



Single Parent Communication in Divorce Understanding for Children

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v9i7.3987>

Abstract

A parental divorce is a life event that can impact children's development in all aspects of life. Parental divorce has both positive and negative consequences. These differences reflect the variety of outcomes influenced by the child's adaptation process. Single parents must communicate effectively and interact with one another to aid in that adaptation process. As a result, this research aims to describe the steps that must be taken and the things that must be considered when informing children about divorce. This article employs a qualitative research method with a literature review approach. Single parents' good communication and interpersonal interactions can help children accept and understand the events that occur in their parents, thereby assisting children in adapting to changes in their families.

Keywords: *Divorce; Single Parent Communication; Child's Understanding*

Introduction

Divorce is the culmination of poor marital adjustment and communication, as well as the inability of husband and wife to find solutions to resolve problems that can satisfy both parties (Hurlock, 2003). The increase in divorce cases has an impact not just on married spouses but also on their children. In Indonesia, the divorce rate in 2021 increased by 53.51 percent to 447,743 cases from the previous 291,677 cases in 2020 (BPS, 2022). This means that if every household in Indonesia has an average of two children, then every divorce that occurs will impact at least 890,000 children yearly.

Divorce is viewed solely as an issue between parents and has no bearing on children. In fact, children also experience anguish as a result of their parent's separation, which might have an impact on their development. In the majority of cases, it was discovered that children who were divorce victims had more issues than children from intact families (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). These issues include deficiencies in academic performance, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social competence (Amato, 2000).

Children require effective family communication to deal with issues that emerge throughout their growth stage. Especially if they are dealing with serious issues that might contribute to stress and despair, such as their parent's divorce. Communication within the family is critical to child development (Vaccari & Marschark, 1997). Cooperative communication between parents and children might help to prevent disputes that may occur after the divorce (Kelly, 1993).

Meanwhile, single parents are parents who care for and raise their children alone, without the presence, support, or responsibilities of their partners (Duvall & Miller, 1985). The changing role as a single parent demands their responsibilities as both father and mother. One of the dual roles that single parents must play to have a strong relationship with their kids is to always maintain good interpersonal communication (Losa et al., 2016).

Therefore, single parents must have good communication skills, especially in terms of explaining the meaning of a divorce. Through effective communication and interaction, children are expected to be able to understand and adapt to situations and conditions that must be faced to minimize the negative impacts that may be caused after the divorce.

Literature Review

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a face-to-face communication process between two or more persons in which the sender may deliver messages directly and the recipient can receive and respond to them directly (Pace et al., 1979). Interpersonal communication can also be defined as the process of sending and receiving messages between individuals with other individuals or a small group of persons to generate immediate feedback (DeVito, 2016).

Interpersonal communication is essential in a relationship context since the process is dialogical. Dialogue is a type of interpersonal communication that demonstrates the existence of interaction. Those participating in this type of communication play a dual function, as each person alternates between being a speaker and a listener (Effendy, 2003). Thus, communicators will be able to respect and appreciate one another, resulting in improved relationships.

Interpersonal communication also plays a role in changing and developing each other. These changes are carried out through interaction in communication and giving each other inspiration, enthusiasm, and encouragement so that they can influence thoughts, feelings, and attitudes according to the topics studied together (Kamaruzzaman, 2016). Therefore, interpersonal communication is seen to be the most effective in altering others' attitudes, beliefs, views, and behavior since it occurs face-to-face and via personal contact.

Family Communication

Individuals grow and develop from a family. The family is defined as society's smallest unit, consisting of a husband and wife; a husband, wife, and children; a father and son; or a mother and child (Law Number 1 of 2009). The family is an individual's primary social group in which to learn to communicate and interact with other people. Communication in the family may increase human connections between the persons who communicate, both in the family and in social life (Cangara, 2002).

Family communication is communication or interaction between parents and children to convey impressions, wants, attitudes, ideas, and understandings based on affection, collaboration, appreciation, and openness (Rezi, 2018). The purpose of family communication is to assist the family setting creates a positive atmosphere and to help family members understand themselves and others in order to develop effective and meaningful interactions that result in positive attitudes and conduct (Apsarini & Rina, 2022).

Communication in the family is highly structured and is based on particular schemes that influence how family members communicate with one another. These schemes consist of knowledge of: (1) how close the family is; (2) the level of individuality in the family; and (3) factors external to the family. The family scheme also includes certain forms of orientation: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. The various schemes developed will result in diverse types of families, such as consensual, pluralistic, protective, and tolerant families (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Interactional View Theory

Interactional view theory was developed by Paul Watzlawick, who made the family his object of observation. Watzlawick describes the family as a system. The family system has a working system that is interrelated with one another. When one system experiences obstacles or problems, the other systems will also encounter interference (Nuridin, 2020).

