

## Self-acceptance in fatherless early adult women due to parental divorce

### *Self-acceptance* pada wanita dewasa awal yang fatherless akibat perceraian orang tua

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#### ABSTRACT

Losing father's role or what called "fatherless" due to parental divorce can be occurred by early adults. Early adulthood is a phase where individual tends to explore their identity. For women, exploring identity cannot be separated from environmental factors and closed ones, including her father. If an early adult woman loses her father figure in her life, it will be impacted on psychological factors and the process of self-acceptance. This study aims to see the self-acceptance in early adult women who experience fatherlessness due to parental divorce. The research method used is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Data collection using in-depth interviews in early adult women who experience fatherless due to parental divorce. The data analysis technique uses Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). The results of the study showed that there are several aspects that can form self-acceptance in early adult women who experienced fatherless due to parental divorce, such as self-understanding, sincerity, perceived improvements in quality of life, resilience and coping strategies, social support, and self-expectation.

#### ABSTRACT

Hilangnya peran ayah atau yang biasa disebut *fatherless* akibat perceraian orang tua bisa terjadi pada individu usia dewasa awal. Dewasa awal merupakan fase individu untuk mengeksplorasi identitas diri. Pada wanita, eksplorasi diri tidak terlepas dari faktor lingkungan dan orang terdekat, termasuk peran ayah. Apabila wanita dewasa awal kehilangan peran figur ayah dalam hidupnya, maka akan berdampak pada faktor psikologis dan proses penerimaan diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat bagaimana bentuk penerimaan diri (*self-acceptance*) pada wanita usia dewasa awal yang mengalami *fatherless* akibat dari perceraian orang tua. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Penggalan data menggunakan wawancara mendalam (*in-depth interview*) pada wanita dewasa awal yang mengalami *fatherless* akibat perceraian orang tua. Teknik analisis data menggunakan *Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis* (IPA). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan ada beberapa aspek yang bisa membentuk *self-acceptance* pada wanita dewasa awal yang *fatherless* akibat perceraian orang tua, yaitu pemahaman terhadap diri sendiri, keikhlasan terhadap kondisi yang dialami, perbedaan kualitas hidup yang dirasakan, resiliensi dan strategi coping, dukungan sosial yang memperkuat diri, dan harapan untuk diri sendiri.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of fatherlessness, referring to the absence of a father figure, has emerged as a global concern that continues to attract growing scholarly and public attention. In the United States, around 18.3 million children (approximately one in four) are reported to live in households without a father (Brewer, 2023). A comparable trend is also evident in Indonesia. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (2023) recorded 408,347 divorce cases, many of which led to decreased paternal involvement in childcare. Furthermore, UNICEF as reported in CNN Indonesia (2024) highlighted that 20.9% of Indonesian children lack the role or presence of their fathers in daily life. Research has consistently shown that fatherlessness can result in a wide range of consequences, including heightened vulnerability to psychological distress, behavioral challenges, and diminished social support that would typically be provided by a father. Conceptually, fatherlessness is understood as the absence of a father figure in a child's life, whether in a physical or emotional sense, such as when a father leaves the household, fails to participate in parenting, or remains physically present but does not fulfill his paternal responsibilities (Ashari, 2017; Smith, 2017).

Preliminary interviews with the participants revealed complex emotional experiences in growing up without paternal involvement following parental divorce. Participant 1 initially felt confused and surprised by her parents' separation, later experiencing loneliness, financial instability, and emotional distress during adolescence when her mother had to work away from home. Despite moments of despair, she gradually learned to let go of past events and embraced principles of sincerity and forgiveness, refusing to hold resentment toward her father. In contrast, Participant 2 reported that her father's absence had already been normalized prior to the divorce due to his long-term physical separation from the family, which lessened the immediate emotional impact. However, the divorce left her with heavier responsibilities, including contributing to the family's financial needs at a young age. Although she admitted to feeling disappointed and burdened, she eventually perceived these experiences as shaping her into a more adaptable and resilient individual. Together, these narratives illustrate how early adult women construct self-acceptance through distinct yet parallel processes of coping with fatherlessness.

The narratives of participants in this research align with contemporary psychological findings on fatherlessness following divorce. Consistent with longitudinal evidence that early paternal absence elevates depressive symptoms in young women into adulthood, especially when fathers become non-resident early in life. Participant 1's emotional trajectory from confusion and loneliness toward resilience parallels such patterns (Culpin et al., 2022). Participant 2's experience of financial burden and early responsibility reflects the documented economic and emotional toll borne by daughters in father-absent households (Hariadi et al., 2024), particularly when supportive co-parental dynamics are weak. Both cases underscore a dual trajectory: the persistence of emotional vulnerability, but also the emergence of adaptive coping and self-acceptance as described in recent qualitative and cohort studies.

The urgency of this study arises from evidence showing that fatherlessness, particularly due to parental divorce, has significant negative implications for daughters' psychological and social development. Research indicates that women without paternal involvement are more vulnerable to anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotion regulation difficulties (Brown, 2018; Rahayu et al., 2024). Father absence has also been associated with diminished trust in relationships, social withdrawal (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002), and even long-term risks such as higher depression levels and poorer cognitive outcomes, especially among females (Yang et al., 2022). These findings highlight fatherlessness not merely as the absence of a figure, but as a condition capable of disrupting identity formation and emotional stability in early adulthood, thereby making the study of self-acceptance within this context both timely and essential.

