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Research Article

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FATHERLESSNESS IN THE LIVES OF DAUGTERS

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Moudy Poernomo¹, Mutia Rahmi Pratiwi², Amida Yusriana³

^{1,2}Communication Science Faculty of Computer Science Dian Nuswantoro University, ³Amsterdam School of Communication Research University Van Amsterdam

purnomomaudy@gmail.com¹, mutia.rahmi@dns.dinus.ac.id², amidayusriana@gmail.com³

Abstract

In a family, both the mother and father's roles are equally important. A father's role goes beyond being the breadwinner or the head of the family; he is also expected to play a complete role in supporting a child's development and sharing responsibilities with the mother as a wife. When a father doesn't fulfill his role effectively, the issue of "fatherless" arises in the family, which has long-term impacts on the child, including a daughter's perception of her future life partner. The puspose of this research to gain a deeper understanding of whether the absence of a father's role at home (fatherless) can affect how children interact, influence their preferences in choosing partners, and the communication obstacles they face. This study, employing phenomenology and in-depth interviews with four female informants who have experienced fatherlessness, draws on family communication, attachment theory, penetration theory, and gender role theory. The research findings highlight that the experience of fatherlessness becomes a major communication barrier, affecting the informants in initiating romantic relationships. The informants express difficulties in trusting and maintaining open communication with close friends. They state that disappointment in their father figure leads them to seek a partner to fulfill their psychological needs related to the missing fatherly figure. The study also confirms factors influencing the perceptions of fatherless daughters in choosing life partners, including a father's involvement in child-rearing, healthy communication between father and child, traumatic experiences, and current parent-child communication relationships. This research can serve as a reference for further studies interested in examining family communication from the perspective of the father's role and the communication between daughters and their fathers.

Keywords: Fatherless, Family Communication, Romantic Relationship, Attachmen, Gender Role

INTRODUCTION

Family is the first shelter a person has (Nurbani, 2020), and each family member has their respective roles, making them interdependent on each other (Wiratri, 2018). Parents, both fathers and mothers, play a significant role in the family, especially in accompanying a child's developmental process, primarily in caregiving. When a situation arises where a father or mother is unable to fulfill their role effectively, it can lead to imbalances in a child's development (Sundari, 2013). In the context of family, children have an important role despite being in a more dependent position (Castetter, 2020). They generally undergo a developmental process influenced by interactions with other family members, especially parents. Their roles include receiving care, learning family values and norms, and developing social and emotional skills (Tara A. Moore, 2016). Children also receive emotional support and have their basic needs for security and love fulfilled by their parents. Therefore, when one of the parents fails to fulfill their role effectively, it can disrupt the children's development and create imbalance within their family environment (Ashari, 2018).

One form of role imbalance is the emergence of the fatherless phenomenon, a condition where the father does not fulfill his role in the child upbringing process. The fatherless phenomenon has garnered attention in society and has become a social issue in various countries (Barini, 2018), such as the USA, Sweden, Canada, the UK, Norway, Australia, Cuba, Trinidad, Tobago, Cameroon, Africa, the Netherlands, Finland, and Indonesia (Sakinah, 2022).

Fatherlessness is a family issue characterized by physical and emotional distance between fathers and their children in the parenting process. This is due to the father's absence, both physically and emotionally. According to Blundell in (S. A. Putri, 2020), Fatherless is a condition in which a father is emotionally absent, often caused by various factors such as parental divorce (Absyar, 2022), the death of the father, work commitments, or the father's lack of participation in family and child-rearing activities (Rosalia et al., 2020).

Fatherlessness has a significant impact on a child's psychological well-being, especially in girls. According to Sinca (2022) girls tend to feel more significantly affected by the loss of their fathers compared to boys. According to Castetter (2020) both boys and girls suffer adverse consequences when they grow up without a father, but there is a tendency for girls to experience more pronounced psychological effects compared to boys. R. D. Putri et al. (2023) states that girls who grow up into adult women and experience fatherlessness may have a fear of rejection, which can create noise in their interactions and communication when choosing a potential partner. Previous research by R. D. Putri et al., (2023) and Tara A. Moore (2016) suggests that

the loss of a father figure in a girl's life can lead to low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness, affecting effective and open communication and, consequently, influencing partner preferences in adulthood. In addition Rosalia et al., (2020) state that communication between parents and their children (in this context, the father and their daughters) has an impact on the child's sense of security. Therefore, it is evident from this journal that communication between parents and their children significantly affects the child's communication with their environment in adulthood.

