

GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN FAMILY REALITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE ROLE OF POST DIVORCE FAMILY INTERACTIONS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to highlight the dynamics of gender construction in divorced families. This study used a qualitative method with a case study design on eight mothers-youths from divorced families. In contrast to previous research, this study identified the role of post-divorce family interactions in the construction of gender associated with their well-being. The study's findings show that the gender scheme developed by youth is linked to patterns of interaction in the family after the parents' divorce. Changes in parent roles and the presence of extended families contribute to their gender construction. There is an evaluation process that builds an understanding of dynamic gender roles in the family in order to understand the reality of the post-divorce family. Fathers who re-opened communication with their children, mothers as gatekeepers in communication and parenting, and mothers' and children's perceptions of the extended family all contributed to the evaluation process. Youth from divorced families face challenges in seeking well-being. They still believe that an intact family is ideal and that the presence of a responsible father is considered important for young people, while the presence of an extended family causes dilemmas in family interactions.

Keywords: gender construction; interaction; family; divorce

INTRODUCTION

Family is the smallest social group, constructing the basis of individual behaviour patterns, which serves as a source of learning for children in understanding their social roles (Dewi, 2021). Furthermore, parents in the family are the models for their children to comprehend the concept of family and the construction of gender so that they are aware of responsibilities attached to their sex (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016). According to Pannilage (2017), family function has an impact on children's well-being. The roles of fathers are as important as the roles of mothers in the growth and development of children and their psychosocial development (Pekel-Uludağlı, 2023). In the family, fathers engage in developing children's social skills and understanding of values and rules, whereas mothers take part in child development

(Jeynes, 2016; Kara & Sümer, 2022). Consequently, it takes the presence of both fathers and mothers for children to become individuals who recognise their social roles.

Family reality cannot be separated from cultural background. The understanding of family social construction and family function is unique since it is influenced by the social values and cultural background in which the family lives (Sanner et al., 2021). The majority of families in Indonesia adhere to an eastern cultural background, which perceives the ideal family as the only means to generate a safe, peaceful, and prosperous life that is full of affectionate interactions among its loving members (Mufidah, 2013). The ideal family is understood universally as an intact family consisting of father, mother, and children, as common in Indonesian culture (Janning et al., 2011; Lestari, in Dewi & Ginanjar, 2019). In

addition, the extended family is also considered an inseparable part of the symbolism of the family in eastern cultures. The presence of grandparents as well as relatives in a family is considered a source of support for the family (Lippman et al., 2013).

Social construction is built through communication and engagement with other individuals. When family members collaboratively construct the reality in which they live, including defining who the insider and outsider are, they construct reality (Berger & Luckmann, in Sanner et al., 2021). In other words, family building is concerned with how members of a family establish, preserve, improve, and modify shared understanding. For example, children understand their roles as father and mother through interactions with their parents. Another example is the introduction of gender roles based on cultural background in the family. Gender roles are seen as social constructions that evolve not only through interactions within the family but are also heavily impacted by local culture. Gender construction is defined by Mosse (2003, in Lestari, 2015) as a process of learning and practicing specific ways that society has established for us to be men and women. Gender is not a biological condition that is inherited, but rather the roles that we live and perform.

Based on this description, the aim of the study was to identify the role of post-divorce family interactions in the construction of gender and family meaning associated with child well-being. The social reality often discovered in divorced families is the occurrence of changes in the family structure and the roles of mothers and fathers. The construction of family reality after divorce is described in the meaning of the post-divorce family, as well as the description of gender attitudes as the result of the absence of a father and the presence of extended family. On the other hand, the common definition of the ideal family affects how a person evaluates the current condition of the family, which leads to a level of well-being.