Previous qualitative studies have examined the psychological consequences of fatherlessness, though often with different emphases. Hadyani and Indriana (2017) found that adolescents developed self-acceptance gradually through emotional struggles, coping, and external support. Brown (2018) emphasized the role of father-daughter bonds in identity formation, linking absence to low self-esteem and difficulties in intimate relationships. Similarly, Castetter (2020) showed that lifelong paternal absence shaped attachment, self-concept, and trust. However, most studies have focused on adolescents or women across the lifespan, with limited attention to early adulthood as a distinct developmental stage. Moreover, prior work has largely emphasized risks, whereas little is known about how young adult women actively construct self-acceptance following paternal absence.

Shereer (1949) defines self-acceptance as the ability to realistically recognize both strengths and weaknesses, including achievements and failures, while embracing them without self-blame. Berger (1952) similarly views it as acknowledging and accepting one's strengths and limitations, a perspective also supported by Ceyhan & Ceyhan (2011) and Chamberlain & Haaga (2001), who emphasize objective self-evaluation. This construct is particularly relevant in early adulthood, a stage marked by identity exploration and the need for emotional stability, especially when facing challenges such as parental divorce. According to Berger's indicators derived from Shereer's theory, individuals with high self-acceptance: (1) Prioritizing internal values over external influences; (2) Believing in their capacity to navigate life; (3) Taking responsibility for their actions; (4) Receiving praise and criticism objectively; (5) Acknowledging both their emotional experiences and personal limitations; (6) Perceiving themselves as equal to others; (7) Not anticipating rejection in all situations; (8) Avoiding negative self-comparisons; and (9) Not experiencing feelings of inferiority.

The present study aims to explore and describe how early adult women develop self-acceptance in the context of fatherlessness resulting from parental divorce. The focus of this research is on capturing the subjective experiences of women in early adulthood who have lived without paternal involvement for several years, emphasizing the emotional, cognitive, and social processes that shape their acceptance of self. By employing a qualitative

phenomenological approach, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced ways in which participants interpret their fatherless condition and integrate it into their identity formation. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on early adulthood as a critical developmental stage, a phase often overlooked in prior studies. Furthermore, unlike previous research that has mainly emphasized the negative psychological outcomes of fatherlessness, this study highlights the adaptive dimensions of the experience, particularly how self-acceptance can emerge through deeper aspects.

## **2. METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using the phenomenological method, specifically the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) technique. Phenomenology is a qualitative investigative strategy in which researchers aim to understand the essence of individuals' lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon, as described by participants or informants (Creswell, 2009). Suyanto (2019) similarly defines phenomenology as a qualitative method that focuses on individuals' personal experiences to uncover the shared meanings of a phenomenon that is consciously experienced by a group. The selection of the phenomenological approach is based on researcher's intention to explore the depth of the subjective experiences of individuals regarding a particular societal issue. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the meaning behind the phenomenon from the perspective of those who have directly encountered. In the context of this study, the phenomenon being examined is fatherlessness due to parental divorce, as experienced by women in early adulthood.

### **Participant Criteria**

The participants involved in this study were selected based on the following criteria: (1) Aged between 18 and 40 years; (2) Female; (3) Had experienced parental divorce; and (4) Were no longer in contact with or residing with their father. The study involved two participants who met all the criteria and two more participants as their significant others for data triangulation. Both main participants were women in early adulthood who had experienced parental divorce more than five years prior to the time of the interview. In addition, neither participant had lived with their father for over five years before the interview was conducted. As for significant others, researcher interviewed both participant's close friend. Participants were recruited through recommendations from individuals within the researcher's personal network. Prior to inclusion in the study, each potential participant underwent a brief screening process involving a short question-and-answer session to confirm their eligibility in accordance with the established criteria.

**Table 1** Participant demographics

Name	Age	Origin Domicile	Current Domicile	Employment Status	Information
RNA	22 years old	Malang	Australia	Intern	Years since parents' divorce: ±8 years, no longer communicating with father, currently living with mother.
VNS	25 years old	Blitar	Surabaya	Employee	Years since parents' divorce: ±6 years, no longer communicating with father, currently lives with mother, 2 older brothers and 2 younger brothers.

### Collecting Data

The data collection methods employed in this study was in-depth interview with selected participants. Non-participant observations and short questionnaire were also conducted to support data collection processes. The interviews conducted were semi-structured. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), semi-structured interviews are guided by a set of predetermined questions while still allowing participants the flexibility to respond without restrictions through open-ended answers. This interview format was chosen to facilitate the collection of rich, nuanced data that captures the depth and complexity of the participants' lived experiences. Before interview, the participants completing a short questionnaire containing their personal identity and two preliminary questions regarding their parents' divorce and their current relationship with both their mother and father. The short questionnaire is given on October 20, 2024 and answered on the same day for both main participants. The interview and observation were conducted on October 25, 2024 for participant named RNA and October 27, 2024 for participant named VNS. As for interview and observation with the significant others were conducted on November 3, 2024 for VNS's close friend and November 5, 2024 for RNA's lecturer. In total, data collection process took around 3 weeks from October 20 to November 5, 2024.

