

The Influence of Fatherlessness on Perceived Stress among Adolescents from Separated Families

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Abstract. Currently, the phenomenon of fatherlessness is common and can have an influence on the emotional well-being of adolescents, especially those who come from separate families. This study aims to analyze the effect of fatherlessness on perceived stress in adolescents from separated families in Indonesia. The method used is quantitative correlational used by including adolescents aged 10–19 years who experience father's absence due to divorce, separation, death, or limited paternal involvement. Data were collected using an online questionnaire using the Fatherlessness Scale which is based on the father's involvement dimension of Lamb and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). The data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics, assumption tests, and simple linear regression. The results of the study indicate that fatherlessness does not have a significant effect on perceived stress in adolescents. Regression analysis also indicated a weak and insignificant relationship between the two variables. These results indicate that adolescent stress levels are more likely to be caused by other contextual factors, such as social support, resilience, and the family environment, when compared to just the absence of a father. The results of this study improve the understanding of fatherlessness in the Indonesian context and indicate the importance of considering broader psychosocial factors in the handling of adolescent mental health.

Keywords: fatherlessness; perceived stress; adolescents; separated families; paternal involvement.

1 Introduction

The phenomenon of fatherlessness is increasingly found and can also affect the emotional and psychological development of adolescents. The presence of a father is so important because his support can help in emotional control, confidence, and resilience in the face of pressure. Maulida Rahmawati et al. (2024) in their findings stated that higher paternity involvement is related to the ability to regulate emotions and better self-control. On the contrary, where the absence of the father can be attributed to emotional distress, emotional instability, and difficulty coping with pressure. Liu et al. (2023) also found that the absence of a father figure was related to increased hostile attitudes, low self-esteem, and lower ability to cope with frustration resulting in higher vulnerability to emotional distress.

Longitudinal results also indicate that the absence of the father can have a long-term effect. Culpin et al. (2022) indicated in their research that the absence of a father since childhood can significantly increase the risk of emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression can continue into early adulthood. In addition, cross-cultural studies indicate that paternal involvement has a role in being an important protective factor for adolescent mental health, whereas a lack of paternal encouragement can lead to emotional instability and weaken coping abilities (Peng et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2024). Theoretically, this is in line with the concept of paternal involvement from Lamb (1983) which includes three main dimensions, including paternal engagement, paternal accessibility, and paternal responsibility. Disturbances in one of these dimensions can reduce emotional impulses, directions, with an acceptable sense of security so that it can increase psychological pressure.

Although research on fatherlessness continues to develop globally, studies in Indonesia are still limited, more specifically regarding its relationship with adolescent emotional stress. Previous research has mostly discussed psychological well-being, self-concept, and behavioral problems, so the link between fatherlessness and the emotional stress of adolescents from broken home families has not been widely studied. The use of the PSS-10 (Perceived Stress Scale) and the Fatherless Scale based on the Lamb model (1983) is also still rare even though both have been proven to be valid and reliable. This condition indicates a gap in the depth of concept and the rigor of the research method.

This study seeks to fill this gap by indicating that adolescents from families who have broken homes with higher rates of fatherlessness tend to have greater emotional stress due to emotional support, direction, and security from fathers. Based on the stress assessment theory of Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) indicates that emotional stress arises when environmental demands are seen as exceeding the individual's ability to cope with them. In the condition of fatherlessness, low paternity involvement can reduce adolescents' confidence in their abilities and increase their sense of helplessness, so that stress levels increase. Therefore, this relationship is important to be analyzed in improving scientific understanding related to the influence of fathers on adolescents in Indonesia.

On the basis of these problems, this research is directed to find out the extent to which fatherless conditions are related to the emotional stress experienced by adolescents from broken home families in Indonesia. The findings are expected to expand theoretical understanding of the role of fathers and mental health conditions in adolescence. In addition, it is also practical where the results of the research can be used as a consideration for teachers,

counselors, or mental health workers in the preparation of appropriate approaches or mentoring programs for adolescents who grow up without the presence of fathers.

2 Methods

This study was designed with a correlational quantitative approach to be able to see the relationship between fatherlessness and emotional stress in adolescents from broken homes. The measurement was carried out by comparing two variables, namely fatherlessness as an independent variable and emotional stress as a bound variable using standardized psychological measuring tools. Adolescents aged 10–19 years who experienced father's absence were well targeted for research due to divorce, separation, death, or low paternal involvement. The selection of respondents was carried out through purposive sampling on the condition that they came from a broken home family, experienced a physical or emotional absence of their father, and gave voluntary consent through online informed consent. The data was then collected through Google Forms from several regions of Indonesia so that the diverse conditions of fatherless adolescents could be represented.