This study is essential because family plays an important role in the development of gender schemes and the formation of personalities in children. On the other hand, the reality of family divorce is worrying, resulting in the shifting of the reality of an ideal family. During 2021–2022, the divorce rate in the United States increased to 14.56 divorces per 1,000 married women (Loo, 2023). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the divorce rate has increased by almost 18% since 2015, which means that in every four marriages, one of which ended in divorce (Prihatin, 2020). The increasing number of family divorces has created a number of stressors and impacts on family members, especially for the development of children. Several studies suggest that children from divorced families tend to have low self-concept, anxiety, decreased academic achievement, juvenile delinquency problems, and difficulties establishing romantic relationships with the opposite sex (Amato & Anthony, 2014; Jannah et al., 2023; Dewi & Soekandar, 2019). The high rate of divorce cases, especially in Indonesia, has affected the well-being of family members and changed the roles and patterns of interactions in the family (Ferraro et al., 2019; Herrero et al., 2020; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2019).

After divorce, fathers usually no longer live with their ex-wife and their children. This leads to several impacts on child development and shifting gender roles for mothers. Leopold (2018) explains that women are more likely than men to experience the long-term psychological effects of divorce in her study on the differential effects of divorce on men and women. These consequences are explained to be related to a higher probability of poverty and parental responsibility. These circumstances often necessitate significant changes in women's gender roles, with them becoming the head of the household, the main breadwinner, and the single parent. The circumstances of divorce also bring about structural changes within the family, resulting in changes in identity and family instability (McKeown et al., 2003).

Furthermore, changes in family structure affect social class, mental health, the development of family members, especially children, and patterns of social support systems (Beyer et al., 2012). Following a divorce, several single-mother families prefer to live with grandparents or extended family. According to the Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, after divorce, extended family or joint residence, particularly grandparents, play a significant role in providing time at home to care for the children of a single mother. This condition often leads to changes in parenting patterns that play a role in determining children's gender identity and self-concept (Leach, 2015). In line with this reality, a gap between the expectations of society of the family role and family function on the psychosocial development of children and the high rate of parental divorce, which is related to conflict in the family, as well as post-divorce parenting problems, has been identified.

Based on the description, a research question arises: what is the description of gender construction in the post-divorce family of parents from the perspective of mother and children? The benefit of this study is to provide an overview of the role of interactions in the post-divorce family in the dynamics of the development of children's gender scheme in their late adolescence or early adulthood, as well as to confirm theories related to social construction regarding family in the context of divorced families. It is expected that the results of this study will contribute to psychosocial service programmes for children from divorced families, especially those with social dysfunction.

METHOD

The design of this study was a qualitative approach based on an instrumental case study design. A qualitative approach is a study that examines how a group or individual interprets social or humanitarian problems, and a case study design specialises in investigating phenomena in real-life contexts, in addition to using multiple sources in extracting data (Yin,

2018). Instrumental-type case studies help researchers gain a complete understanding of the relationship between theoretical concepts and phenomena in a unique case, with the aim of better understanding an issue and developing confirmation of a theory (Poerwandari, 2017; Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

Prospective participants in this study were carefully chosen using purposive sampling (Salmons, 2015), which focuses on the search of the research subjects as the sampling unit in the study. This study categorised the research subjects into two units of analysis, namely mothers and children.

First, mothers who take care of their children after separating from their partner for at least two years. The criteria were based on the consideration that individual adjustment after the divorce, particularly emotional adjustment, is usually achieved within two years after divorce (McGoldrick et al., 2015), and the ethical research of post-divorce duration in research subjects is determined by two years (Molina, in Cohen et al., 2014). Mother's age is set to less than 60 years and she has a minimum education level of SMA (high school), assuming that she can understand instructions and conversations conducted in Bahasa.

Second, the biological children of mothers as participants were in the category of late teens or young adults with an age range of 18–30 years (Arnett, 2015). Child participants are children who are not married and live with their mothers in families that are not fully structured after the divorce of their parents.

