

Research Article

## Sense of Belonging in Adolescents Whose Parents Divorce and Remarry

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### Abstract

This study aims to describe the sense of belonging to family in adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried. Parental divorce in adolescence is a significant event that impacts changes in a child's social and emotional life. During this time, adolescents go through various important transitions that affect the development of their identity. A sense of belonging is considered a key element in ensuring that teens feel accepted, valued, and supported in the family. This study involved four resource persons, namely two subjects of adolescent girls aged 18-20 years and two significant others. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with subjects and significant others. The results of the study showed that there was a difference in adolescents' sense of belonging depending on the post-divorce parental relationship. Teens whose parents can reconcile and build healthy communication tend to feel more valued and more connected to their families, even after remarriage. In contrast, teens whose parents are unable to reconcile with divorce tend to feel isolated and have difficulty building strong relationships with their families. These findings emphasize the importance of the role of parents in supporting the emotional recovery process and the development of a sense of belonging in adolescents after divorce.

**Keywords:** Sense of Belonging, Teens, Parental Divorce, Family, Parental Relationships

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Problem

Divorce is a formal separation between a married couple which results in them no longer carrying out their duties and obligations as a couple (El-Alami &



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Hinchcliffe, 2023). In Indonesia, the divorce rate has increased significantly, with the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) reporting 291,677 cases in 2020, which increased to 448,126 in 2022 (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2023). Divorce affects not only the couple involved, but also the children in the family. A complete and harmonious family plays an important role in shaping a child's personality. However, divorce results in disturbances in children's psychological development, such as changes in attitude, responsibility, and emotional stability, which can cause feelings of anxiety, confusion, and sadness (Sarmadi & Khodabakhshi-Koolaee, 2023).

Children whose parents divorced often experience frustration because their basic needs, such as feelings of being loved and valued, are disrupted. A family that is not harmonious, or often referred to as a broken home family, can negatively affect the development of a child's personality (Gul & Nadeemullah, 2017). The effects of divorce on children can be diverse, including emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Ottosen & Schwartz, 2013). Therefore, the role of parents in the family is very important in the formation of children's self-esteem, which is influenced by the example shown by parents (Harris et al., 2015).

Adolescence is a challenging period, especially for those who come from families that have experienced divorce. Stereotypes about adolescents' behavior often arise because of their difficulty adapting to changes in the family (Qu, 2023). Adolescents whose parents divorced are more susceptible to social and emotional problems, as well as difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships (Santrock, 2012). This exacerbates the discomfort in the home, which is supposed to be a safe and comfortable place for teenagers.

Maslow's theory of sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943) states that a sense of acceptance, value, and connection in a group is essential for individual well-being. In the context of the family, the sense of belonging is the feeling of being accepted as part of a strong family, which greatly affects the emotional and social development of the child. Adolescents from divorced families often have difficulty feeling a strong sense of belonging (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981).

The study of the sense of belonging in adolescent families whose parents are divorced is very important, considering the high divorce rate in Indonesia. This research focuses on understanding how family dynamics after divorce, including the marriage of both parents, affect adolescents' sense of belonging to their families.

## **Research Focus**

This study aims to find out the picture of sense of belonging in adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried. The main focus of this study is to answer the main question: "What is the description of the sense of belonging to the family in adolescents whose parents divorce and remarry?" Some of the in-depth sub-questions are as follows:

1. How did teenagers feel about their parents' divorce at that time?
2. How do they understand their sense of belonging to their family during and after divorce?
3. What impact does parental divorce have on their sense of belonging on the family today?

## **Significance and Uniqueness of Research**

This research is relevant considering the high rate of divorce in society and its impact on children, especially adolescents. Based on previous research, parental



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divorce affects the psychological and social aspects of children, such as feelings of shame, anxiety, and difficulty in relating to others (Adofo & Etsey, 2016). This study is unique in that it focuses on teenagers whose parents have remarried, creating a stepfamily. The relationship between adolescents and their biological mothers and stepfamilies is the main key in shaping their sense of belonging (King et al., 2015).

This research is also expected to provide a new perspective on the impact of parental divorce on adolescents' sense of belonging, as well as enrich studies in the field of family psychology, especially in the context of an incomplete family and its impact on child development.

### **Research Objectives**

This study aims to describe how adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried feel a sense of belonging to their families. In addition, this study also aims to find out the factors that affect the sense of belonging in adolescents after parental divorce.