The measurement of perceived stress in this study was based on the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), which consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived stress. Meanwhile, fatherlessness was measured using the Fatherless Scale adapted from Risqina (2025), which was developed based on Lamb's theory of paternal involvement, encompassing three dimensions: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. In the present study, the Fatherless Scale consisted of 15 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher levels of fatherlessness. Both instruments demonstrated adequate internal consistency in the present study, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .721 for the PSS-10 and .895 for the Fatherless Scale.

Data collection begins with an explanation of the purpose of the research, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Participants then filled in demographic data and two psychological instruments and then the answers were selected based on research criteria. Data were processed using JASP with descriptive statistics to describe the characteristics of participants and the distribution of variables. Normality and linearity tests are carried out before the hypothesis is tested so that the requirements of parametric analysis can be met. Furthermore, a simple linear regression was used to test the influence of fatherlessness on emotional stress with a significance limit of $p < .05$. This stage will allow the results of research on paternity absence and adolescent emotional stress to be obtained in a measurable and retestable manner.

3 Results

Linear regression analysis was used to be able to see the ability of fatherless to predict emotional stress. The relationship between the two was very weak with $R = .061$. The value of $R^2 = .004$ indicates that fatherlessness explains only 0.4% of the variation in emotional stress. Meanwhile, adjusted $R^2 = -.013$ is an indication that the addition of fatherless does not create an increase in prediction compared to models that use only intercepts. This means that fatherless people have not been able to predict emotional stress meaningfully (Table 1).

The ANOVA test indicated that the regression model was insignificant with $F(1, 61) = 0.22$; $p = .637$ (Table 2). This means that fatherless people have not been shown to be able to

predict emotional stress significantly. The results of partial and partial correlation also indicated a very weak negative relationship ($r = -.061$) so that the contribution of fatherlessness to the variation in emotional stress can be considered very small (Table 3).

The feasibility of linear regression is checked by going through several diagnostic graphs. Figure 1 indicates that the residuals are randomly scattered around zero without a specific pattern so that linearity and homogeneity of variance (homoscedasticity) are met. Figure 2 is able to show a standardized residual that is close to the normal distribution. This result is reinforced in Figure 3 with the Q–Q points that follow a diagonal line so that the assumption of normality can be considered fulfilled.

In Figure 4 where the relationship between fatherless conditions and emotional stress is seen through a partial regression line that undergoes almost no change in slope. This condition indicates that changes in fatherlessness have very little association with changes in emotional stress levels. This visual picture reinforces the results of previous analyses that showed that the relationship between the two variables is very weak and has not yet reached a level of statistical significance.

Table 1
Summary of Linear Regression Analysis Predicting Emotional Stress

Predictor	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	RMSE
Fatherless	.061	.004	-.013	5.66

Note. Dependent variable: Emotional stress

Table 2
ANOVA Results for the Linear Regression Model

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	7.19	1	7.19	0.22	.637
Residual	1953.89	61	32.03		
Total	1961.08	62			

Table 3
Partial and Part Correlations Between Fatherlessness and Emotional Stress