### Analyzing Data

The data analysis employed in this study was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Data collected from the interview process were first descriptively outlined, then categorized according to emerging themes, and subsequently interpreted. IPA is grounded in the hermeneutic philosophy of Martin Heidegger and emphasizes the interpretation of meaning within individuals' lived experiences. It aims to explore how participants make sense of significant life events (Abdellatif & Haynes, 2024). In the context of this study, IPA was applied to analyze the self-acceptance process in early adult women who experienced fatherlessness as a result of parental divorce.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that the two participants differed in several aspects, including domicile, employment status, and the family members they currently live with. However, they also shared certain similarities, such as being of a similar age, having no interaction with their current father, and experiencing the effects of parental divorce that had occurred more than five years ago. Despite the differences and similarities, both participants expressed individual responses that demonstrated self-acceptance, which are further outlined through specific themes in Table 2.

**Table 2** Main themes and sub-themes from interview results

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Self-understanding	a. Inner strength b. Has life principles
Sincerity	a. Acceptance towards parental divorce b. Sincerity on father's past behavior c. Self-compassion
Perceived improvements in quality of life	a. Overcoming difficult phase after parental divorce b. Comparison of life changes c. Better quality of life
Resilience and coping strategies	a. Recover from negative talk b. Adaptive coping strategies
Social support	a. Good relationships with other family member (mother, siblings, etc.) b. Respect the support from others
Self-expectation	a. Hopes for the future b. Hopes for romantic relationships and married life

#### Self-understanding

This study aims to explore how individuals who experience fatherlessness due to parental divorce come to accept themselves and their current life circumstances. In line with this objective, the researcher seeks to understand how participants perceive and interpret their own identities, as self-understanding is a crucial component of self-acceptance. According to Permatasari & Gamayanti (2016), self-understanding is typically characterized by authenticity, realism, and honesty in one's self-expression.

Based on the interview findings, both participants RNA and VNS demonstrated a degree of self-understanding. RNA, for instance, identified her capacity to let go of past events as a personal strength in coping with her fatherless condition. She emphasized a personal principle of refraining from holding grudges toward those who may have caused her pain. This principle was instilled by her mother, who consistently advised her to forgive others and

embrace the process of letting go. Although RNA acknowledged that letting go is not an easy task, she expressed confidence in her ability to carry it out as part of her personal growth. RNA's close friend also stated that RNA doesn't hate her father. She can accept the fact and the reality about her situation.

*"Kuncinya itu satu sih kalau aku, aku prinsipnya "legowo". Kedua, jangan pernah dendam."*  
(The key is one thing for me, my principle is "legowo". Second, never hold a grudge.)  
[RNA75]

*"... Pada akhirnya kayak "ya udah lah" gitu loh kak. Kalau saya liatnya nggak yang benci atau gimana, memang ikhlas aja" (... In the end, it was like, 'It is what it is'. From my point of view, there was not any hatred or anything, it was just a matter of acceptance.)* [SO]

In contrast, VNS articulated a different form of self-understanding. She described herself as a flexible individual who is able to adjust effectively in various situations. This adaptability allows her to respond appropriately to challenging or uncomfortable environments by quickly assessing and adjusting to the context. VNS identified this flexibility and adaptability as personal strengths that help her navigate life's difficulties. However, she also acknowledged that adaptation is not always immediate or effortless; there are instances where she encounters significant challenges in adjusting to certain circumstances. VNS's SO also stated that she can adapt quickly. Thus, she told the story when VNS moved to another city, she can understand the surroundings like streets or places in a short time. She also said that VNS can socialize pretty well in a new place. Those also happened when VNS changed her job. Even though she placed in different position, she can still perform well.

*"Aku tuh orangnya sangat fleksibel. Dalam menghadapi apapun itu sangat fleksibel. Jadi apa ya, cepet banget beradaptasi. Jadi menurutku itu tuh keunggulan banget"* (I am a very flexible person. When it comes to dealing with anything, I adapt very quickly. So, I think That is a huge advantage.) [VNS49]

*"Aku sih melihatnya, dia itu memang gampang beradaptasi. Karena seingatku waktu dia pindahan dari Blitar ke Surabaya, dia bisa langsung tahu berbagai tempat dan bersosialisasi dengan orang lain. Selain itu, dari segi pekerjaan juga dia kelihatan sat set walau sempet pindah kerja juga. Jadi emang kelihatan dia orangnya bisa beradaptasi dengan baik"* (I've seen her adapt easily. I remember when she moved from Blitar to Surabaya, she immediately found her way around the place and socialized with others. Furthermore, she seemed to be a fast and consistent performer in her work, even though she'd changed jobs. So, she certainly seems to be adaptable.) [SO]

Both RNA and VNS were able to clearly articulate the personal characteristics and guiding principles they rely on for navigating life's challenges. Each participant consciously

and candidly acknowledged that their journey toward resilience involved considerable struggle, despite their recognition of personal strengths. This capacity for introspection and acknowledgment of internal resources reflects a developed sense of self-understanding. According to Permatasari & Gamayanti (2016), self-understanding is closely linked to self-acceptance; individuals who possess a deeper understanding of themselves tend to demonstrate higher levels of self-acceptance. In this context, both RNA and VNS were aware of their respective strengths and actively applied these internal principles throughout their lives as coping mechanisms.