Research on fatherlessness is not a novel endeavor. Several previous studies have explored this topic from different perspectives.Based on research by (Horne 2015), The relationship between the duration of father's absence during adolescence and adolescents' commitment to romantic relationships, as well as their sexual behavior and pregnancy within romantic relationships. Horne used a quantitative approach and the Paternal Investment Theory (PIT). From his research, Horne concluded that adolescents with a history of father absence tend to have distinct patterns in their romantic relationships compared to those without such experiences. Those with father absence experiences generally exhibit less committen to their partners and engage in riskier behaviors, such as premarital sex and non-committal pregnancies. Additionally, the study indicated that women with father absence experiences are more likely to seek less commitment compared to men with father absence experiences.

There is also research conducted by R. D. Putri et al. (2023), the impact of the absence of a father figure on a child's gender-role development. This study employs a literature review method in which this research reevaluates several previous pieces of literature related to fatherlessness and gender-role development. From this research, concludes that there is no significant difference in the gender-role development of children with or without a father figure. Children without a father figure are found to seek other male figures outside the home as their role models or may view their mothers as essential role models. In this study, elaborates that a child will look for another figure who can "replace" their absent father as a source of genderrole development. Therefore, even though there may be no apparent difference between children growing up with their fathers and those growing up without them, a child will inevitably require their father's influence for growth and development. If this father figure is absent from their life, the child is likely to seek out a substitute father figure elsewhere.

Additionally, research related to fatherlessness was also conducted by Gauthier (2023). This research explored the absence of fathers in African-American women living in the United States. The research aimed to understand how these women experienced fatherlessness, both

physically and psychologically, and how it influenced their romantic relationships and maintenance of those relationships. This qualitative study involved in-depth interviews with 12 participants, focusing on the father's involvement in their daughters' lives, mechanisms for sustaining relationships, dependency, building romantic relationships, intimacy, and personal development. The theoretical framework used in this research is attachment theory. The findings revealed that the absence of fathers significantly affected the psychological well-being of these women, contributing to insecure attachments. Additionally, women with fatherless experiences tended to be less interested in commitment-based relationships, stemming from their early attachment experiences with their fathers, which left them with insufficient security to interact and connect with their partners. Furthermore, it was observed that women with fatherless experiences faced challenges in intimate relationships and personal development (Gauthier, 2023). From the impacts of fatherlessness on women as outlined above, it is evident that the effects of fatherlessness have relevance to women in choosing life partners within the field of communication. This is because the selection of life partners is largely influenced by social interactions and communication with potential partners (Yurizal, 2016).

The studies by Horne (2015), Gauthier, (2023) and Nihayah et al., (2023) provide valuable insights into how fatherlessness affects adolescents' romantic commitment and the gender role development of children. However, their studies focus more on behavioral outcomes (such as low commitment, risky sexual behavior, and gender role development) without delving deeper into how interpersonal communication processes and social interaction dynamics play a role in shaping these behaviors. This research focuses on how the experience of fatherlessness affects communication barriers with potential partner selection preferences. It includes individual communication barriers with potential partners, how they express feelings and emotions, and the behavioral tendencies of fatherless women.

This research uses several theories to observe the impact of fatherlessness on women. Family Communication Theory Sinca (2022) is used to examine the state of family communication among the informants, while Attachment Theory Hafo (2020) evaluates the impact of emotional detachment from the father. Gender Role Theory R. D. Putri et al., (2023) analyzes how the absence of a father influences gender role development, and Social Penetration Theory.Pandaryasi (2022) is used to understand the barriers that may arise in romantic relationships and partner selection preferences. By using these four theories, the researcher can delve deeper into whether the absence of a father's role (fatherlessness) affects

how children interact and shape their preferences in choosing partners and determining their romantic relationships.