Predictor	Partial <i>r</i>	Part <i>r</i>
Fatherless	-.061	-.061

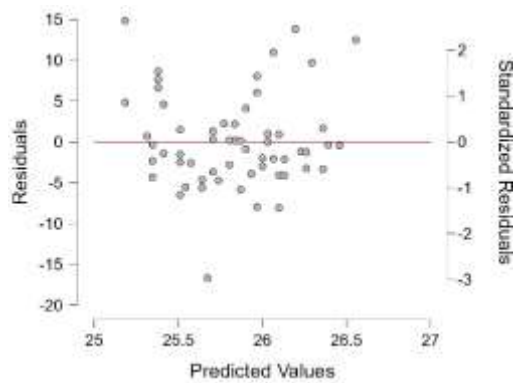


Figure 1. Residuals vs. Predicted

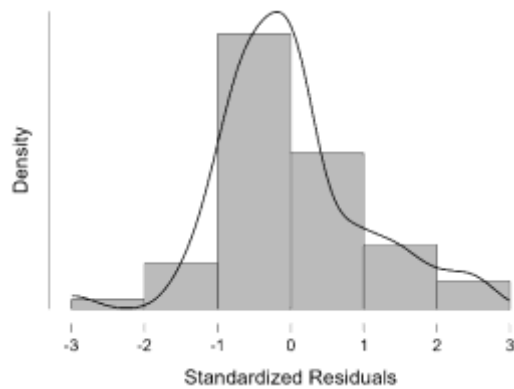


Figure 2. Standardized Residuals Histogram

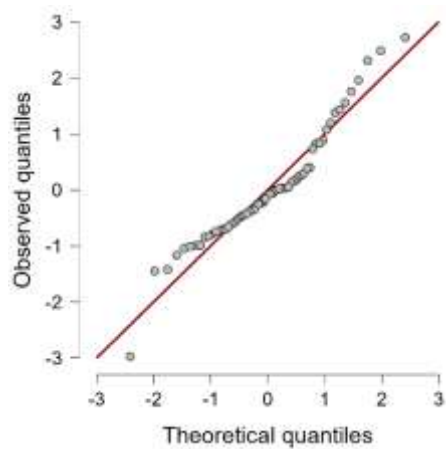


Figure 2. Standardized Residuals Histogram

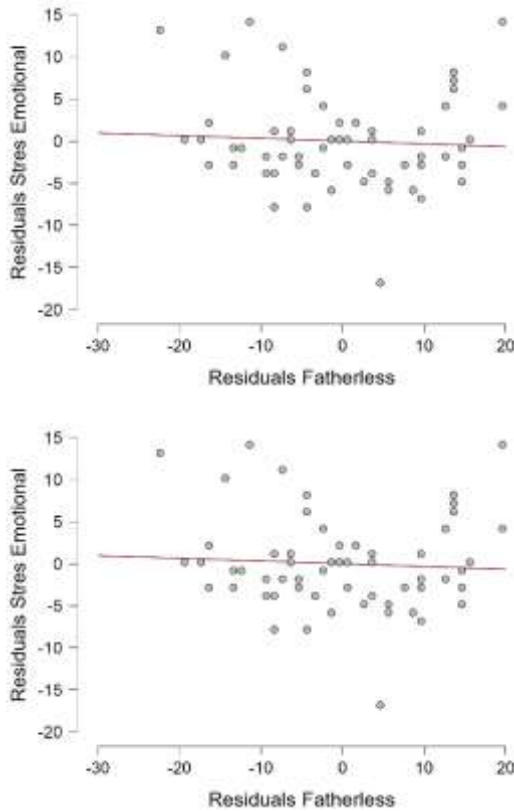


Figure 4. Partial Regression Plots
Emotional Stress vs. Emotional Stress Fatherless

4 Discussion

Based on the results obtained, the existence of a fatherless condition cannot be used as the main explanation for the emotional stress of adolescents who come from broken homes. Although the absence of fathers in a number of theories and previous studies has often been associated with the risk of emotional and behavioral problems, the data of this study indicate a very low and insignificant association between the two. The ability of regression models to explain stress changes is also very limited, with the contribution of fatherlessness being below one percent. Therefore, emotional stress in adolescents in this study may be more related to personal factors or other environmental conditions, while the absence of the father alone is not enough to explain the emergence of stress.

The findings of this study are not entirely in line with the results of previous studies on the impact of father's absence. Liu et al. (2023) and Peng et al. (2024) indicate that fatherlessness can be accompanied by increased emotional vulnerability seen through

anxiety, irritability, and lower ability to cope with frustration. The findings of Culpin et al. (2022) also indicate through long-term research that the absence of a father from childhood may be related to the risk of emotional disorders until entering early adulthood. In these various studies, emotional support and paternal involvement are seen as elements that can protect the psychological condition of adolescents. On the contrary, the results of this study indicate that the level of emotional stress is not directly determined by the existence of the father alone, especially if support from family or other social environments can still be obtained.

These differences in results can be influenced by the social and cultural conditions of Indonesian adolescents. In the collectivist society itself, emotional support is not only obtained from parents but can also be given by grandparents, uncles, aunts, or older brothers when the father is not present. This support can reduce the emotional impact of fatherlessness. The ability to deal with pressure can also be formed through peers, school, and community activities so that the intensity of stress can be suppressed. Maulida Rahmawati et al. (2024) also indicated that social connectedness can also affect the relationship between father's absence and psychological distress.