The family system is a network with feedback and interdependence in a family that is governed by family norms, such that each family member's conduct can influence and be influenced by other family members (Griffin et al., 2006). As a system, the family can also unite interactions in family communication that has dynamics and pluralism in the vision of a model of life. These dynamics are united through the interactional view within the family.

Watzlawick developed four axioms that are built to form good communication in family relationships, namely: (1) One cannot not communicate; (2) Communication contains content and relationship; (3) The nature of a relationship depends on how both parties interpret the communication chain; and (4) all communication contains symmetrical and complementary aspects (Griffin et al., 2006).

Method

This study uses qualitative research methods as a scientific method that is often used and carried out by a group of researchers in the field of social sciences. The type of research used in this research is descriptive qualitative with a literature study approach. A literature study is a research conducted by researchers by collecting several books, and magazines related to the problem and research objectives (Danial & Warsiah, 2009).

Using a literature study approach, the data sources used in this study were obtained from scientific journals, other research results (theses and dissertations), books, and other appropriate sources (online articles) on several scientific indexes such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and the Google search engine. To find relevant data sources, several keywords were utilized, including divorce and children, the impact of divorce on children, disclosure of post-divorce parents, and single-parent communication after divorce.

Results and Discussions

Overview of Adult Divorce

Divorce became widely known in the 1970s in post-industrial societies (Balestrino et al., 2008). Over time, divorce has evolved into a societal issue impacting family structures and has become a worldwide phenomenon. Divorce can arise as a result of a variety of events in a marriage. The variables that induce divorce vary by nation and are impacted by differences in religion, customs, culture, and socioeconomics.

In a study in Iran, the causes of divorce between men and women are choosing the wrong partners, unfulfilled emotional needs, and family involvement (Barikani et al., 2012). Furthermore, the economic recession, which resulted in poverty and unemployment, was a major cause of divorce in America between 2008 and 2011. Individuals who marry at a young age in England and Wales are more likely to divorce due to a lack of maturity and socioeconomic stability. Disparities in education between spouses are also a major cause of divorce in Japan. Last, the main reasons for divorce in Malaysia are a lack of understanding, a lack of etiquette, and a lack of religious knowledge (Ghani et al., 2017). Divorce, for whatever cause, has become a significant risk in the course of the human lifespan that has implications and consequences in various aspects.

Divorce is one of the most difficult events an adult has to go through. This is due to the fact that divorce affects the economy, psychology, emotional well-being, and interpersonal relationships (Braver et al., 2006). In the economic context, the consequences of divorce have an impact on income, asset value, employment, and government benefits. Women (and children) have more negative economic impacts during and after a divorce than men (DeVaus et al., 2014). Divorce is also ranked as the number one life stressor that leads to poor individual psychological well-being. Divorced adults are known to have high levels of depression, anxiety, and unhappiness (Braver et al., 2006). Divorce also has an impact on the relationship between parents. Divorced couples with children frequently experience high levels of conflict. Open conflict between parents can cause problems in children's behavior and development (Davies & Cummings, 1994). As a result, divorce also affects the quality of parent-child relationships. The presence of parents, both single and concurrent, is crucial in the development and adaptation of children to divorce (Stadelmann et al., 2010).

Impact of Divorce on Children

The family is an essential context for understanding children's psychopathological development. A parental divorce is a life event that can impact development because it is associated with increased behavioral and emotional problems in children. Many studies have found that children who have experienced parental separation have significantly different socio-emotional development. Some children appear to be greatly affected by the separation, whereas others appear to be relatively unaffected and adaptable (Stadelmann et al., 2010).

The impact of parental divorce on children has always piqued the interest of practitioners and researchers. In most cases, divorce has a negative effect on the child's development. Several studies conducted over the last three decades have found that children with divorced parents are more likely to experience problems such as physical disorders, emotional disturbances, social relationship difficulties, and academic failure (Aghajanian et al., 1986). In a meta-analysis comparing the well-being of children from divorced families to children from intact families, Amato and Keith discovered that children of divorced parents scored significantly lower in a variety of areas, including academic achievement, behavior, psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social competence (Amato & Keith, 1991). In terms of gender, several adjustment issues related to the externalization problem of divorced children were discovered, with boys generally exhibiting more aggressive, impulsive, antisocial behavior, and difficulties in peer relationships than girls (Kelly, 1993).