This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by of Horne (2015), Gauthier (2023), and Nihayah et al., (2023), which has not yet explained how the experience of fatherlessness in women affects partner selection. This research is important because it provides in-depth insight into the impact of fatherlessness on communication and romantic relationship dynamics, and fills a gap in the social literature on how this experience affects partner selection and relationship perceptions.

This research aims to delve into and understand the perceptions of women who have experienced fatherlessness when choosing life partners. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of how childhood experiences involving the absence of a father can influence women's views and preferences when selecting life partners. Additionally, the study aims to identify potential communication barriers that may arise between fatherless women and their prospective life partners. Furthermore, this research aims to integrate a gender perspective into the understanding of fatherlessness experiences and partner selection. By examining how gender influences perceptions and preferences in this context, the study can provide a more comprehensive insight into the relationship between fatherlessness, gender communication, and partner selection.

In this study, researcher utilized four theories to better unravel and understand the fatherless phenomenon. These theories include family communication theory, Attachment Theory, social penetration theory, and gender theory. Family Communication Theory serves as a crucial conceptual foundation in this research. This theory perceives the family as a complex communication unit in which family members influence each other and learn communication norms and values that shape their interaction patterns. According to Sedwig (Wilza & Sagita, 2022), family communication is the organization of verbal forms, attitudes, intonation, and actions to create expectations, images, and expressions of mutual concern. In line with Wiratri (2018), a family is a group of individuals bound by blood and marriage, consisting of more than two people who engage in interpersonal interactions, thereby connecting and binding themselves to each other. Within the family, one of the key forms of interaction is the interaction between parents and their children (Nurohman & Pratiwi, 2021)

Attachment theory, first proposed by John Bowlby in 1958, posits that attachment is a unique form of relationship between a specific social figure and a particular phenomenon that characterizes the nature of that relationship. According to Bowlby, attachments tend to last a

long time, often beginning in childhood. In 1969, Mary Ainsworth further expanded on Bowlby's ideas regarding attachment theory. She described attachment as an enduring emotional bond formed between individuals that is specific and enduring throughout a person's life (Wilza & Sagita, 2022).

Attachment is typically found in the relationship between a child and their caregiver, in this context, the parents. Attachment theory initially focused on the child's relationship with their mother, but as it has evolved, it encompasses a broader perspective, including the child's attachment to both parents, including the father. The father is often the first male figure a child encounters. According to (Ikrima 2021), the most significant impact of attachment between a child and their parents, including the father, is the development of a sense of security and trust. In this context, the father serves as a secure base for the child.

The Social Penetration Theory (SPT) attempts to describe a pattern of human relationship development through a series of stages (Wulandari & Kom, 2016). The theory was formulated by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor in 1973. The development of the Social Penetration Theory is based on the Social Exchange Theory, proposed by Thibaut and Kelley in 1959, which suggests that social exchange processes involve individuals trading resources in a relationship (Wulandari & Kom, 2016.). When the rewards received by individuals in this exchange are greater and the resources given are fewer, the relationship between them becomes more intimate (Yurizal, 2016) Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor used the analogy of an onion to help understand the Social Penetration Theory. They posited that human personality consists of multiple layers or levels, which can be likened to the layers of an onion, revealing deeper layers as one peels them away from the surface.

According to Altman and Taylor, the process of social penetration occurs gradually and systematically (R. D. Putri et al., 2023). This process is divided into four stages, as outlined by Wulandari n.d. (2016): (1) Orientation Stage. This stage is an orientation or exploration phase, and it is the very first stage in social interaction. Conversations at this stage are superficial and not personal. They typically adhere to social norms, including smiling, greetings, and cautious behavior. Each individual avoids evaluation to prevent conflicts, (2) Exploratory Affective Exchange Stage. This stage involves the exchange of affective explorations. By this point, individuals have become acquainted and are more open. The area of public disclosure expands, and personal aspects start to become public. Interactions at this stage become more relaxed and spontaneous, involving personal language and behavior, (3) Exploratory Exchange Stage. At this stage, both individuals are more interested and open to each other. Interactions become

more relaxed, spontaneous, unique, and unburdened. Both parties use personal symbols for communication, such as nodding as an expression of agreement. Additionally, friendships develop, and evaluations of each other occur., (4) Stable Exchange Stage. In this stage, individuals have already expressed their thoughts and feelings to each other. Behaviors are open, spontaneous, and intimate. Individuals also show highly synchronized and repetitive behaviors that can be anticipated by others. At this stage, misinterpretations of communication are rare because each individual has experience in clarifying with each other.