Data collection techniques in this study were semi-structured interviews, observations of mother-child relationships, and documentation on social media after obtaining participants' consent, such as status posts on social media and photos of activities during data collection. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or by using a video call application, considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of physical distancing. Data retrieval via the internet and

telephone can be utilised as an alternative to accurate data collection because of the ability to provide sufficient and real-time data, although data retrieval by telephone is only limited to intonation and voice pauses (Salmons, 2015). The researcher tried to overcome this by giving the option of telephone interviews in additional interview sessions or when the use of video calls was not possible due to a poor Internet connection.

The questions to the mother were designed to collect information about her daily life after the divorce, her relationship with her children, and the extended family. While the questions

to the children, apart from questions similar to the mothers, were also intended to collect data about their feelings and experiences after the divorce of their parents. In the data collection process, the researcher conducted the initial interview process after the prospective participants received information about the research and were willing to become participants. This research has passed the process of ethical review at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia. The data regarding the interview process is presented in Table 1, which was based on the COREQ guide from Tong et al. (2007, in Hannes et al., 2015).

Table 1.
Participant's Interview

| Group | P1 | | P2 | | P3 | | P4 | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Initials | Aa | At | Sa | Su | Yu | Ya | En | Ed |
| Technique | FF, PC | FF | VC, PC | VC | VC | VC | FF | FF |
| Setting | Rest. | Rest. | Internet | Internet | Internet | Internet | Liv. Room | Liv. Room |
| Presence of non-participants | No | No | No | No | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| N of session ^a | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Data type | Audio, voice record; field notes. | Audio, voice record; field notes. | AV, video; field notes. | AV, video; field notes. | AV, video; field notes. | AV, video; field notes. | Audio, voice record; field notes. | Audio, voice record; field notes. |
| Duration ^a | 45'12" 60'18" | 32'37" | 31'14" 29'15" | 44'28" | 73'16" 180'35" | 38'01" | 60'49" | 14'52" |
| Transcript | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Member Checking | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note. FF = Face to Face, PC = Phone Call, VC = Video Call, Rest. = Restaurant, Liv. Room = Living Room, AV = Audio Visual. Adapted from: Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349 – 357.

^aExclude initial interview.

Data analysis was carried out based on the following stages of analysis: identifying the patterns of data categorization, conducting categorical aggregation, and matching the

patterns with the theories, followed by explanation building based on within-case analysis and cross-case patterns (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018; Yin, 2018). In the first

stage, the identification of patterns of data categorization was started by coding the developed data transcripts. A consensus was reached to decide on the code. In this study, the consensus was based on the agreement between coders and compared transcripts with field notes to maintain the confirmability of research results, as described by Silverman (2013, in Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, categorical aggregation was done by determining the categorization of the shared codes obtained in the previous stage. Codes were analyzed and categorized in a comprehensive categorization. The coder and supervisor discussed categorization that narrowed down to thematic patterns according to the research objectives. Then, the researcher conducted the explanation building based on within-case analysis and cross-case patterns. Member checking was also carried out to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Patten, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved eight participants from four families of single mothers after divorce, consisting of four mothers and four grown-up children. Mother participants were those who have been the head of the family and the breadwinner for 4–12 years after their divorce. Most of them had been working mothers since the beginning of their marriage. Among those participants, only En had just started working informally after her divorce. The failure of the ex-husband to provide for their children, the economic condition, and the needs for education make them decide to work, either formally or informally. All participants were of Javanese or Sundanese ethnicity. The educational background of the mother participants varied from high school to postgraduate and ranged between 41 and 48 years old.