### **Research Benefits**

#### **1. Theoretical Benefits:**

- Adding insights and literature in research on the sense of belonging in the family context, especially for adolescents from families who have experienced divorce and marriage of both parents.
- Contributing to the development of psychology, especially family psychology.

#### **2. Practical Benefits:**

- Provide an understanding for individuals whose parents divorced and remarried on how they can better understand their condition through the experiences presented in this study.
- Provide helpful information for divorced and remarried parents regarding the impact of divorce on their children.
- Increase public understanding of the condition of adolescents whose parents divorce and remarry, as well as the importance of support for them.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Adolescent**

#### **1. Definition of Adolescent**

Adolescence is a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, which is characterized by physical, cognitive, and emotional changes. Piaget (in Hurlock) described adolescence as a period in which individuals begin to feel equality with adult society, particularly in terms of rights and obligations. Hurlock states that adolescence lasts between the ages of 13 and 21, with age differences in adolescent boys and girls. This stage is crucial in the formation of identity, where individuals begin to navigate their path to independence and maturity (Amato, 2010).

Erikson (Thalib, 2010) divides adolescence into three stages: early adolescence (13-15 years for females, 15-17 years for males), intermediate adolescence (15-18 years for females, 17-19 females), and late adolescence (18-21 years for females, 19-21 females). In general, adolescents experience very significant biological, psychological, and social changes during this period (Özdemir et al., 2016).



## 2. Stages of Adolescent Development

Erikson said that adolescence is in the fifth stage of the eight stages of human psychosocial development, namely identity versus role confusion. At this stage, adolescents search for their identity and often experience internal conflicts, emotional instability, as well as changes in interpersonal relationships (Honig, 2016). In addition, adolescents often face emotional and behavioral problems as a result of the transition they are experiencing (Kenny & Rice, 1995).

Mason et al add that adolescents tend to seek acceptance and feel anxious and lonely if they are not accepted by their social group (Mason et al., 2009). Therefore, a strong sense of belonging is essential for their emotional well-being (Diananda, 2018).

### **Sense of Belonging**

#### 1. Definition of Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is a basic psychological need that refers to the feeling of being accepted, valued and recognized as an integral part of a social group or environment. Maslow in his hierarchy of needs stated that the sense of belonging is a basic need after physiological needs and a sense of security (Maslow, 1943). Haim-Litevsky et al. assert that this sense of belonging plays an important role in the health and well-being of individuals, on par with basic needs such as food and shelter (Haim-Litevsky et al., 2023).

A sense of belonging is also defined as the drive to build and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 2017). Individuals who feel a sense of belonging in a group or family will feel more connected and valued, which contributes to their emotional well-being (Choenarom et al., 2005).

#### 2. Dimension of Sense of Belonging

According to Anant, the sense of belonging consists of two main dimensions: (Anant, 1967)

- Valued Involvement: This dimension involves feeling valued and needed within a group, where individuals feel their contribution is important.
- Fit: This dimension focuses on the individual's conformity to the group's values and norms, where the individual feels accepted because of the similarity of attributes and beliefs.

#### 3. Factors Affecting the Sense of Belonging

Ahn & Davis identified two main factors that affect the sense of belonging: (Ahn & Davis, 2020)

- Felt Security: This aspect involves feeling safe and stable in the group, allowing individuals to feel they can count on support and acceptance.
- Self-Esteem Enhancement: Individuals feel valued and recognized for their contributions, which increases self-esteem and strengthens a sense of belonging.

According to Hagerty, additional factors that play a role in the development of a sense of belonging include energy for engagement, potential for meaningful engagement, and potential for similarity of characteristics among group members (Hagerty et al., 1996).

#### 4. Sense of Belonging in the Family

A sense of belonging in the context of the family is the feeling of being accepted



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and valued as part of the family unit. It is related to positive experiences such as being understood, appreciated, and wanting to spend time with family (Poggenpoel et al., 2017). For adolescents, a harmonious family can strengthen their sense of belonging, which supports their emotional and social development.

However, for teenagers from divorced families, their sense of belonging can be threatened. Research by Rejaan et al. shows that adolescents from divorced families tend to have a lower level of sense of belonging compared to adolescents from whole families (Rejaan et al., 2022). This has an impact on their emotional and behavioral well-being.

#### 5. Benefits of Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging has many benefits, both physically and psychologically. Physically, the sense of belonging can improve neurological function and immunity. Psychologically, the benefits include increased self-esteem, reduced anxiety, stress, and depression, and increased overall life satisfaction (Hagerty et al., 1996).