Gender role theory is a theoretical framework that explores the roles of gender and social norms in shaping an individual's gender identity. The term "gender" refers to the differences in roles, functions, statuses, and responsibilities between men and women that emerge as a result of the social and cultural influences instilled through the process of socialization from one generation to the next (Paramita et al., 2022). This means that gender is not a natural or inherent concept but is formed through social agreements among different individuals. Gender is a flexible concept that can change and vary between individuals, depending on factors such as time and local culture (Puspitawati, 2016).

According Foss (2011) gender role theory is a theory that considers that gender differences in individuals lead to differences in the development of roles within social structures and the societal expectations placed on the social values of how an individual should behave. In their book, Stephen and Karen also demonstrate that men and women have differences in skills and attitudes in several aspects, including gender roles in the family and aspects of communication. This theory is commonly used in research related to communication, conformity, gender stereotypes, assistance, influence, leadership, and partner selection (Foss, 2011). Gender roles as social and cultural developments in social life lead society to categorize what are typically considered male roles and what are typically considered female roles (Rahminita, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research design is qualitative, utilizing the phenomenological method. Since this research extensively discusses the feelings and personal issues of the informants, the phenomenological method and the use of in-depth interviews can yield more detailed and comprehensive insights. Qualitative research is commonly used in the social and human sciences, especially when it involves human behavioral patterns and the reasons behind such behaviors, which are Foften challenging to quantify with numbers or statistics. This method is

utilized to obtain in-depth and detailed research findings based on the experiences of the participants. According to Fthe phenomenological method is a research approach aimed at understanding experiences as perceived by human beings. This method doesn't begin with preconceived hypotheses and instead emphasizes the depth of information that can be obtained.

This research involves four participants who have experienced being fatherless girls in choosing life partners. Data collection was carried out through direct observation and in-depth interviews, which were recorded, and the interview results will be transcribed afterward. The selection of participants was based on the following criteria: having experienced being fatherless and willing to share their experiences in the context of choosing a life partner. The author divided the questions into three categories: childhood, family relationships, and romantic relationships, with a maximum interview duration of two hours.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Family Background from Research Subject

Based on the interviews conducted with the four participants, it was found that the four informants had different family background conditions. However, there were similarities in the family conditions of the informants, namely the presence of estrangement and communication barriers among family members. It was found that the communication barriers occurred in the relationships between father and mother, father and children, and among siblings.

There are four factors that trigger communication barriers between the mother and the father. These are the physical distance between the father and mother due to the father's job requirements that force him to work out of town, domestic violence both verbal and physical, the father's infidelity with other women, and the father's indifferent and uncaring characteristics.

Meanwhile, in the context of the participants' relationships with their fathers, four factors were found that made the informants feel distant from their fathers, leading to communication barriers in the father-child relationship. These are the father rarely being at home, the belief that raising and educating children is solely the mother's responsibility, the father having a bad temper, and the father's indifferent and cold characteristics.

Additionally, communication barriers also arise in the participants ' communication with their siblings. The four informants stated that they are reluctant to discuss personal matters with their siblings, resulting in communication between the participants and their siblings being limited to practical communication only. Based on the above statements, it is evident that there is a lack of harmony within the participants' families, which makes them feel that their family environment is neither warm nor comfortable. This situation causes the participants to feel more withdrawn and lonelier.

These findings align with the journal Erika Ayu et al., (2022) which states that when there are communication barriers within a family, a gap and inflexibility in relationships between family members will occur, leading to a pattern of family relationships characterized by coldness and detachment (Sinca, 2022).