This study involved four children (18–30 years) from mother participants. Of the child participants, two were female, namely At and Yu, while the two others were male, namely Su and Ed. The educational backgrounds of the child participants ranged from high school

to college. When the study was conducted, there were two children who had worked, namely Ya and Ed. Participants' demographic data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Sociodemographic Description of Research Participants

| Mothers | <i>n</i> | Children | <i>n</i> |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Age (years)</i> | | <i>Age (years)</i> | |
| 41 – 45 | 2 | 18 – 24 | 3 |
| 46 – 50 | 2 | 25 – 30 | 1 |
| <i>Education</i> | | <i>Occupation</i> | |
| SHS | 1 | College | 2 |
| Bachelor | 2 | Students | |
| Postgraduate | 1 | Marketing Officer | 1 |
| <i>Occupation</i> | | Security Officer | 1 |
| State Civil Apparatus | 1 | <i>Ethnic Group</i> | |
| Private sector employee | 1 | Sundanese | 1 |
| Entrepreneur | 1 | Javanese | 3 |
| Lecturer | 1 | <i>Duration of being divorcee</i> | |
| <i>Ethnic Group</i> | | 4 – 7 years | 2 |
| Sundanese | 1 | 8 – 12 years | 2 |
| Javanese | 3 | | |

Note. SHS = Senior High School.

All of the child participants lived with their mothers after their parents' divorce. Two families, Yu and her daughter (Ya), as well as En and her son (Ed), have a history of domestic violence. The difference is that Yu experienced persecution and attempted murder by her ex-husband, who has a mental disorder. Meanwhile, both En and Ed experienced abuse and neglect. In addition, Ed also experienced physical abuse. Ya and Ed admitted to witnessing his father act violently towards their mothers and are currently reluctant to interact with their fathers, though they have not refused to communicate by phone or face to face on certain occasions.

For all participants, divorce has affected their family structure. The fathers have been outsiders and no longer lived with the mothers and children, which was shown in the responses from all the child participants, such as “My family is now consisted of my mother and I...”. In addition, all the mother participants also conveyed similar responses, “Since the divorce, we (and our ex-husbands) no longer live in the same house.” Some participants stated that after the divorce they returned to live with their parents or their relatives, as shown by the following response “... since the divorce I have returned to my parents”. However, there were participants, such as Aa and En, who preferred not to live at the same house with their relatives, but they still had a close relationship with them. Even En stated that her older brother had supported her financially, “... I am lucky that my brother supports me when I am in trouble”.

Interactions with the extended family have been observed to have different meanings for mothers and children. For mothers, the extended family was considered the source of the necessary social support system, not only an instrumental support but also a very meaningful source of emotional support. On the other hand, children perceived interactions with extended families as less beneficial for them. Some children felt they were not respected and were not considered in the family. Others felt that the extended family was a financial burden to their mother and a negative influence on their small family because members of the extended family often quarrelled and misunderstood each other.

Changes in family structure resulted in the ability to survive and make adjustments in the family. Most of the mother participants admitted that after two years of divorce, they were able to put themselves together and be independent. The mother holds a central position and focuses on the child’s needs. For example, Aa stated, “Since the divorce, I have to be independent for my children, my happiness is when I see they are fulfilled, healthy, and happy”. The reorganisation stage has been marked by the shift of the mother’s

role as the head of the family as well as the breadwinner to replace the father’s role. In addition, the reorganisation has required mothers to be more independent, both in financial and family decision-making. With this reorganisation, the patterns of mother-child interaction are closer and more open. For example, Sa, who has a son (Su), says, “...before the divorce, his father was the one who accompanied the children, only now Su and I are more open. Even though he chooses to be silent, he understands his mother’s challenges”. In addition, mothers also set the boundaries and rules for communication between children and fathers and play a major role in childcare. Only one child participant (At) stated that, after the divorce, his father had cared more about him, set him up and gave rules, and become a partner for discussion, “... Papa’s rules are even stricter than Mama’s. A place for lecture discussions, papa...”.

This type of interaction was characterised by emotional closeness and concern for each other (cohesiveness), as well as intense togetherness. Almost all participants had similar experiences, although some of them experienced conflicts due to their overprotective mothers. Children need freedom and the opportunity to be independent, yet the mothers seem worried about the child’s condition. In addition, a sense of mutual care and attention was observed between mother and child. Over time, they developed more open communication, especially when expressing their emotions. More than that, mothers have become gatekeepers in relationships and parenting. Some participants, such as the Aa-At family and the Sa-Su family, have experienced better interactions between father and child. This development makes the father figure, who tends to be negative at the beginning of the divorce, more positive for them. It is stated that their family is mother-daughter-father, although they can’t be together anymore, they are still close to each other. Meanwhile, Su felt that his father is currently trying to correct his mistakes by

reconnecting with him and his sister. Su's father even asked to meet him several times and provide him with college necessities. For Su, "...yes, not disappointed anymore, because my father is trying to do what he should have done previously..."