However, a socio-historical approach revealed that not all children from divorced families had developmental weaknesses and problems. According to some researchers, there is no difference between children of divorce and children of intact families. Even if a difference is discovered, it is very small and unrelated to divorce (Kinlaw, 2013). Hetherington and Kelly also reported that 25% of children whose parents divorced had serious long-term social, emotional, or psychological problems in adulthood. It means that as many as 75% of children whose parents divorced did not experience serious long-term disorders during adulthood (Lansford, 2009). In an update of his research, Amato discovered a significant curved trend for academic achievement, behavior, psychological and emotional adjustment, social relationships, and self-concept of divorced children, where the difference between children with divorced and married parents showed results are not large in absolute terms (Amato, 2001). The difference in the effects of parental divorce on children reflects the variability of outcomes between the two groups as influenced by the children's adaptability.

The difference in the effects of parental divorce on children reflects the variability of outcomes between the two groups as influenced by the child's adaptability. The degree of conflict between parents, changes in the child's standard of living, and the amount of additional stress the child experiences, such as changing schools, all influence children's adjustment after divorce (Amato, 2001). Children's adjustment is also influenced by their age, with young children having a lower risk of divorce than pre-teens or adolescents, who appear to be more vulnerable to adjustment difficulties at home or school (Härkönen, 2013; Wood et al., 2004). According to Lansdale and Hetherington, children frequently experience more

short-term adjustment difficulties following their parents' divorce (Lansford, 2009). However, these difficulties can be reduced or eliminated after the initial adjustment period for divorce, one of which is through cooperative communication with children regarding their parent's divorce.

Single Parent Communication about Divorce to Children

Divorce affects not only adults but children as well. Most researchers believe that children who witness parental divorce are at risk for various negative developmental outcomes (Lansford, 2009). Interpersonal communication between divorced parents and their children is necessary for the two's relationship as well as the child's socio-emotional development. Communication can help form empathic communication between single mothers or single fathers to provide a positive understanding for children about divorce (Fitria et al., 2020).

Single parents play an important role in communication with their children, especially in terms of disclosure. Single parent disclosure is intended to help children understand the events and process of divorce, as well as to reduce children's fears and anxieties about uncertainty. Disclosure can also promote intimacy and improve the quality of a parent-child relationship (Kang et al., 2017).

However, communicating divorce with children is a difficult task for single parents. Divorce disclosure to children, particularly teenagers, is often regarded as painful and adds psychological stress to their lives (Lehman & Koerner, 2002). It takes great courage, good language, and the right time to communicate and explain the separation of parents to children.

According to Ellen Galinsky and Judi David, the following steps can be used to explain divorce to children: (1) Informing and explaining the imminent separation of parents; (2) Explaining that the separation was not caused by the child's fault; (3) Avoiding conflict and assisting children in expressing feelings; (3) Avoiding conflict and assisting children in expressing feelings; (4) Seeking and engaging third-party support; (5) Giving time and sharing emotions to children feel better; and (6) Opening opportunities for further discussion whenever the child requires it; (7) Maintain as much continuity as possible in children's social lives; and (8) Provide encouragement and support to children and themselves (Galinsky & David, 1988).

When communicating with children, parents must consider several factors that can influence the child's acceptance process, such as (1) Planning the right time to talk and determining the flow of the conversation; (2) choosing a comfortable place to talk to each other; (3) having a heart-to-heart conversation, and keeping the situation conducive; and (4) providing directed explanations and using language that is easily understood by children; (5) Allowing children to ask questions and express their feelings and opinions; (6) Emphasizing to the child that the love and time of parents will always be given to the child; and (7) Avoiding activities that cause psychological pressure on children, such as lying, covering up, and blaming each other in front of children (Anas, 2011).

With good communication and interpersonal interaction from single parents, children are expected to be able to feel, accept, and understand events and conditions that occur in their families. Good interpersonal communication can also foster children's openness to single parents, resulting in a sense of mutual motivation (Fitria et al., 2020). In this way, children can understand and recognize their biological and psychological needs, allowing them to adapt to changing family circumstances.

Conclusion

Divorce is a type of social problem that has become a global phenomenon. Divorce affects not only adults but also children. The effects of parental divorce on children vary in the same way as the effects of divorce on adults. There is a significant difference between divorced children, with one group of children being profoundly affected by their parent's separation and the other group of children being

relatively unaffected. The difference in the effect of divorce on children reflects the variability of outcomes between the two groups as influenced by the child's adaptability. Good interpersonal communication and interaction from the parents, either single mothers or fathers, is one way to help children adjust after a divorce.

Interpersonal communication between divorced parents and their children is essential for their relationship and their children's socio-emotional development. Single-parent open communication is intended to help children understand the events and process of divorce, as well as to reduce children's fears and anxieties about uncertainty. However, communicating divorce with children is not an easy thing for single parents. It takes specific steps to explain divorce to children, and several things must be considered so that children can accept and understand their parents' separation.

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