### Sincerity

Additionally, the in-depth interviews provided insight into the emotional experiences of both participants from the time of their parents' divorce to the present. These emotional narratives were compiled to construct a holistic understanding of their lived experiences. RNA shared that during the initial period following her parents' separation, she did not experience sadness; rather, she felt surprised and confused, often questioning the reason behind their divorce. This response may have been influenced by her young age at the time, which limited her understanding of the concept of divorce. However, as RNA entered adolescence, new emotional responses began to surface. She recounted reaching a particularly low point, stemming from the absence of her father, the physical distance from her mother due to work obligations, financial instability, and the emotional turbulence of puberty. During this period, RNA admitted to feeling desperate.

*"Habis kolaps tuh mama akhirnya merantau kan ke Bali. Nah, disini ini kak. Ini bener-bener aku merasa kayak desperate gitu ... Aku yang dulu apa-apa sama mama, tiba-tiba kayak ditinggal jauh, ditinggal kerja. Itu merasa desperate banget waktu itu."* (After her collapse, my mom ended up moving to Bali. That left me felt desperate. I used to do everything for my mom, but suddenly she was far away, left for work. I felt really desperate at the time.) [RNA31]

Over time, as RNA transitioned into adulthood, she reported gaining new insights and gradually shifting her perspective on her life circumstances. She stated that she had learned to let go of past events and had come to accept her status as fatherless. This acceptance was reflected in her acknowledgment that she no longer harbored resentment, anger, or blame toward her father. RNA contrasted her experience with that of peers who had undergone similar parental divorce but continued to place blame on their fathers. She emphasized that her refusal to assign blame was a sign that she had successfully released the emotional burden associated with the incident. Furthermore, RNA described herself as someone who does not dwell on past difficulties, as she believes her life follows a predetermined path and she chooses not to look back. However, despite these affirmations of acceptance, the researcher observed that RNA still experiences complex emotions related to her past. She admitted to continuing

feelings of sadness, disappointment, and lingering questions. Nevertheless, RNA recognized that the conditions of her life had changed, leaving her with no choice but to move forward and embrace her present situation.

In contrast, VNS recounted that she did not experience any strong emotional reactions at the onset of her parents' divorce. This, she explained, was due to the prolonged physical separation of her parents prior to the formal divorce, during which her father had been working away from home for an extended period. As a result, the official separation did not feel markedly different from her lived experience. However, VNS later went through a grieving process upon realizing the absence of a paternal figure in her life. She also expressed a sense of injustice, particularly because she was compelled to assume financial responsibility for the family at a young age due to her father's lack of support. Despite these challenges, VNS reflected on her journey as one filled with emotional highs and lows that contributed to shaping her present self. She views this growth process as evidence of her ability to accept her fatherless condition.

*"Menurut aku, kalau nggak ada kejadian itu, aku nggak bisa menjadi aku yang hari ini. Menurutku gitu sih, jadi ikhlas sekali. Sangat ikhlas."* (I think if that incident had not happened, I would not be who I am today. That is how I feel, and I wholeheartedly accept that.) [VNS45]

Feelings of acceptance are a fundamental aspect of self-acceptance. According to Savira (2023), individuals who are capable of accepting themselves tend to exhibit sincere attitudes and express gratitude for their present circumstances. Both RNA and VNS acknowledged possessing a sense of sincerity; however, each participant interpreted this concept differently. For RNA, sincerity was demonstrated through the absence of negative emotions such as resentment or blame toward her father, who no longer played an active role in her life. In contrast, VNS perceived sincerity as the ability to reflect upon and learn from her past experiences, allowing her to grow and evolve into the person she is today. Both participants required time to reach this point of acceptance, which, according to their narratives, emerged as a necessity in response to life circumstances that left them with no choice but to let go of the past.

### **Perceived improvements in quality of life**

Feelings of acceptance are a fundamental aspect of self-acceptance. According to Savira (2023), individuals who are capable of accepting themselves tend to exhibit sincere attitudes and express gratitude for their present circumstances. Both RNA and VNS acknowledged possessing a sense of sincerity; however, each participant interpreted this concept differently. For RNA, sincerity was demonstrated through the absence of negative emotions such as resentment or blame toward her father, who no longer played an active role in her life.

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RNA also reported difficulties in adapting to her new junior high school environment, which differed significantly from her previous school. It took approximately six months for her to adjust to the new social setting, characterized by a more heterogeneous student body. Over time, however, she began to integrate socially, found friends who shared her interests, and felt accepted despite her background. As she progressed into adulthood, RNA reported acquiring valuable life lessons, particularly from her mother, including the importance of sincerity and avoiding harboring grudges. She emphasized the role of time in healing emotional wounds and ultimately expressed the belief that her current quality of life is better than in the past. RNA's SO added that RNA has a better quality of life that indicated by how she sees RNA as someone who's rarely looked sad even though she had such a family background.

