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THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of divorce on children. Divorce has a direct impact on children's development and can influence their behaviour either positively or negatively. The purpose of this paper is to identify the effects of divorce towards the children itself and to examine the challenges that the children face after their parents had divorced. Additionally, to find out the way for the children of divorce overcome their challenges. Divorce can more likely give negative impacts towards children. A large number of Malaysian children can expect to experience a lot of ill effects that parental divorce has been shown to cause. Two methods are used. One is data collection strategies which is interview type and sampling. The second one is data analysis which is thematic analysis. This study adopts the family stress theory by Reuben Hill explains that a crisis for families that often leads to reorganization to the family's style of functioning is due to major stressful life events, where particularly those that have chronic difficulties. The result revealed that divorce of parent does effect the children itself. Besides that, the correspondent had a different experience and opinion about the challenges of divorce. But majority of the correspondent felt depressed and stress out just after their parent's divorce. Not just that the correspondent also agreed that financial is the main challenges after their parent's divorce. Adding on, the children of divorce overcome their challenges by seeking and accept support, taking care of physical health and focus on addressing problems instead of feeling helpless about them.

Keynote: effects, divorce, children, parents, children psychology

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a legal dissolution of marriage and it is one of the most common issues that had largely affected the children. Following divorce, children experience many difficulties which may linger into adulthood if left unaddressed, adversely affecting their success in

intimate relationships (Cui & Fincham,2010; Shulman, Zlotnik, Shachar-Shapira, Conolly, & Bohr, 2012). However, divorce itself does not affect children in a negative way. It is more often from the feeling of doubt of what is going to happen to the family after the divorce, from the level of conflict between the parents and how the parenting after the divorce is done.

Everyone dreams to have a happy marriage that would last forever but unfortunately not everyone is lucky enough to live that fairy-tale. In Islam, divorce is not the best solution to resolve a broken marriage and is advisable to fix it in a better way. According to Dogarawa Ahmad Bello (2009), from the given procedure, it is clear that Islam permits divorce only when it has become impossible for the parties to live together in harmony and also all attempts to make peace have failed. Sadly, the rate of divorce is increasing year by year and it is unhealthy. Nevertheless, divorce still occur anyway not because of will but because of the environment and it happens to affect the children growth.

Divorce has a direct impact on children's development and can influence their behaviour either positively or negatively. When the children keep on witnessing the fight between their parents, it may result on the children's emotion physically and mentally. Children usually end up being the middle person of interaction between their parents. Additionally, as concluded by Cui and Ficham (2010), children who witness conflict between their parents later exhibit similar patterns of conflict in their own marriages. Besides that, they may have to move to a different environment and adapting to a new lifestyle such as a new school, new friends and a new house. Some may even have to travel back and forth from one parent's house to another. Without realizing, parents are setting a bad example of their marriage towards the children. The end result the children may blame themselves for the divorce and still hoping that their parents will get back together.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Definition of Divorce

Divorce is a painful challenge that faced by the married couple which is a separation between the husband and wife to end their marriage. According to Meyer (2017) a divorce is a legal action between married couple to end their marriage relationship. It can be referred to

as dissolution or dysfunctional of marriage and way to ends the marriage before the death of either spouse. The dissolution of a marriage is often traumatic and can affect the children with parent's relationship. According to one study, the child will be more antisocial when they are in the dysfunctional families "the higher the level of family dysfunction prior to divorce, the greater the reduction in child antisocial behavior after the divorce". According to United States show that people who divorced individuals compared with married individuals, report less happiness, more symptoms of depression, stress, more social isolation, more negative life events, and more health problem such as mental and physical issues.

(Bierman, Fazio & Milkie (2006) Hetherington (2003) Wood, Goesling, & Avellar (2007).