The role of mothers as gatekeepers in communication and parenting has an impact on the limited opportunities for fathers to be involved in post-divorce parenting. The impact is a result of the conflicts with the spouse before the divorce, the ex-spouse's indifference to family needs, and the violence by the ex-spouse towards their child. In this study, two types of maternal gatekeeping have been identified. The first type is the role of mothers to open the communication between father and child, which does not affect the communication between mother and father nor provide a special role for the father in parenting. The second type of maternal gatekeeping is that there is no communication between fathers and children after the divorce, so the mother really becomes a single parent for the child. However, all mothers in the unit of analysis still describe the figure of the father to their children as a person who has personal advantages, such as being handsome and smart.

The family reality was understood by the children as a condition that must be addressed by giving great attention to their mothers and being by their mother's side, although there are some children who express concern about the condition of their father. All the children expressed great concern for their mother, were worried about their mother's health condition, and thought that their mother would be happy even without their father, as Ed said, "...mother must be happy, remarry soon.... Don't worry about dad." On the other hand, they considered their father figure disappointing and irresponsible to his family. In fact, two child participants, Ya and Ed, admitted that they were afraid and traumatised when they met their father because of their experience of witnessing domestic violence by their father.

Children's understanding of gender and family roles has not changed from the concept of gender roles in their background culture. A father is required to be responsible for his family and be involved in the upbringing of children. Su said, "When I was in middle school, I felt like I had lost the figure of my father, especially when I heard a friend's story of being scolded by his father... Ohh, that's how it should be... Unfortunately, I didn't experience it". However, as a result of the family divorce, they have an understanding of a positive attitude towards gender equality and do not differentiate between the roles of men and women in the family. For example, At explained that "Women have to obtain higher education, basically, they have to work and be independent..." and also Ed, "... all you think about is that you have to work, so I will not be a burden for my mother."

In addition, this gender scheme has also been applied when they observe the behaviour of their extended family members who live in the same house. For example, Ya, who lives with her two uncles who are married but unemployed, says, "... yes, how come... men with children are unemployed? So it's just a problem for my mother". Ya has believed that the current relationship between her family and her extended family is toxic because the burden on the family is borne by her mother. Furthermore, their relationship is also often colored by quarrels and conflicts between her grandmother and her two uncles. A similar thing was also expressed by Su, "... I'm just disappointed, not with mom or dad, but more with the extended family... the family should always emphasise togetherness and help each other, but I'm not considered. You see, I have the right to know what's going on, I'm not someone else's child...". Su felt that his extended family had treated him badly because he had never been invited to discuss family decisions, even those concerning his parents' divorce. For him, as the eldest son, it is natural to be responsible and given the opportunity to open up to each other in a big family.

Unlike the other mother participants, after four years of separation, En still wanted to reconcile with her ex-husband, whereas the other three participants have believed that their current family condition is a family goal for them because they live in peace, are financially independent, and are free to make family decisions. Those three participants have become more prosperous and happier for themselves and their children. They have experienced closeness and openness in the relationship between them and their children.

Based on the results of the study above, it is understood that the gender scheme developed by children is related to interactions in the family after the divorce. Gender schemes that appear in divorced families are more likely to define women as autonomous and graduates from higher education so that she can bring prosperity to herself and her family in the future. Meanwhile, men are required to have independence and responsibility towards themselves and their families (wife and children). Gender schemes in children tend to develop in line with the developments and changes in the interactions in their families and their environment. Children not only absorb the reality of their family as material to understand their gender roles but also respond to what they experience with their family.