The theory also suggests that improving a sense of belonging in adolescents, especially those who come from divorced families, can help them adjust better and reduce the negative psychological impact that may arise from parental divorce.

### Parents

#### 1. Definition of Parent

Parents, as the primary caregivers in the family, play an important role in guiding and educating children. They are the first source that provides life experience and shapes children's behavior (Bornstein, 2015). Parents can be natural, foster, or stepparents, all of whom have a role in forming families and child development (Ruli, 2020).

#### 2. Parental Function

Parents have an important role in children's development, both physically, emotionally, and socially. They are the main source of values and behavioral models that children imitate. Parents also function as role models, which are expected to provide healthy guidance for the development of children's character.

### Divorce

#### 1. Definition of Divorce

Divorce is a formal separation between a husband and wife that ends their marital relationship, often caused by disharmony in the household (Rokan et al., n.d.). According to Elida Prayitno and Erlamsyah, divorce occurs when a couple can no longer maintain their relationship to achieve a common goal in marriage (Birditt et al., 2017).

#### 2. The Impact of Divorce on Adolescents

Divorce has a huge impact on teenagers, who often experience emotional and psychological changes. Research by Adofo & Etsey shows that adolescents from divorced families experience anxiety, depression, and difficulty in establishing social relationships (Adofo & Etsey, 2016). Adolescents also often feel feelings of shame, loss, and difficulty adapting after their parents' divorce (R. Subramaniam et al., 2020).

However, it is important to note that not all teens experience the same impact. Some adolescents are able to adjust better, while others need extra support to cope



with the psychological impact of their parents' divorce (Dianovinina et al., 2023).

## **METHOD**

### **Research Type**

This research uses a qualitative approach, which aims to understand and describe phenomena in depth. According to Creswell, qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand central symptoms by means of in-depth interviews and data collection in the form of words or texts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The data obtained are then analyzed to produce depictions or themes that reflect the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Raco stated that the results of qualitative research are usually presented in the form of flexible reports, where the interpretation of the researcher plays an important role in data analysis (Raco, 2010).

This study uses a case study method to explore in depth the picture of sense of belonging in adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried. Creswell defines a case study as an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon in a real context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to explore the life dynamics of the subjects in more detail and contextual, particularly in understanding the changes in family relationships after divorce and marriage of both parents.

The research design used is descriptive case studies, which aim to describe phenomena in detail in a real-life context (Yin, 2017). The researcher wanted to describe how adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried felt a sense of belonging to their families.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis in this study is a description of the sense of belonging in adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried. The main focus is to explore how teens feel accepted, valued, and part of their families after parental divorce. The study subjects were adolescents aged 18 to 21 years who were individuals in an important transitional period in their psychosocial development (Kenny & Rice, 1995). At this age range, adolescents experience major changes both biologically, psychologically, and socially, affecting their need to be accepted into the family (Diananda, 2018).

The researchers will focus on adolescents who experienced parental divorce in their early teens (12-15 years) and have lived life with remarried parents. This is because at that age, adolescents are building self-identity and forming strong interpersonal relationships.

### **Research Subject**

The selection of research subjects was carried out using the purposive sampling technique, where subjects were selected based on criteria determined by the researcher. The research subjects consisted of two adolescents who met the following criteria:

- Ages 18 to 21, which is the age of late adolescence.
- Having parents who are divorced and have remarried.
- Parental divorce occurs during adolescence.

The selection of subjects based on the age of late adolescence (18-21 years) is carried out because at this age, adolescents have gone through a major transitional phase in their lives, which includes changes in identity and the search for identity



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(Mason et al., 2009). Adolescents who experience parental divorce at that age generally have profound experiences related to feelings of acceptance and value in the family, which is the focus of this study.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed researchers to explore more deeply the subjects' feelings and experiences regarding their sense of belonging towards their family. According to Creswell, semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to tailor questions to participants' responses, while still focusing on the main topic to be explored (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Interviews were conducted using interview guidelines developed based on the research topic. Researchers will ask open-ended questions to gain in-depth information regarding adolescents' feelings about their family relationships, especially after parental divorce and both parents' marriages. This interview process allows researchers to gain a broader understanding of the factors that affect the sense of belonging in adolescents.