There are many cases that can lead to divorce such as financial problem, lack of communication, constant arguing, and lack of intimacy and sexual or physically abuse. All of these stressful features of divorce can take a cumulative toll on people's physical and mental health (Graham, Christian, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006). Consequently, there are many disadvantages associated with being divorced appear such as negative effects on the person itself, extended families and their children. For example, Wade and Pevalin (2004) was found that individuals in the United States who separated or divorced had poorer mental and health prior to marital failure. Furthermore, divorce will effect on individual functioning, families going through divorce experience changes in dyadic and overall family relationship level. Anderson & Sabatelli (2011), Emery (2011). To sum up everything divorce can make a lot of changes that can affect the family members and the person itself.

Effects of divorce towards the children itself.

1. The effects of divorce towards the children's psychology.

Divorce is an increased risk factor for children to develop and experience psychological difficulties. Studies support that children from divorced families displays a higher level of depression and anxiety (Warner & Mahoney, 2009). Moreover, children who experience parental divorce tend to have more emotional, social, behavioural, and learning problems than individuals from intact homes (Cohen, 2002; Nair & Murray, 2005; Weir, 2006). Children with divorced parents tend to display greater levels of anxiety, depression,

anger, and antisocial behaviour than individuals whose families remain intact (Clarke-Stewart, 2006; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999; Strohschein, 2005). When parents split and one goes away, it's as if children lose a part of themselves. It's normal for kids to feel angry, sad, confused, and even responsible in some ways. Feelings of anger, sadness, betrayal, loss, and sometimes rejection and abandonment are all part of the trauma of divorce. For many teens, these feelings persist even though their parents divorced 4, 8, or even 10 years ago (Gaskins, 1996).

2. The effects of divorce toward the children's social development.

Amato (2003) researched another researcher named Judith Wallerstein stated that children who came from divorced families tend to have lack of interpersonal skills as compared to parents that have been continuously married and have been good model to their children. For children whose parents are divorced and do not have such a model, tend to also have issues with intimacy and commitment. The ramifications of divorce go beyond the child's wellbeing during his or her adolescence and stretch far into his or her adulthood and thus the negative habits, notions, relationship skills, and ideals are passed onto a next generation where they continue to make the same mistakes and continue the pattern or cycle for the next generation and so on (Wallerstein, 2005). In addition, Tremblay, Nagin, Seguin, Zoccolillo, Zelazo, & Boivin (2004) found the following: most children have initiated the use of physical aggression during infancy, and most will learn to use alternatives in the following years before entering primary school. Humans seem to learn to regulate the use of physical aggression during the preschool years. Those who do not, seem to be at highest risk of serious violent behavior during adolescence and adulthood. The most typical form of aggression in males is physical aggression (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette 2001). The most typical forms of aggression in females include the following: indirect aggression, relational aggression, and social aggression (Underwood, Galen, & Paquette, 2001).

3. The effects of divorce towards the children's education.

Divorce can potentially cause psychological distress in children during the time of divorce. This can manifest itself in changes in mood, sleep patterns, appetite, ability to focus, performance in school, as well as, a myriad of other outcomes (Warner & Mahoney, 2009). Moreover, school-aged children are at greater social and academic risk. They commonly react with depression, withdrawal, grieving, fear, fantasies of responsibility for the break-up and of possible reconciliation, anger, shame, decreased school performance, a sense of loss or rejection, and conflicts over which parent to express loyalty to (Ashley Stapleton, 2009). Portnoy (2008) argued that children from divorced families obtained lower scores on academic achievement, emotional adjustment, social interaction, and behavioural measures.

4. The effects of divorce towards the children's future relationship.

Children from divorced families also endure fears, anxieties, love and commitment issues that affect them in their future relationships (Kim Abel, 2012). Those with parental divorce reported lower levels of marital commitment and more pro-divorce attitudes, indicating that attitudes towards marriage and divorce are beliefs that are partially created even before young adults enter into relationships (Eliyahu Melen, 2017). For girls, this could translate into not selecting the best suitor to aid in forming and raising a family or for the woman to select a man to try and fill in the missing desires, needs and wants that were not met by her own father during her childhood or adolescence as a result of a divorce (Kim Abel, 2012). However, for boys this could result in not understanding the role or need for a father figure in raising children and ultimately could result in a man beginning a family and then abandoning it as he saw his father do to his own family, not realizing the ramifications of said actions and ultimately passing on this flawed and negative information to a new generation (Kim Abel, 2012).