The impact of fatherlessness can be different because the form of paternal absence experienced by adolescents also varies with physical, emotional, temporary, or parental conflicts. The emotional burden can be lighter when the support of the mother or other caregiver remains available. Over time in adolescence, they can also adjust to family conditions so that the influence of father's absence is reduced. This is in line with the study of family psychology which focuses more on the quality of the relationship with the caregiver present than simply the absence of parents.

The findings of this study are not entirely in line with Jiang et al. (2024) who indicate that the role of the father may be strongly related to the ability of adolescents to manage stress. Although access and emotional support from fathers were considered important in the study, the results of this study indicate that these two things do not necessarily make the level of emotional stress different in all adolescent groups. This difference can be explained by the fact that emotional stress does not form from a single cause. These conditions can be influenced in a simultaneous way by social relationships, the environment in which the adolescent is located, and personal circumstances. Therefore, fatherless influences are likely to arise through combination with other factors so that the relationships between these variables are not sufficiently explained through simple linear patterns alone.

The contribution of this study can be seen from the finding that the impact of fatherlessness on emotional stress does not apply in the same pattern to all adolescents. The absence of the father cannot be immediately considered ineffectual, but these results indicate that the relationship may be influenced by other conditions surrounding the adolescent. Factors such as the ability to rise emotionally, the quality of support from the mother, relationships with peers, the economic situation of the family, and the existence of a replacement for the role of the father can be considered as variables that strengthen or weaken these influences. These differences in supporting factors may explain why the impact of fatherlessness appears stronger in certain groups but does not indicate similar results in other groups. Therefore, this research can be the basis for future research to be able to examine fatherlessness in more depth by considering various conditions that accompany adolescent life.

These findings indicate that the impact of father's absence is not the same on every adolescent. The condition of fatherlessness needs to be understood along with the social and environmental factors that also affect their lives. Academic pressure, peer conflict, or economic problems can be more dominant sources of stress so that the influence of father's absence is less visible. Therefore, emotional stress is more accurately understood as the result of various pressures that are interrelated that are not the direct result of fatherlessness.

Overall, although the importance of the role of fathers in adolescent emotional development has been widely discussed, this study indicates that fatherlessness is not a significant factor in emotional stress in Indonesian adolescents in the study sample. The findings are clues where the father's absence can be influenced by other factors so that the relationship between the two cannot be explained through a simple pattern. Future research needs to be able to examine more stress-causing factors and use longitudinal designs to look at adolescent psychological changes over time. That way, the understanding of fatherlessness and adolescent psychological well-being can be developed more thoroughly and according to the cultural context.

5 Conclusion

This study aims to be able to find out whether fatherlessness can predict emotional stress in adolescents from broken homes. The results of the analysis indicate that the absence of the father is not a significant predictor so that the level of stress of adolescents is not only determined by the existence of the father figure. Stress is likely to be influenced by various interpersonal and environmental factors that can reduce the influence of fatherlessness. These findings are clues that fatherlessness is not the only risk factor that applies equally to all adolescents as its impact is influenced by other parenting supports, social relationships, and coping skills. The contribution of this study lies in the finding that the impact of fatherlessness can be different in collectivist cultures, when extended families, maternal support, and peers can help relieve stress. Therefore, further research needs to consider other factors that interact with fatherlessness so that the understanding of adolescent development and family psychology becomes more complete and in accordance with the cultural context.

6 Recommendation

The findings of this research can be used as a basis for several steps in follow-up research, policy, or mentoring practices. Since the influence of fatherlessness on emotional stress has not been proven to be significant, the attention of subsequent research should be extended to other factors such as maternal support, peer closeness, coping with problems, economic pressure, and the existence of other caregivers. Research with longitudinal methods also needs to be considered so that changes in adolescent psychological conditions can be observed over time and stress differences at each stage of development can be known. In public policy, the strengthening of community-based support programs can be carried out to help adolescents who have lost parental support, especially in broken home families who are still receiving protection from extended families. In schools, mental health services can be expanded through screening and counseling that address the various sources of stress with not just fatherless conditions. In educational or clinical practice, adolescents' conditions should be assessed in a comprehensive way because stress responses can be shaped by many social and emotional factors. Based on this understanding, counselors, teachers, and community workers can develop mentoring that focuses on self-resilience, social

relationships, and emotional support. In general, fatherlessness needs to be placed in a broader cultural and relational context so that mentoring strategies for adolescent psychological health can be prepared more completely.

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