### **Data Organizing and Analysis Techniques**

The data obtained from the interviews will be processed using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis process begins with data organization which includes data collection through interviews and documentation, filtering relevant data, and systematic data grouping. Interview data will be transcribed in verbatim form to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained.

After the data is compiled and coded, the researcher will conduct a thematic analysis with a theory-driven approach, where the thematic analysis is built on theories relevant to the research topic, especially theories related to the sense of belonging (Khaleghi et al., 2022) and adolescent development (Newman & Newman, 2020). With this approach, the researcher will identify the main themes that emerge from the data and provide an in-depth description of how adolescents feel a sense of belonging to their families.

### **Research Credibility Strengthening Techniques**

To ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher will use the data triangulation technique, which involves collecting data from various sources to ensure the accuracy of the research findings (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Data triangulation was carried out by collecting interviews from several research subjects, and comparing the information obtained from each subject.

In addition, the researcher also used significant other techniques to validate the data obtained. Significant others are the closest people who observe the subject directly and can provide additional perspective on the subject's life experience. In this way, researchers can ensure that the data obtained is not only accurate, but also more in-depth and comprehensive.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Setting**

#### **1. Research Preparation and Implementation**

This study aims to describe the sense of belonging in adolescents whose parents divorced and remarried. This topic was chosen because there is a lack of research that



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examines feelings of family attachment in adolescents with divorced family backgrounds, especially in Indonesia. The researchers started this study after conducting a review of the related literature and found that this theme is very relevant and requires more attention.

The researcher begins by compiling a research proposal based on relevant theories and the literature that has been read. Next, the researcher determines the subjects to be interviewed based on the criteria that have been set. The researcher also prepared interview guidelines that were used to dig into the data in depth and structure.

## 2. Implementation of Data Mining

The data was collected through virtual interviews due to the long geographical distance between the researcher and the research subject, which is located in Jakarta and Surabaya. The interview was conducted using the Google Meet application and recorded using the voice note feature on mobile devices. Interviews were conducted once for each subject and significant others. The interview process was carried out after the researcher obtained consent from the subject and significant others, as evidenced by the informed consent given previously.

The following is the interview schedule conducted in this study:

| Yes | Interview                              | Interview     | Day, Date             | Time                          | Location    |
|-----|----------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 1   | First subject (GBR)                    | Interview One | Wednesday, 8 May 2024 | 07:57 p.m.- 08:22 p.m.        | Google Meet |
| 2   | Second subject (SD)                    | Interview One | Thursday, 9 May 2024  | 04:05 PM- 04:45 PM local time | Google Meet |
| 3   | Significant others first subject (DGT) | Interview One | Thursday, 9 May 2024  | 02:22-02:36 PM local time     | Google Meet |
| 4   | Significant others subject second (JJ) | Interview One | Friday, 10 May 2024   | 07:17-07:35 PM local time     | Google Meet |

## 3. Subject Description and Profile 1 (GBR)

The first subject, with the initials GBR, was born on January 28, 2002 in Jakarta. This young woman is 20 years old and works as a student and barista at a coffee shop. After her parents' divorce in 2013, the subject moved between the house of her biological father, biological mother, and lived alone in a boarding house. Currently, GBR lives with his biological mother and older brother, while the relationship with his biological father is a bit strained after they don't live together.

## 4. Subject Description and Profile 2 (SD)

The second subject, with the initials SD, was born on March 29, 2008 in Bekasi. This 18-year-old girl is a high school student who has just graduated and plans to continue her education to college. The divorce of elementary school parents occurred in 2015, when the subject was still in elementary school. SD has two younger siblings who live with her biological mother, while SD lives with her biological father and stepmother. Relationships with stepmothers and stepfathers tend to be unfamiliar.



## 5. Obstacles in the Implementation of Research

One of the main obstacles faced in this study is the implementation of online interviews due to the long distance between the researcher and the subject. Some technical glitches such as an unstable internet connection also occur during the interview process. Adjustment of interview time with the subject and significant others also affects the smooth collection of data.

## Research Results

### 1. Description of Invention

#### a. Subject 1 Interview Results (GBR)

The first subject, GBR, revealed that his parents' divorce still had a negative impact on his life. He felt confused and sad after his parents' divorce, and often thought that if his parents hadn't divorced, some things might not have happened. Nevertheless, GBR feels appreciated and needed by his family, especially by his biological father who often entrusts certain tasks to him. GBR also felt that his relationship with his biological mother and sibling was very close, although there were awkward feelings with his stepmother.