The challenges that the children face after their parents had divorced.

1. Had to travel from one parent's home to another.

When the children need to keep moving from one place to another, the children need to adapt with the environment at the new place, Amato and Cheadle (2005) also stated that along with the economic hardship come the stressful events, such as moving to new neighborhoods, changing schools, parental remarriage, merging or blending of families and even the possibility of additional parental divorces. This issue causes the children to feel “caught in the middle” during or after their parent’s divorce, according to Amato and Afifi’s (2006) research shows the emotional and behavioral problems of children who feel caught in the middle can be directly related to their parent’s divorce. This shows the children that need to travel from one parent’s home to another can be challenging to the children’s life.

2. The parent who gain custody of the children may restrict them from seeing the other parent.

Usually in this case the mother will get the custody and the children may have the likelihood to barely see their father. This statement is supported by Thiong’o Ernest Karanja (2016), he stated that in most cases, children will live with their mothers and they will see their father much less .Furthermore, there are five theoretical perspectives used to explain this variability; the loss of the noncustodial parent, the adjustment of the custodial parent, interparental conflict, economic hardship, and the cumulative effect of stressful life changes, (Warner & Mahoney, 2009). Some of the reason of the mother will not allow their child to meet their own father because due the financial purposes like the father don’t give the “nafkah” to child. According to Kalil and Ryan (2010), the economic circumstances of families decline after divorce, especially among mother-headed families.

3. Fighting their own mental thought

Divorce can give the main challenges toward the children involving their mental thought because of the external stress and pressure from their own parents that can lead to the depression, so the studies supported that children from divorced families display a higher level of depression and anxiety (Warner & Mahoney, 2009). The children of divorce’s family tend to get mental health easily because of their own surrounding and lack of loves. This

statement is supported by Sandler, Wheeler & Braver (2013) that another issue frequently faced by children of divorce is an increase in mental health challenges attribute to the decreased involvement of parents following divorce. These findings show that children are not immune to the effects of divorce and can suffer severe and lasting consequences if left untreated. According to Fabricius and Luecken (2007) who studied the physical health correlation for children of divorce, the findings indicate that more stress-related physical illnesses developed for children in divorce settings than those in the control group.

Way for the children of divorce overcome their challenges.

1. Seek and accept support.

The divorce child usually will feel stressed and depressed at first when it comes to knowing their parents have been divorced. This is because they cannot accept of what is happening and they usually overthink of what will happen with their lives in the future. According to Darton (2012), keeping in touch with people can help you feel a bit more grounded and sometimes get things more in perspective. Try a short phone call to a close friend or relative, or if you cannot manage it, just an email or text message. Let people you trust and know about you to improve your mood. This is one way of obtaining support you need while you work to feel better. They can help you to figure out solutions to some of the problems you have been dealing with.

2. Enjoy yourself.

Find time to recover yourself. Do whatever that you like, do not deprive yourself of things you would like to do just because before this you did it with your parents and this time you need to do it alone. It may seem awkward at first, but go for a walk, to a concert, or to a movie and having fun (Narang, 2014). Find an activity that's completely different from the things causing you stress also is a great way to get away from pressure. If stress is making you feel lonely or isolated, shared hobbies can also be a good way to meet new people. (Boyd, 2015).

3. Take care of your physical health.

Even in distress, we also need to take care of ourselves. Get regular exercise, eat nourishing food, and maintain a healthy weight. This is to ensure that our health is in good condition to do our daily routine (Vierck, 2003). This statement was supported by Darton (2012), he stated that regular exercise can be very effective in lifting your mood and increasing your energy levels, and it is also likely to improve your appetite and sleep. Physical activity stimulates chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which can help you to feel better.