*"Ya Alhamdulillah sudah ya kak. Sudah lah, dari pada yang dulu. Semua itu ada, apa, ada obatnya gitu loh. Kan waktu nenangin luka."* (Yeah, thank God, it is better now. Better than before. Everything has its cure, you know. Time helps to heal the wounds.) [RNA74]

*"Saya ingat dulu dia pernah cerita tentang keluarganya, tapi selama berteman sama dia sih saya nggak, apa ya, nggak selalu melihat dia sedih. Jarang bahkan. Dia terlihat baik-baik aja, mungkin itu bisa menggambarkan kalau dia sekarang hidupnya lebih baik."* (I remembered she talked about her family, but during our time together, I rarely seen her sad. She seemed fine, which may indicate that her life is better now.) [SO]

A comparable experience was reported by VNS, who also underwent a difficult period following her parents' divorce. The absence of her father had a significant impact on the family's financial condition, resulting in considerable hardship. After the divorce, VNS and her family were compelled to relocate to another city. At the time, her mother who was unemployed, had to assume the role of a single parent to five children. The family was forced to undergo numerous adjustments to cope with the new reality. Initially, the family's financial needs were supported by the maternal uncle. After completing vocational school, VNS also began working to contribute to the household.

However, when her uncle passed away, the financial burden increased, and VNS was compelled to work even harder. No longer supporting only her mother, she became responsible for covering the household expenses and financing her younger siblings' education. VNS recalled this as the lowest point in her life and expressed deep disappointment in her father, who had failed to provide any financial assistance during this period. As she entered

adulthood, VNS reported gaining valuable life lessons and learned from her older siblings. She also highlighted the mutual support among family members as a key factor in their resilience. VNS compared her past and present financial conditions, stating that there were times in the past when the family struggled to afford even one proper meal. However, she noted that her current financial situation has improved significantly, leading her to conclude that her quality of life is better than before. This also supported by VNS's SO who stated that VNS and her family faced financial hardship after her father abruptly left them. Over time, their situation began to change when they moved to Surabaya, where VNS's older siblings secured jobs. After completing vocational school, VNS also started working to help support the household. Gradually, their economic condition improved, along with their overall quality of life.

*"... Kita pun kadang bertahan hanya dengan uang sedikit untuk makan orang banyak di rumah, itu sebenarnya sulit banget. Jadi kalau dibandingkan yang dulu, terus sama aku yang hari ini, kayaknya kita tuh sekarang lebih baik sih, sangat jauh lebih baik ..."* (... Sometimes we even survive with just a little money to feed a lot of people at home, which is actually really difficult. So, comparing the past and me today, I think we're better off now, much better...) [VNS48]

*"Kalau aku lihatnya sih dulu kehidupan dia emang cukup sulit, apalagi ketika papanya secara tiba-tiba menghilang dan nggak ngasih kabar. Padahal posisinya finansial keluarga itu ditopang sama papanya. Pun setelah pindah, kakak-kakak dia bekerja dan dia sendiri juga bekerja setelah lulus SMK. Dari situ, finansial keluarganya lebih baik. Jadi, aku menilainya sih memang kualitas hidupnya membaik"* (From what I see, her life was indeed quite challenging, especially when her father suddenly disappeared without a word. Even though her father supported the family financially, after she moved away, her older siblings worked, and she herself also worked after graduating from vocational school. As a result, her family's finances improved. So, I think her quality of life has indeed improved.) [SO]

Sembiring et al. (2023) emphasize that self-acceptance is positively correlated with quality of life, where a higher level of self-acceptance is associated with enhanced well-being. From the interviews, it became evident that both RNA and VNS experienced a marked difference in their quality of life between the early period following their parents' divorce (particularly the first six months) and the present. Interestingly, each participant evaluated their improved quality of life from distinct perspectives. RNA associated it with emotional healing and recovery from the psychological impact of her parents' separation. In contrast, VNS defined her improved quality of life in terms of the family's enhanced financial stability.

### **Resilience and coping strategies**

During the interview, RNA shared a personal experience of being humiliated by a family member, specifically her aunt, due to her status as fatherless following her parents'

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divorce. At the time, RNA was not immediately aware of the incident, as it was her mother who witnessed it. She admitted that she was unable to respond and chose to remain silent. However, she recalled feeling intense anger and noted that had the incident occurred at an older age, she likely would have reacted differently. RNA reflected that this experience served as motivation for her to improve herself and strive to become a better person.

*"... Waktu mereka cekcok, bertengkar, itu pernah dia bilang gini, "Anakmu iku, kamu jadikno opo? Nggak duwe bapak!" ... Jadi aku merasa diremehkan soal nggak punya ayah ... It is okay lah, nggak apa-apa. Itu buat motivasi aja, itu supaya aku be better ke depannya gitu kalau aku." (... When they were arguing, fighting, he once said something like, "Your child, what will she become? She is fatherless!". I felt belittled about not having a father. It is okay, it is fine. Just make it a motivation, it is so I can be better in the future.) [RNA46, RNA47]*

In addition to this event, RNA described her childhood as emotionally challenging, particularly due to the absence of her father. When asked whether she engaged in any specific activities or hobbies to help her cope with this situation, RNA responded lightheartedly that she enjoyed buying snacks and spending time with her friends. For her, having friends who shared her wavelength and provided a space for open conversation helped to ease her emotional burden. She also mentioned that when memories of the past became overwhelming, she would go out with friends as a form of "healing." These activities served as coping strategies that allowed RNA to manage the emotional impact of her fatherlessness by engaging in enjoyable distractions and maintaining supportive social interactions. RNA's SO also stated that RNA occasionally shares about the challenges in her life, including issues related to her father. According to her SO assessment, she is able to move forward over time by engaging in various activities that help distract her from negative thoughts.