The Relationship Between Fatherless Experience with Partner Selection Preferences and Romantic Relationships

Based on the participants conducted, it was found that there is a relationship between the fatherless experience of the informant, JA, and their tendencies in partner selection. JA's fatherlessness stemmed from their parents' divorce when JA was six years old. The interviews also revealed instances of verbal and non-verbal violence by the father towards the mother and children, depicting the father as temperamental, rough, and unreliable.

Thus, in the process of selecting a partner, informant JA always avoids men with unstable emotions, rough, irresponsible, and unreliable. JA realizes that there is a relationship between the fatherless experience they have and their tendencies in choosing their partner, so based on the experience that informant JA has lost their father figure, and how the father treated the mother, JA has criteria for partners in the form of a gentle man in speaking and acting, having emotional stability, responsibility, and having the same social status.

The criteria selection represents JA's effort to avoid romantic relationships similar to those experienced by their parents. JA realizes they share characteristics with their mother, so they strive to build a different foundation in their romantic relationships, creating a space for a safer, more comfortable, and happier relationship.Based on the fatherless experience participant BL went through and how BL perceives their father figure, BL often seeks a partner who has traits opposite to those of their father. This means BL often looks for a partner who is more dominant in the relationship, proactive and responsive, hardworking, and reliable. This pattern is also

observed in two other informants, where they tend to choose partners with characteristics opposite to those of their fathers, aiming to avoid repeating their mothers' experiences.

Additionally, a unique pattern was found among fatherless women when forming romantic relationships. According to social penetration theory, there are four stages of penetration: the Orientation Stage, Exploratory Affective Exchange Stage, Exploratory Exchange Stage, and Stable Exchange Stage. All four informants reported that they frequently encountered difficulties during the Orientation Stage and the Exploratory Affective Exchange Stage. This aligns with the attachment theory, which suggests that the attachment of a caregiver (in this case, the father as a parent) can influence the child's communication skills and ability to form attachments. Because the informants lacked a strong attachment to their fathers, they experienced challenges in communication and bonding with potential partners. However, interestingly, when the informants and their potential partners managed to reach the Exploratory Exchange and Stable Exchange stages, the informants tended to become very attached and demand a lot of attention.

The phenomenon of fatherlessness in women has a significant impact. The absence of the first male figure they see (their father) creates a profound foundation for how these women view men and romantic relationships. In this research, it was found that the fatherless experience that the participants went through influences how they perceive male figures and romantic relationships themselves.

Communication Barriers Experienced

From the results of the interviews conducted, it was found that there are two aspects that trigger communication barriers for the informants. The first aspect is the fear that the informants have, and the second aspect is the trust issues they experience.

Based on the interviews, the informants stated that their fathers rarely initiated conversations with their children. As a result, activities that referred to emotional support through listening almost never occurred. This led the informants to feel that they were not heard and accepted by their fathers. These feelings made them believe that their emotions and feelings were not validated by their fathers. Without realizing it, this influenced their fear of expressing their feelings and opinions to their partners or potential partners. The absence of dialogue and emotional support from their fathers caused the informants to feel isolated and have difficulty building open and honest communication in their romantic relationships. This fear, rooted in

their childhood experiences, continues to affect how they interact with others, especially in the context of more intimate and profound relationships.

Moreover, the pattern of emotional neglect experienced during childhood creates a cycle of communication barriers that persist into adulthood. The informants may unconsciously avoid deep emotional connections to protect themselves from potential rejection or hurt. This selfprotective mechanism, while understandable, ultimately hinders the development of fulfilling and supportive romantic relationships.

As they navigate their romantic lives, the informants are often confronted with the task of breaking free from these ingrained patterns. It requires conscious effort and, in many cases, therapeutic intervention to learn how to communicate effectively and trust their partners. Recognizing and addressing these deep-seated fears can pave the way for healthier and more satisfying relationships, allowing them to experience the emotional support and validation they missed in their childhood.

The second aspect that triggers communication barriers for the participants is rooted in trust issues stemming from their father's absence and the profound past trauma inflicted by their father's mistreatment. The participants' experience of growing up without a father figure who actively engaged with them emotionally has left them with a deep-seated hesitation to trust others. This lack of paternal presence during their formative years has instilled a sense of insecurity and vulnerability, making it challenging for the participants to form genuine connections and build trust in their relationships.