Children who are in their late teens or early adulthood do not change their understanding of their role as children. Due to the divorce of their parents, children tend to side with their mothers, who have taken care of them since childhood and live with them. They choose not to get married immediately or leave the house because they care about their mother's condition. Interestingly, almost all children develop schemas about fathers who should be role models and believe that every child needs a father figure in their development.

The changes in the family structure require reorganisation within the family. All participants have experienced changes in the roles of mothers and fathers, as well as the presence of an extended family, which

ultimately has given its own dynamics to their gender construction. The meaning of family is also understood differently by mother and child. Mothers interpret their current family as mother and child, and this interpretation has been accepted as a positive family reality, as they want. In addition, some mothers consider the extended family a part of the family. This consideration is a consequence of the need for emotional and instrumental support after they become single parents. Meanwhile, children tend to refer to the definition of an ideal family consisting of a father, mother, and children. Children think that an intact family is the one that brings prosperity to them. This understanding makes them believe that the presence of a responsible father is important. On the other hand, the presence of extended family raises dilemmas. Children believe that the extended family is not their family, but they become part of the nuclear family because of the reality of the post-divorce family. Dilemmas arise when a conflict or disagreement occurs between the child and one of the extended family members, for example, between a child and an uncle or a child and their grandparents. In addition, some children consider the presence of an extended family a burden for their mother, who is the breadwinner. The gap between the meaning of family understood by children and social reality has been identified. The family is considered a place where they can be respected and open to each other, yet nowadays, most children feel that their freedom is limited and less respected by their extended family.

From the results of the study, there are some interesting findings regarding the understanding of gender roles in children, which go through an evaluation phase that involves dynamic gender schemes, especially regarding the role of fathers. When the father is in a position as an outsider who tries to reopen communication with the child, the child sees this action as a positive effort by the father to rebuild his relationship and responsibilities that he failed to fulfil in the past. From the child's point of view, the

fathers still have a place in the family, even though it is not the full family they hoped for.

On the other hand, the role of the extended family appears to be a dilemma between mother and child. Some children have experienced a lack of freedom, are not valued as individuals, and are disadvantaged by the presence of extended family in intense interactions in their families. The

disadvantages are explained as there has been no change in the meaning of family for children after their parents' divorce, and this is what is assumed to be a source of declining child well-being. More clearly, the dynamics of gender construction in children growing up in the context of divorced families, which are associated with post-divorce family interactions, are presented in Figure 1.

