived as not suitable for childcare and not allowed to be involved in it (Munjiat, 2017). Economic factors can also force fathers to work long hours or migrate (Fitroh, 2014), leading to family separation and limited contact, which is often referred to as commuter marriage (Sandow, 2010).

Lack of parental cooperation can affect a child's growth and have negative consequences in their life. The absence of a father, known as fatherlessness, can have several psychological impacts on a child. Some studies suggest that (1) poor coordination, disrespect by parents, lack of cooperation and warmth, and separation from one parent are conditions that put children at developmental risk (McHale et al., as cited in Santrock, 2007). (2) Research by Goleman (2003) suggests that children growing up without a father may face various physical and psychological problems, including depression, lower academic performance, and social problems; reduced self-esteem, social withdrawal, criminal behavior, and substance abuse. (3) Loneliness and envy, low self-esteem, anger with difficulty controlling emotions, and shame due to being different from other children who experience fatherly companionship (Lerner, 2011); difficulty solving problems leading to rebellious behavior (risk-taking) (Williams, 2011); and aggression (Alfasma et al., 2022).

The loss of a father's role affects daughters more than sons. For boys, it means losing guidance on how to be a protective, authoritative, and responsible man. In this situation, children are more vulnerable to the behavior of their peers, often leading to drug abuse and promiscuity (Ni'ami, 2021). Fatherless daughters may experience the fatherless daughter syndrome, a disorder of the emotional system that leads to decisions about dysfunctional relationships, especially related to trust and self-esteem. This is due to a lack of attachment between fathers and children, leading daughters to have an unclear picture of what healthy relationships between men and women should look like. Fatherless daughters tend to be sensitive to others' feelings and cautious in choosing friends because they have difficulty trusting others. The lack of a father figure may force daughters to seek male figures from men their age or older as long as they fulfill their need for protection and guidance, potentially leading to unhealthy sexual behaviors. Fatherless daughters may also struggle to develop a healthy sense of self-worth. When there is a void in the role that only a father can fill, it can affect a daughter's development (Mardiyah, 2020).

Many studies have examined fatherlessness and its impact on children's psychological development, including self-control, social skills, academic achievement, loneliness, and aggressive behavior resulting from divorce, death, and separation. However, research on children from commuter marriage families is lacking. Therefore, researchers feel it is essential to explore the impact of the father's absence on children's psychological well-being in commuter marriage families.

Research Methods

This research employs qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is a data collection method used to discover meaning behind facts through the quality of content, values, or meanings that can only be revealed and explained through language, body language, and words of the subjects. The aim of qualitative research is to explain and describe the conditions, specific situations, various phenomena, and social realities that occur in society (Creswell, 2010). The approach used in this research is phenomenological study. Phenomenological studies assume that all individuals experience events throughout their consciousness. In other words, phenomenological studies aim to explore the subject's deepest perceptions of the experiences they go through in an event (Hasbiansyah, 2008). The researcher chose the phenomenological approach because it helps describe and highlight the direct experiences of the subjects.

Subject selection in this study uses the purposive sampling technique, where subject selection is based on personal research criteria and is not randomly determined by the researcher. According to Nasution (2003), sampling is done based on the researcher's conclusion that the elements of interest already exist in the selected sample members. Therefore, specific characteristics or traits that exist are used as the key for sample selection. The research subjects in this study are fatherless daughters due to the commuter marriage family pattern, where the father has to work far away from home (Zhafira, 2021). The characteristics of the subjects for this study are: (1) The age of the daughters ranges from 7 to 13 years old. (2) Fatherlessness due to the commuter marriage family pattern.

In this study, the researcher uses research instruments such as interviews, observations, and psychological tests. Credibility is the extent to which research data can be trusted (Sugiyono, 2019). The researcher conducts triangulation to enrich research data in explaining the complexity of aspects. Triangulation of data sources is used in this research. Data analysis in qualitative research can be conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles and Huberman, as cited in Creswell, 2010). The data analysis technique in qualitative research with a phenomenological study can be performed as follows (Creswell, W. John & Creswell, 2018): (1) Organizing the collected data results regarding the experienced phenomenon. (2) Reading all the obtained results, then making notes that are considered important, sorting, and grouping each meaning found from the data collected regarding statements expressed by respondents with horizontalization (initially, all statements expressed by respondents have the same meaning). (3) These statements are then collected into meaning units, forming a description of an experience that respondents have undergone. (4) Describing "what" the respondents experienced in the research with textual description. (5) Describing "how" the phenomenon occurred for the respondents, which is structural description, and what is discussed is the background of the research phenomenon. (6) The essence of meaning is the combination of textual description and structural description, which will present a long description of the phenomenon under study and discuss what the respondents experienced and how it can be experienced.

Results and Discussions

The factors influencing a child's growth and development are genetic and environmental factors. Environmental factors are broadly divided into prenatal and postnatal factors. Postnatal environmental factors that generally affect a child's growth and development can be categorized as follows (Soetjiningsih, 1995): (1) Biological environment, including race/ethnicity, gender, age, nutrition, healthcare, susceptibility to diseases, chronic illnesses, metabolic function, and hormones. (2) Physical factors, including weather, seasons, geographic conditions of an area, sanitation, home conditions: building structure, ventilation, lighting, housing density, and radiation. (3) Psychosocial factors, including stimulation, learning motivation, appropriate rewards or punishments, peer groups, stress, school, love and affection, and the quality of child-parent interactions. (4) Family and cultural factors, including family occupation/income, parental education, the number of siblings, gender composition in the family, household stability, parental personalities, cultural traditions, religion, urbanization, and the political life in society.