*"... Aku dulu itu punya temen yang sefrekuensi dengan aku pas SMP ... Terus anaknya juga suka jajan, suka makan, jadi sefrekuensi gitu. Jadi kayak, akhirnya itu ikhlas gitu ... Ya, ada di masa aku nangis-nangis, sedih, terluka itu ada. Tapi aku mikir, "ngapain aku kayak gini? Hidup kan cuma sekali dinikmati. Ya udah, kita keluar, kita healing, kita jajan". Gitu sih kak kalau aku sendiri." (... I used to have a friend who had quite similar interests as me back in junior high. She also liked to buy snacks, liked to eat, so we were on the same page. So, it was like, in the end, I am accepting the situation. Yes, there were times when I cried, sad, and hurt. But I thought, "Why am I like this? We only have one life to enjoy. Let's just go out, heal, and buy snacks." That is how it is for me, sis.) [RNA69, RNA70]*

*"Memang kita cukup dekat, suka jalan bareng gitu sih kak. Kadang dia cerita juga ke saya kalau ada sesuatu. Kalo berbicara tentang ayahnya, saya menilainya sih dia udah bisa move on. Mungkin memang butuh waktu, tapi dia akhirnya ngelakuin hal lain biar nggak kepikiran." (We're quite close, we like to hang out together. Sometimes she tells me when something is wrong. About her father, I think she had moved on. It might take time, but she eventually does something else to take her mind off it.) [SO]*

In contrast, based on VNS's account, she once encountered a prejudiced perspective from an individual in her workplace. VNS recounted that this person assumed individuals from divorced families were typically raised in impoverished environments. Rather than confronting the statement, VNS chose to ignore the comment, suggesting a tendency to disregard negative external judgments. This behavior indicated that VNS does not place significant weight on others' opinions.

*"Nggak pernah juga sih kayaknya atau aku yang nggak peduli sama omongan orang ... Baru ngerti kalau ada orang yang berpikir kalau keluarganya nggak utuh itu berarti biasanya dia dibesarkan di keluarga yang kurang baik ... Iya tahu sih, tapi karena udah gede jadi "masuk telinga kanan, keluar telinga kiri" gitu sih." (I don't think I ever have, or I just don't care about what people say. I just realized that if someone thinks that their family is not intact, it usually means they were raised in a bad family. I know, but because I am now an adult, it is become like 'in one ear, out the other.')* [VNS23, VNS25]

Moreover, the researchers identified specific coping strategies VNS employed in dealing with the psychological impact of her fatherlessness. One such strategy included engaging in her personal interest, fangirling. After the interview, it was revealed that VNS was an admirer of a K-pop idol. This behavior served as a form of emotional relief and distraction, allowing her to cope with internal stressors while still engaging in meaningful and pleasurable activities.

These narratives reflect the participants' journey toward self-acceptance, facilitated through resilience and the use of coping mechanisms. Both RNA and VNS demonstrated signs of recovery following adversity, a process aligned with the concept of resilience. According to Wahidah et al. (2024), increased resilience correlates positively with higher levels of self-acceptance. Furthermore, both participants reported engaging in pleasant, self-soothing activities, such as socializing with friends or fangirling, as a response to emotional distress stemming from paternal absence.

Additionally, both RNA and VNS exhibited the ability to regulate emotions and demonstrate self-control in the face of unfavorable social judgments. These actions fall under the category of coping strategies, particularly emotion-focused coping. Mahdatillah (2021) defined coping as efforts to manage internal and external demands that are appraised as taxing. Emotion-focused coping, as described by Schoenmakers et al. (2015), involves strategies aimed at alleviating emotional distress in stressful situations. Research by Theodoratou et al. (2023) further supports this, indicating that women are more inclined to employ emotion-focused coping as a way to achieve emotional stability and explore alternative solutions.

### **Social support**

In addition to internal factors, external influences also play a critical role in shaping an individual's self-acceptance. One prominent external factor identified through the interviews

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with RNA and VNS was social support. RNA reported that her familial relationships, particularly with her mother, are generally positive. Although occasional disagreements occur, they are resolved constructively. RNA emphasized the quality of this bond by affirming her strong relationship with her mother on multiple occasions. She described her mother as the primary figure who has provided for her and shown unconditional love since her father's passing. Furthermore, RNA also acknowledged the supportive roles of her grandmother, grandfather, and the family's domestic helper. Their presence and encouragement were described as essential in helping her navigate emotional distress, contributing significantly to her process of self-acceptance. Beyond her family, RNA also considers her friends as vital sources of support. Spending time and engaging in conversations with them served as effective emotional outlets during periods of vulnerability.