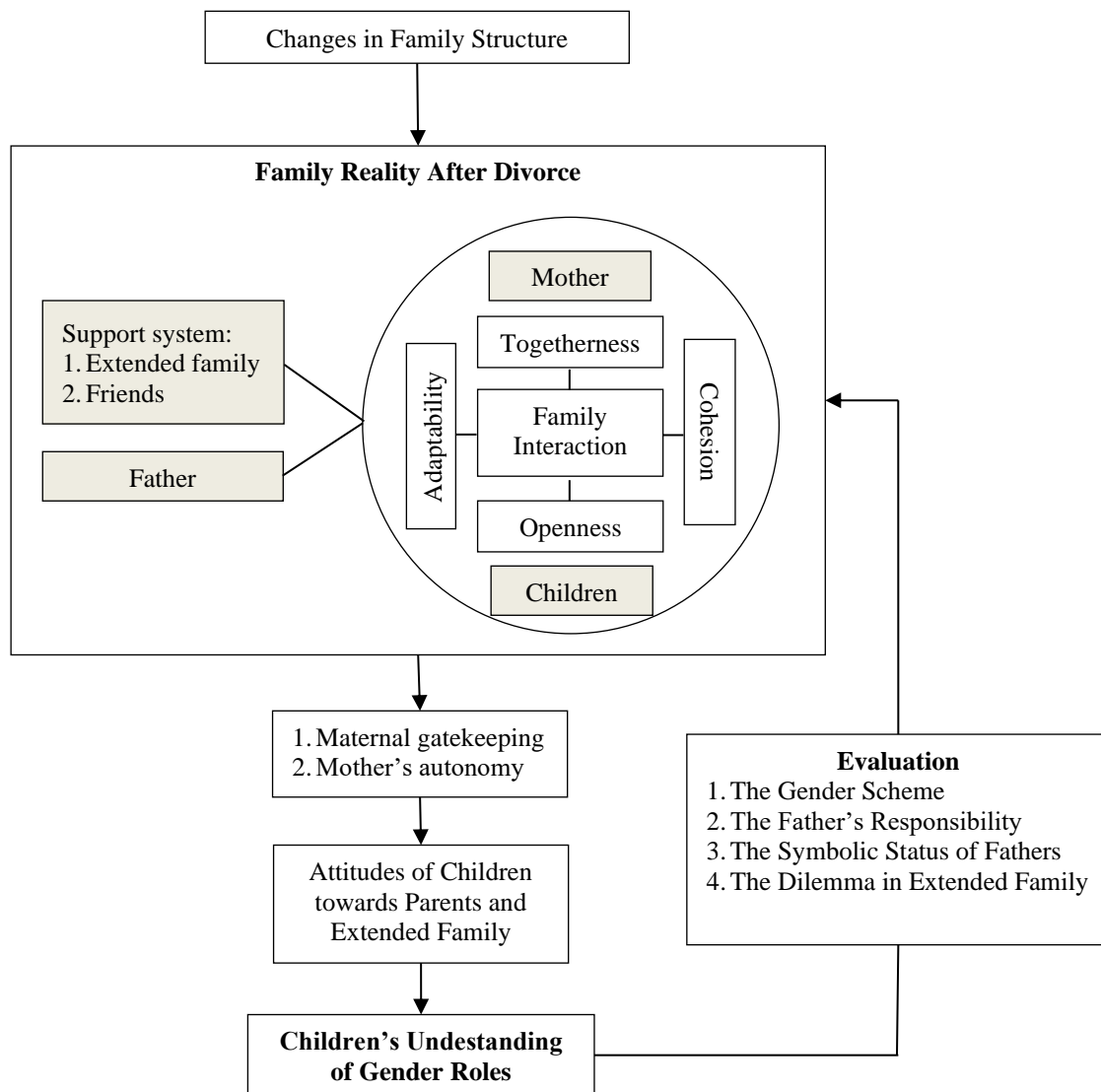


Figure 1. The Dynamics of Gender Construction in Post-divorce Family

This study discovers that in divorced families, gender roles in the family are reconstructed after the reorganization of the family structure. Mothers are the head of the family as well as the breadwinner, as all participants

stated about their financial independence and freedom in family decision-making, which they did not get before. Their children understand that the mother plays a major role in the family after their parents' divorce.

According to Poerwandari et al. (2016), in gender issues and construction, women are often shown as feminist, gentle, polite, intelligent, and strong at the same time. When a woman with family must conduct a job or engage in outdoor activities, the concept of a strong and independent woman requires them to fight hard for the values they believe in to be able to survive in difficult situations that automatically require adaptation and adoption of new ways of life. The demand allows internal conflicts to arise if those women are not supported by a qualified social support system and interactions with children. The family reality is that the decision to divorce requires divorced mothers to be economically independent. This finding is in line with research conducted by Gasse (2020), which discovered two important roles of single mothers after divorce, namely balancing work and life and seeking ways to overcome potential conflicts between work and family.

The next finding is that children in early adulthood from single mother families after divorce pay attention to issues of financial independence, the roles of fathers, and concern for mother figures. All child participants chose to be on the mother's side over the father's side or their extended family as a result of a lack of communication with the father, a less harmonious relationship with the extended family, and the opinion that a toxic figure burdens the mothers.