4. Focus on addressing your problems instead of feeling helpless about them.

Most of the divorce children may feel hopeless after their parents' divorce and this makes them started to do useless things such as involve with drugs, promiscuity and even some of them commit suicide because of pressure. They should not have to do all that instead they should think on how to improve their relationship with both parents and stay focused on their own lives for the future success. Vierck (2003), stated that think of them as "challenges or tests" rather than as insurmountable obstacles. Other than that, stay focused on positive things and avoid negative self-talk such as "I cannot do that without my parents", just think that you can do that and start do it because negative self-talk will make you feel more stress.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is the method to solve the problem and studying how research being carried out by collecting the information and data on effects of divorce toward children.

1. Data collection strategies

a) Interview type

The researcher using a qualitative method which is often associated with an in-depth interview that focus on individual case studies. Meanwhile the researcher also using the semi-structured interview which is a meeting that the interviewer does not 100% strictly follow a list of question that already been prepared for the interview. Researcher will ask more on open-ended questions, that allowing a discussion between the interviewer and interviewee

rather than a straightforward question and follow the answer format (Ridzuan, Ridzuan and Ridzuan, 2018).

b) Sampling

The researcher using the purposive sampling in order to collect the data for the interview. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sample that is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. For this research the characteristics of the sample that the researcher choose are:

- a) A child from a divorce family
- b) University student

The researcher chooses the sample based on the both characteristics that already been listed. There are 7 interviewee who is a child from the divorce family that were interviewed. The purpose of this interview is to know what the responses, feeling and experience of child from a divorce family regarding the issues. Moreover, this study is to seek information that was gathered from seven students from variety of Universities regarding the effect of divorce on children. Through this, it allows the researchers to see the students' development such as behaviours, opinions, values, or feelings to be a child of divorce. It also portrays the point of view and perspective to be a child of divorce as an act of understanding their issues in their current life.

2.Data analysis

a) Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a central to the credible qualitative research. By doing thematic analysis the researcher can describe and understand the research instrument and interpret the experience properly based on the topic the effect of divorce on children the researcher makes a mind map and observed all the corresponded answer based on the issues (Abdul Rauf Ridzuan et al., 2015).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. To identify the effects of divorce towards the children itself.

- **The effects of divorce towards young adults' psychology.**

One of the informants named Wati stated that she felt depressed, sad and stress as she tried to figure out what is she supposed to do on how to solve her parents' problems. This statement is supported by Ahmad where he said that he felt unnerved while Akasha also stated that it was really sad as she cries every time until her eyes became sore. This statement is supported by (Warner & Mahoney, 2009) where studies support that children from divorced families displays a higher level of depression and anxiety. However, one of our informants named Akasha stated that she does not feel anything during her parent's divorce and this statement is supported by Radi where he said that his parent's divorce does not affect his psychology at all. This shows that only some children of divorced parents went through depression during their parent's separation.

- **The effects of divorce towards young adults' social development.**

Our informant name Wati stated that she can barely accept it at first as it felt unusual to not live together with both of her parents and she had to force herself to adapt with the environment. This statement is supported by Arina where she said that she had to face financial problems and Syam stated that he had to meet his separated parents in different times and not together like how they used to be. However, according to Akasha her parent's divorce did not affect her social development and this statement is supported by Ahmad where he said that he was already close to one of his parents that he lives with now, so his lifestyle remains the same. This shows that the research conducted by the scholar are not relevant because the society at their country and Malaysia are different.

- **The effects of divorce towards young adults' education.**

Based on this question, our informant named Radi stated that the divorce did affect his education because he kept on stressing about his parents and this statement is supported by Wati where she said that it caused her to overthink and lose focus to study which resulted to bad grades. However, Syam stated that it is his parents' issue and not his and Akasha also said that the pressure was between her parents and she had nothing to do about it. This statement is supported by Arina where she stated that she is a type of person who will not let anything interrupt her studies. This result does not support (Warner & Mahoney, 2009) which shows that their statement is not valid for generation nowadays.