*"Itu nenek sih, uti sama akung pihak mama. Itu krusial banget sih kak ... Yang memberikan semangat itu ya mereka itu. Ketika dunia sedang tidak baik-baik saja, itu ya mereka gitu loh. Terus ada sih kak, satu lagi. Tapi itu asisten rumah tangga ... Orangnya nggak sekedar bersihkan rumah, orangnya baik kayak memberikan feedback, motivasi, moral, memberikan support."* (That is my grandmother and grandfather from my mom. They have crucial roles since they're the ones who give me encouragement. When I am not doing well, they're the ones who helped. Then There is another one, the housekeeper. She didn't just clean the house; She is a good person who gives feedback, motivation, morals, and support.) [RNA58, RNA59]

Likewise, VNS described her relationship with her mother as not only positive but also akin to a close friendship. Living in a household with two older brothers and two younger sisters, VNS is consistently surrounded by family. She shared a particular closeness with her two older brothers, especially her older sister, whom she sees as a confidante and source of emotional support. VNS also emphasized that observing and learning from her siblings' experiences, including their mistakes, has been a significant learning opportunity for her. Similar to RNA, VNS also credited her peers as important providers of emotional support, particularly in discussing family-related challenges. This is supported by SO's statement, who mentioned that they have been friends since childhood. According to SO, VNS is sincere in expressing her feelings, including her openness in showing love and care toward those around her. SO also regards their friendship as meaningful, describing it as if she were part of her family.

*"Baik sih, kalau sama mama sih baik. Karena saat ini, istilahnya aku tuh cuma punya mama ... Jadi hubungan kita tuh sebenarnya lebih kayak temen ya, dari pada orang tua ... karena aku punya dua kakak, aku itu lebih ke belajar dari kesalahan mereka ... Ada peran dari temen sih kayak yang lebih banyak mendukung karena waktu masih lebih muda, waktu masih sekolah itu dari pada keluarga. Karena kita tuh biasanya tuh nggak akan bercerita sama keluarga karena kayak, sungkan gitu. Jadi*

*kita tuh bisanya sama temen, jadi menurutku yang banyak banget jadi support secara emosional itu pasti temen sih” (Everything is good with my mom. Because right now, I only have my mom. Our relationship is actually more like friends, rather than parents (and child). As I have two older siblings, I tend to learn from their mistakes. There is a role from friends, like being more supportive because when I was younger, when I was still in school, it was more than family. Because we usually would not talk to our family because we were embarrassed. So, we can usually be with friends, so I think the ones who provide the most emotional support are definitely friends.) [VNS28, VNS33]*

*“Aku sama dia udah temenan dari kecil sih dan aku akui dia itu adalah tipe orang yang sangat jujur dengan dirinya sendiri. Walau dengan latar belakang seperti itu, dia masih mau untuk dicintai oleh orang sekitar dan juga memberi ruang untuk mencintai orang terdekatnya juga. Pertemananku dengan dia sangat bermakna, ibaratnya aku menjadi bagian dari keluarganya” (She and I have been friends since childhood, and I admit, she is the type of person who is very honest with herself. Even with that background, she still wants to be loved by everyone around her and also makes room for those closest to her to love her. My friendship with her is very meaningful; it is like I am part of her family.) [SO]*

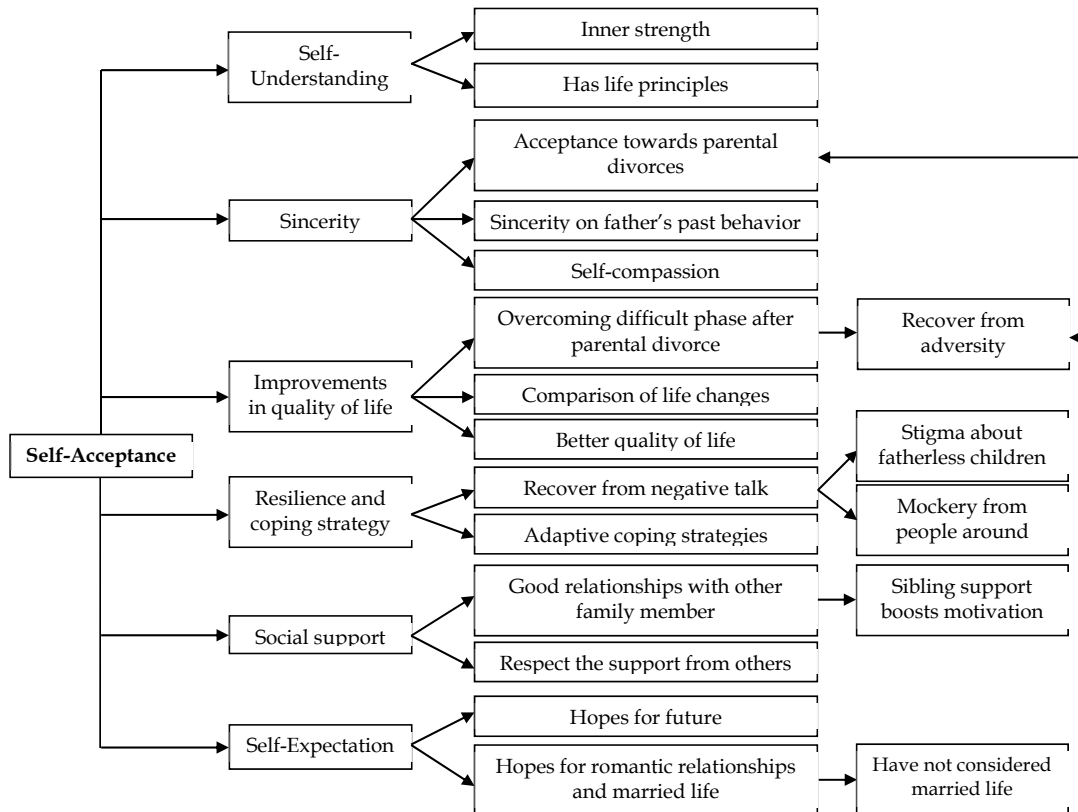
The presence of meaningful relationships surrounding both RNA and VNS exemplifies the role of social support in fostering self-acceptance. According to Hafni (2020), there is a positive and significant correlation between social support and self-acceptance, suggesting that individuals who receive higher levels of support from their environment are more likely to develop a stronger sense of self-acceptance. Accordingly, it can be inferred that the social support experienced by RNA and VNS has positively influenced their personal development and acceptance of past adversities.