In addition, in contrast to mothers, who have an understanding of changes in family realities after divorce, children believe in the ideal father's role as the head of the family and the breadwinner. This belief eventually develops the mindset that fathers are irresponsible. These findings explain that the perception of gender in children is influenced by parenting and actions by parents. When mothers show stronger gender stereotypes, children will show similar things as well as fathers (Endendijk et al., 2013). On the other hand, Janning et al. (2011) described that divorce has a direct or indirect impact on changes in social construction., which is in

line with the finding in this study that the mother participants believe that the father figure must still be introduced to the child and provide opportunities for father-child communication since the social construction does not change immediately. As a result, the children get the opportunity to feel their father's love and do not lose their father figure. On the other hand, because the mothers refuse to be reunited with the father, the children feel disappointed, even though they can understand the decision. This condition creates a new challenge for them to accept the fact that their fathers are outsiders and the family is no longer a complete family. Thus, the changes might lead to a decrease in the mental health of family members, especially children, as well as changes in the pattern of their social support system (Beyer et al., 2012). It is very likely that this condition also triggers social dysfunction and decreases child well-being after divorce.

This study suggests that post-divorce, mother-child interactions develop togetherness, more intense and open communication, and cohesiveness, which are indicated by emotional closeness and concern for one another. Undeniably, there are frictions between them, but those can be resolved. Quality interactions in post-divorce families bring an understanding of the meaning of family to children. Children have positive values towards the family, even though they repress disappointment regarding the reality of an incomplete family. The description confirms that it is not the family structure that affects the well-being of children but the processes within the family, especially the relationships (Fagan, 2012; Goldscheider et al., 2015; Matteson et al., 2013; Meggiolaro & Ongaro, 2014). Understanding of the family can not only be seen from a genetic perspective but is also influenced by the processes of cognition, communication, and behaviour of its members, so that the family is considered a socially constructed construct (Sanner et al., 2021). Over the past few decades, kinship and family members have no longer been influenced by traditional criteria,

such as genetic and legal ties, but rather are based on affective relationships determined by family members (Nelson, 2014; Sanner et al., 2021).

This study discovers that the mother's central role is important in achieving family functioning. The openness and emotional closeness between mother and child for most of the participants have helped children understand the condition of their parents' divorce. This is in line with Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (2019), who suggested that the mother's role has an important influence on the mental health and psychological condition of children in post-divorce families. Mother-child interactions that show closeness can facilitate children's understanding of their exclusive relationship in families with single mothers as the heads of the families. In addition, it appears that the roles of the mothers as gatekeepers in mother-child-father communication and parenting are quite dominant, so that the post-divorce communication carried out by the fathers is strongly influenced by the rules conducted by the mothers. A similar finding was also suggested by Walper et al. (2020), who explained that the higher maternal gatekeeping that occurs in parenting interactions is closely related to the lower role of fathers in childcare and the high sense of mother's responsibility in the family. In this case, it is appropriate for mothers to provide opportunities for fathers to improve their communication with children and be involved in their child's upbringing so that they can evaluate children's understanding of their gender scheme, especially in relation to the figure of father.

This study has not been able to provide further explanations of the relationship between children's psychological well-being and the gender scheme of children after their parents' divorce. This aspect should be considered as a future research topic. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic situation, which limits the interaction between researchers and participants, has also resulted in a lack of

interaction data between mother-child-father participants.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the gender scheme developed by the child is related to the patterns of interaction in the family after the divorce of the parents, especially the interaction between mother-child-father and the children with their extended family. Changes in family structure require reorganisation in the post-divorce family, resulting in changes in the roles of mothers and fathers as well as the presence of extended family. Mother-child interactions, which include open communication, emotional closeness, and caring support, help children understand the reality of post-divorce families. This interaction has become an evaluation in creating an understanding of the dynamic gender roles in the family. However, the absence of changes in the meaning of family for children after their parents' divorce, where children consider the family as father-mother-child, has been a challenge for divorced families in seeking child well-being.

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