The environment plays a significant role in a child's development. Both friends and family are essential aspects of a child's social environment. However, among these,

the family's role is crucial in shaping a child's character. The family not only plays a vital role in a child's survival but also holds responsibility for the child's psychological development. According to (Chomaria & PSi, 2021), the family, as the smallest unit in shaping a child's personality, plays a significant role in a child's development. Effective cooperation in parenting is essential for forming positive social development in children. Children need guidance and direction as the foundation for their mental, cognitive, attitude, and behavioral development. They require the father as a role model for courage, firmness, independence, problem-solving, and affection. Similarly, children need a mother figure who is patient, gentle, caring, and affectionate. Hazizah, (2018) states that both figures can be absorbed by children and make them more responsive to the received responses, making them more pleasant to interact with and able to interact well in their environment.

Parenting has become more challenging in modern society due to various busy schedules and increased needs to maintain one's lifestyle. People compete to improve their quality of life, both in terms of material and social status, even if it means living in different places (commuter marriage). In families with children, children often stay with their mothers in their hometown while the fathers work in different cities (Marini, 2021) (Julinda, 2010).

S is 8 years old, the only daughter, and the youngest child. Both of S's parents have a commuter marriage, which has been ongoing for 6 years. S's mother, along with her five children, lives in one house, while her father lives in another city for work due to his previous job loss. S's mother plays the role of a homemaker and takes care of all five children without her husband's assistance. S has lost the psychological role of her father and is experiencing fatherlessness.

A father's role significantly impacts a child's cognitive, emotional, and social development. In the cognitive realm, a positive father's role supports achieving good academic performance and a successful career. In the emotional aspect, a positive father's role helps children develop low emotional pressure, high life satisfaction, and low anxiety levels. In the social aspect, a good father's role helps children develop social initiatives, social competence, and the ability to build positive relationships with others (Alfasma et al., 2022). As stated by Hart (as cited in (Assa, 2016), the eight characteristics of a father's role are: economic provider, friend and playmate, caregiver, teacher and role model, monitor and disciplinary, protector, advocate, and resource.

S's father has been working away from home since S was 2 years old. Usually, he returns home once a year, but he sends monthly financial support to the family. When they are apart, they communicate mainly through phone calls about 3-4 times a week. During phone conversations, S doesn't talk much to her father because she has to share the phone with her older siblings. Sometimes, S's mother argues with her husband over the phone in front of the children. This makes S feel scared of her father. This fear has been evident in the past two years when her father tried to accompany her to school. S refused and cried because she didn't want to be accompanied by her father.

Mutual interaction between children and parents fosters intimacy within the family. Children become open to their parents, and communication becomes two-way, enabling them to solve problems together due to the closeness and trust between parents and children. The quality of interaction is more important than the duration of time spent with a child. It is essential to understand each other's needs and make an optimal effort to fulfill those needs, guided by mutual affection. The stability and harmony of a household influence a child's growth and development, with children from harmonious families

showing different developmental outcomes than those from less harmonious families (Soetjningsih, 1995).

S's mother stated that her husband is very strict and dominant. His decisions are final and not open for discussion. While S's mother sometimes disagrees with her husband's decisions, she still follows them. According to Marsiglio, et al. (cited in Santrock, 2007), fathers who use authoritative parenting styles tend to have children with fewer external problems (such as expressing repressed feelings or being very aggressive) and fewer internal problems (such as anxiety and depression) compared to fathers using other parenting styles.

In her daily life, S spends more time with her mother. To meet her daily needs, S is still assisted by her mother, such as preparing clothes to wear after bathing and brushing her hair. At school, from kindergarten to her current second-grade level, S has never allowed her mother to leave her alone. Her mother always has to accompany her, even if it means waiting outside the classroom. When interacting with others, S is willing to socialize with peers at school, although her interactions are limited to her close friends. At home, S has several friends to play with, but her mother always restricts her outdoor playtime.

DeClaire (1997) stated that a father's role in parenting significantly shapes a child's personality to be empathetic, attentive, loving, and capable of maintaining good social relationships. In addition, children develop a healthy gender identity, positive emotional development, and good adaptability. The attention provided by a father and good parenting can enhance a child's emotional maturity, manifested in prosocial and positive behavior.

In the academic field, S is more interested in general subjects. She struggles with subjects related to the arts, Mandarin language, and computer studies. S is assisted by her older siblings when studying at home, but there are challenges when it comes to teaching computer studies because they do not have a computer.

The interaction patterns that occur within a family can be expressed directly through verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Each family member should be aware of whether the communication patterns are what the family desires. What is most important to consider is whether these patterns can maintain the health and functionality of the family.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that S experienced fatherless parenting. Dad has been working in another city since S was 2 years old and now it has been for 6 years. The fatherless impact experienced by S includes: Not getting quality time with dad to do play activities because dad works out of town and comes back once a year. Fathers verbally abuse their wives, an indication of the loss of the father's role as a person who gives affection and protection from danger. Father S made his own rules and decisions in the house without listening to the opinions of his wife and children first. Every decision of the father must be followed by the mother and the children, if it is not followed then the father will be angry. Father S thinks that nurturing and educating children is the duty of a mother, and the duty of a husband is only to make a living. Mrs. S is unable to build an image of the father's presence in the children's lives. S difficulty in keeping up with lessons at school. In addition, S also had difficulties when adapting to

school, where during school he had to always be accompanied by his mother. When playing S, he only wants to interact with close friends he already knows.

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