- **The effects of divorce towards young adults' future relationship.**

Our female informant named Wati stated that her parent's divorce did affect her in terms of her future relationship because she lost their trust on males. This statement is supported by Arina where she believed that all males are the same and Aksha also stated that her father was her role model who broke her mom's heart. Besides that, the male informant named Syam stated that he took his parent's divorce as a lesson to be a better husband. This statement is supported by Radi where he said that he will be a better father because it will most likely affect the kids more than the parents. This shows that the statements by (Kim Abel,2012) are not valid because none of the informants' result are the same. However, both male and female informants believed that it depends on the individual itself, so it does not affect them anymore. This shows that the generation nowadays had become more open-minded and have different perceptions to be compared with the research by the scholars in 2012.

Conclusion remarks:

In conclusion, not every people have the same effect as how the scholars had studied. It depends on the person's mind and how they see the situation whether they wanted to see it in a positive or a negative way. This also shows that the generation nowadays had become more open-minded and have different perceptions to be compared with the people back then. In a nutshell, the children of divorce especially young adult must think very rational in controlling their thoughts and gain more positivity in order to avoid unwanted effects.

1. To examine the challenges that the children face after their parents had divorced.

- **The children need to travel from one parent's home to another**

Syam, Dani and Arina agreed that they need to travel from one place to another and sometimes their parents insist to pick up their siblings during weekends. But it not same to Wati and Radi when their parents are rarely come to see them. Meanwhile Ahmad said that he never travels from one parent's home to another and rarely seeing his father until Ahmad was 16 when his father got married. Next for Akasha, her parents involving the children in the communication and made the children the middle person that help them communicate and it quite disturbing. This proven the statement from Amato and Afifi's (2006) research shows the emotional and behavioural problems of children who feel caught in the middle can be directly related to their parent's divorce.

Besides that, having to cope with the new environment. Dani, Radi and Wati cope with new environment by socializing more and find new friend to hang out and finding a good friend that he can rely and trusted on. Syam stated that it takes time for him to adjust to the new environment but mostly he acts like nothing happened or maybe like thin that it is just a small problem and live his life as usual normal days. Nevertheless, Akasha, Ahmad and Arina stated the environment before and after the divorced felt the same because their parents handled the responsibility really well. However, it opposed the statement from Amato and Cheadle (2005) also stated that along with the economic hardship come the stressful events, such as moving to new neighbourhoods, changing schools, parental remarriage, merging or blending of families and even the possibility of additional parental divorces

- **Parent who gain custody of the children may restrict them from seeing the other parent.**

This situation is supported by Wati and Radi because their parents did not give permission for the other parents to meet basically because of their mother had hatred toward their ex-husband. This statement is supported by Thiong'o Ernest Karanja (2016), he stated that in most cases, children will live with their mothers and they will see their father much

less. However, for Dani, Syam and Akasha stated their parents does not restrict them from meeting their parents and even insist them to meet their parents. Not just that, in term of financial, it too become a challenge because when their parents' divorce some of them forget their responsibilities toward their own children and does not give the 'nafkah' to the children. Wati and Radi stated that it is very challenging in term of financial because they need to survive for university and in life too. It proven by to Kalil and Ryan (2010), the economic circumstances of families decline after divorce, especially among mother-headed families. This is because of the behaviour of the parents itself that forgot their own responsibilities.

- **The children fighting their own mental thought.**

It is supported by Syam, Akasha and Radi that stated that after their parent divorce is a crucial time where some of them almost make to the negative path and also when they are alone or frustrated suddenly, they will think of it. This proven by Sandler, Wheeler & Braver (2013) that another issue frequently faced by children of divorce is an increase in mental health challenges attribute to the decreased involvement of parents following divorce. But this situation is not same as Dani and Ahmad because they never thought of themselves being depressed. However, it shows that not every children of divorce parent will feel the same as the statement that made by Warner & Mahoney (2009) that supported that children from divorced families display a higher level of depression and anxiety.