As a result of these early experiences, the participants often find themselves grappling with ongoing struggles to establish trust with anyone they encounter, whether in friendships, professional settings, or romantic relationships. This struggle manifests in passive communication patterns where they may withhold their true feelings or opinions, fearing potential rejection or betrayal. Alternatively, some participants may withdraw from interpersonal interactions altogether, preferring to avoid the perceived risk of emotional hurt.

These communication barriers not only affect the participants' ability to form meaningful connections but also impact their romantic relationships significantly. The difficulty in trusting others can create misunderstandings, emotional distance, and a lack of intimacy in their partnerships. Addressing these trust issues requires a concerted effort to heal from past wounds, possibly through therapy or self-reflection, to develop healthier communication habits and establish secure attachments with their partners.

Gender perspective

Integrating a gender perspective into the understanding of fatherless experiences and partner selection reveals significant insights into how gender roles and expectations shape the perceptions and behaviors of individuals who have grown up without a father figure. For women, the absence of a father can create a profound impact on their views towards men and romantic relationships. As illustrated by the informants in this study, their fatherless experiences often lead them to seek partners who possess qualities starkly different from those of their fathers. This is particularly evident in the traits they value in potential partners—such as emotional stability, responsibility, and gentleness—which contrast with the negative characteristics they associated with their fathers, such as temperamental behavior, irresponsibility, and unreliability.

Furthermore, the gendered experiences of fatherlessness contribute to unique communication barriers. Women, like the informants in this study, often internalize the fear of experiencing the same emotional pain their mothers did, such as infidelity, abandonment, and domestic violence. This fear, coupled with deep-seated trust issues stemming from their father's absence and mistreatment, can lead to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy romantic relationships. The informants' reluctance to engage in committed relationships and their consideration of same-sex relationships highlight the complexities of their search for safe and validating romantic environments.

From a gender perspective, it is also essential to understand the societal expectations placed on women to nurture and maintain emotional bonds within families. The absence of a supportive father figure often forces these women to develop resilience and self-reliance, but it can also lead to a protective stance that hinders open and trusting communication with potential partners. This protective stance manifests in passive or withdrawn communication patterns, as the informants struggle to navigate their fears and trust issues within romantic contexts.

In conclusion, integrating a gender perspective into the study of fatherless experiences and partner selection emphasizes the nuanced ways in which gender roles and expectations influence women's perceptions and behaviors. It sheds light on the profound impact of fatherlessness on their romantic choices and communication styles, underlining the need for a comprehensive understanding that considers both psychological and societal dimensions. By recognizing these gendered experiences, we can better support women in overcoming the challenges of their past and fostering healthier, more fulfilling romantic relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this research, the researcher identified that women with a fatherless background tend to face obstacles in the communication process. They often experience difficulties in selfexpression, exploring and discovering their identities, managing emotional fluctuations, and maintaining self-control. In the context of romantic relationships, the findings from this study indicate challenges in the early exploratory stage and the subsequent stable exchange stage. Failures in building romantic relationships frequently arise during the initial stages of courtship.

Furthermore, this research reveals that the absence of a father can influence how women perceive gender roles. Women with a fatherless background tend to view their mothers as more dominant in the family's roles. It's not uncommon for mothers to assume the roles that fathers traditionally take on, sometimes leading to gender dominance within their relationships.

Commitment in relationships often haunts the interviewees because they fear repeating the challenges faced by their mothers. Feelings of insecurity and trust issues in romantic relationships are also common among them. The research finds that women with a fatherless background often prefer partners with characteristics that contrast with those of their fathers. In conclusion, this study illustrates the intricate impacts of a fatherless experience on women in the context of communication, the development of romantic relationships, perceptions of gender roles, commitment, and self-esteem. These findings provide essential insights into how family experiences can influence critical aspects of the personal lives and relationships of fatherless women.

The suggestions that can be drawn from this research include the need for communication skill development for women with a fatherless background, the importance of recognizing the father's role in identity formation, gender education to prevent gender dominance, efforts to enhance relationship security through psychological support, wise partner selection, and the necessity for further research to understand the individual impacts and differences in the context of fatherlessness.

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