In terms of a sense of belonging, GBR feels valued involvement in the family, although there is a lack of dimension in terms of fit (suitability) with some family members, especially because of the authoritarian character of his biological father.

#### b. Interview Results Subject 2 (SD)

The second subject, SD, recounted that his parents' divorce involved physical violence that traumatized him since childhood. SD admitted that she felt lonely and underappreciated by her family, because her biological father often left her and her biological mother was more focused on her younger siblings. Despite living with his biological father and stepmother, SD felt that his relationship with his family was becoming increasingly tenuous.

SD feels that her sense of belonging is more about responsibility towards her younger siblings, even though she feels unappreciated and not involved in family decision-making. SD also felt that it did not fit into the characteristics of their family, especially in terms of poor communication and lack of understanding of the subject's desires.

### 2. Data Analysis Results

#### a. GBR Subject Data Analysis

##### 1) Post-Divorce Family Relationships

GBR still feels a strong connection with his family, even though his parents have divorced. He feels appreciated by his biological father and has a closeness to his biological mother and siblings. Despite the awkward feelings with his stepfather and stepmother, GBR still feels a sense of belonging, especially thanks to his well-maintained communication with his family.

##### 2) Sense of Belonging GBR

GBR feels valued involvement with his family, even though his relationship with his stepfather is not very close. He also feels fit in the family even though he has to adapt to the authoritarian character of his biological father.

#### b. Elementary Subject Data Analysis

##### 1) Post-Divorce Family Relationships



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SD felt the greater impact of her parents' divorce, with trauma from physical violence and feelings of loneliness. Despite living with his biological father, SD feels that his relationship with his family is bad due to the lack of communication and attention from his parents.

#### 2) Sense of Belonging SD

SD feels undervalued and not involved in family decisions. Even so, he felt responsible for his younger siblings and tried to protect them. However, SD feels that the sense of belonging in her family is very limited.

### Discussion

Post-Divorce Family Relationships and Sense of Belonging in both subjects showed significant differences, although both faced the impact of parental divorce. GBR still feels that there is a strong family bond even though his parents are divorced, while SD feels more isolated and feels not appreciated by his family.

The following table shows a comparison of the subject's description of family relationships and sense of belonging:

| Subject | Post-Divorce Family Relationships                                                      | Sense of Belonging                                                                              |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GBR     | Trying to maintain a relationship with both parents, closer to mother and sibling      | Feels valued and needed by his family, despite being awkward with his stepmother and stepfather |
| SD      | Bad relationship with his parents, more focused on taking care of his younger siblings | Feeling unappreciated, lonely, and unneeded by their family                                     |

### CONCLUSION

Parental divorce has a significant impact on a teen's life, affecting their sense of attachment to family. The results of this study show a clear difference between the two subjects, GBR and SD, in terms of their sense of belonging to the family after their parents' divorce. GBR, despite feeling sad and still not fully accepting the fact that his family is not intact, still feels valued and accepted in his family. She felt that there was both emotional support from her biological mother and financial support from her biological father, which helped strengthen her sense of belonging to the family even though her parents had divorced and remarried. On the contrary, elementary schools felt a heavier impact. He feels unappreciated and neglected by his parents, mainly due to poor communication and lack of attention from his biological father who often leaves the subject at home. When asked about her sense of belonging, SD revealed that if given a choice, she would prefer not to be born into a divorced family, reflecting how deep her feelings of worthlessness felt. Despite this, SD still tries to maintain a relationship with his younger siblings and feels that he has a responsibility for them. This suggests that although the sense of belonging in the family may be reduced, a sense of attachment can still be formed through relationships with siblings.

Based on these findings, some suggestions can be given. For teens who are going through a parental divorce, it's important to be more open in communicating with parents about their feelings and concerns. Open communication can strengthen family relationships and increase a sense of belonging. Additionally, teens need to



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seek emotional support from both their family and friends to help them feel accepted and understood. For divorced and remarried parents, it is important to stay cooperative in raising children and ensure that family communication and decisions remain involved in their children. A cooperative parenting approach can help strengthen children's sense of belonging. Parents should also pay attention to their teen's feelings, given that feelings of not having or not being appreciated can affect the development of their self-identity. Finally, for further research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to look at changes in adolescents' sense of belonging over time after parental divorce. In addition, further research could explore other factors that influence feelings of belonging, such as adolescents' relationships with peers and their communities, to gain a more thorough understanding of these dynamics.

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