Conclusion remarks:

It shows that not all respondent feels the divorce can give a bad challenge in children life. The correspondent had a different experience and opinion about the challenges of divorce. But majority of the correspondent felt depressed and stress out just after their parent's divorce. Not just that the correspondent also agreed that financial is the main challenges after their parent's divorce because some of them need to do to business in order to survive in university. However, some of the correspondent felt the other way when their parents still managed to support the children financially and still interact like always.

2. To find out the way for the children of divorce overcome their challenges.

It is not easy for the children of divorce to cope with the situation that happened to them. Different people could have different way to overcome this challenge, some might be very frustrated with the situation until they cannot handle their emotion and start to involve and doing something that could give a bad impact towards themselves but some might handle it properly and even had a better life after that.

- **Seek and accept support.**

Firstly, the method uses to overcome this challenge is to seek and accept support. Based on the interview that we have conducted, informant named Dani he used this method, which is he will talk to people who is trusted like his brother who is always with him whenever he needs to share his problems. This also supported by informant named Radi, which he also will find and talk to his close friend about the problem that he faced. According to Darton (2012), keeping in touch with people can help you feel a bit more grounded and sometimes get things more in perspective this is because, people that you trust and know about you know how to improve your mood and make you feel better. Sometimes they also can help to figure out a solution of the problems that we have been dealing with.

- **Taking care of physical health.**

Next, to overcome this challenge is by taking care of physical health. Informant named Syam stated that during his parents' divorce, he feels stressed and depressed at first, but he overcome his mental issues by started to taking care of his health. This is because he needs a lot of energy to live a life as a student. What he does is he will spend his weekend about 30 minutes to jog in the morning. This is because by doing this activity he will feel better. This statement was supported by Darton (2012), which he stated that exercise can be very effective in lifting a mood and increase energy levels because during the exercise, chemicals in the brain called endorphins will stimulate and it help you to feel better.

- **Focus on addressing problems instead of feeling helpless about it.**

Lastly, informant named Wati stated that, to overcome this situation is just focus on addressing problems instead of feeling helpless about them. Informant named Akasha also agreed and she said that she always thinks positive because she believes everything that happen for a reason and it is useless to be sad all the time. This also supported by informant named Ahmad, we must have great mindset and not causing problems with parents instead always think on how to improve relationship with both parents and stay focused on his own lives for the future success. The last informant which is Arina said that, we have learnt to controls personal thought and emotion in order to avoid overthinking towards situation that happen between their parents. There is still a great friend and relative that always support her and it is not the end of the world. Vierck (2003), stated that stay focused on positive things and avoid negative self-talk because negative self-talk will make you feel more stress.

Conclusion remarks:

Based on the interview session, most of the informant stated that to overcome this challenge is by focus on addressing it instead of feeling helpless about it. But every people have their own way to handle this situation and not everyone is the same. Everything is depending on how we think about the situation happened, if we think positive it might be positive but if negative it would be negative. So, the children of divorce especially young adult need to be calm and know how to handle their emotion and being open to share problem with people who is trusted to seek support from them. Must believe that every problem must have a solution so handle it wisely.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it shows that divorce can give effect toward on a child whether in term of children's psychology, social development, education and also future relationship. This shows that it is important for the parents know the consequence of divorce toward the children. Children is so fragile and need enough love from their own parents in order to live a happy and motivated life. There also few challenges the children face after their parents had divorced like had to travel from one parent's home to another, the parent who gain the custody of the children may restrict them from seeing the other parent and lastly the children will fighting with their own mental thought. All of this challenge the children may face after the divorce happen may give a bad effect toward the children itself. Next, there are few ways for the children of divorce overcome their challenges are seek and accept support, enjoy yourself, take care of your physical health and also focus on addressing your problem instead of feeling helpless about them. This a way that the children can applied in their daily life in order to stay away from a bad vibe and negative thinking. So, from all this issue there are few recommendations that we need to acknowledge which is the parents should play the main role to not stress out their children. Other that the children should live their live and understand the issues ongoing instead on worrying the negative things. Lastly, the children should go to counselling for treatment. So, this research show that divorce do give a bad effect toward the children.

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