### **Self-expectation**

The interview findings revealed that both RNA and VNS share similar aspirations and expectation for their personal growth. RNA expressed a desire to become a better individual in the future by learning from his parents’ past mistakes. He aims to achieve personal success, maintain humility, avoid harboring resentment, and contribute positively to others and society, particularly his nation and parents. Likewise, VNS articulated a goal of attaining career success as a means of elevating his standard of living. For VNS, economic independence is regarded as a primary objective. Thoughts about marriage or household life have not occupied them, as they prefer to focus on current obligations. These aspirations reflect key indicators of self-acceptance, which include the presence of realistic expectations and a stable sense of self-worth (Permatasari & Gamayanti, 2016).

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**Figure 1.** Self-acceptance dynamic chart on fatherless early adult women due to parental divorce

## Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to explore how early adult women who experienced fatherlessness due to parental divorce develop self-acceptance. Through a phenomenological approach, the research aimed to capture their subjective experiences and the psychological processes underlying acceptance of self in the absence of paternal involvement. The findings revealed that self-acceptance was constructed through several key dimensions: self-understanding, sincerity in facing past circumstances, perceived improvements in quality of life, resilience and coping strategies, social support, and self-expectations for the future. These dimensions illustrate that, despite the challenges of fatherlessness, the participants were able to reconstruct their identities and foster adaptive growth in early adulthood.

First dimension is self-understanding that plays a crucial role, which includes recognizing one's internal strengths and adhering to personal life principles. Women in early adulthood who exhibit high levels of self-acceptance tend to demonstrate strong self-awareness (Permatasari & Gamayanti, 2016). Second, acceptance of adverse experiences, manifested as a sense of sincerity, was also found to be significant. However, sincerity is inherently subjective, and individuals possess the autonomy to define and determine their own sense of sincerity.

This aligns with Savira (2023), who stated individuals with self-acceptance express sincerity and gratitude toward their life circumstances.

Third, self-acceptance was marked by an observable improvement in quality of life. The subjective nature of this concept means that quality of life can only be evaluated from the perspective of the individual experiencing it. Sembiring et al. (2023) found a positive relationship between quality of life and self-acceptance, indicating that individuals with higher life satisfaction are more likely to accept themselves. Fourth, self-acceptance is facilitated by resilience and the development of effective coping strategies. The findings suggest that the journey toward resilience is non-linear, with each individual requiring varying amounts of time to adjust to life challenges. The enhancement of resilience is positively correlated with self-acceptance (Wahidah et al., 2024). An important external factor identified in the development of self-acceptance is social support. The most influential sources of support were those closest to the participants, particularly family members and friends. Hafni (2020) found that social support significantly correlates with higher levels of self-acceptance. Fifth, the emergence of hope for the future was identified as a characteristic of self-acceptance. Hope reflects an individual's valuation of their own self-worth (Permatasari & Gamayanti, 2016).

In comparison with previous studies, the findings of this research both align with and diverge from earlier conclusions. Consistent with Hadyani and Indriana (2017) as well as Brown (2018), the participants' experiences confirm that fatherlessness is often accompanied by emotional struggles and challenges in self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. However, this study also differs by emphasizing the adaptive aspects of the experience. Unlike prior research that predominantly highlighted the negative consequences of paternal absence, such as low self-confidence, emotional instability, and social withdrawal (Casterter, 2020; Rahayu et al., 2024), the present findings demonstrate that early adult women are able to cultivate resilience, utilize coping strategies, and build self-acceptance with the support of significant others. This contrast indicates that fatherlessness does not universally result in detrimental outcomes; rather, its impact may vary depending on individual resources, social support, and the developmental stage at which the absence is experienced.

Additionally, this study suggests that social support contributes to identity formation in early adulthood. Brown (2018) emphasized that communication with close social circles fosters identity development in young women. Furthermore, Rohmah et al. (2024) asserted that self-acceptance, social support, and coping mechanisms collectively and independently influence psychological well-being. Women, in particular, are more likely to seek social support compared to men, which may be attributed to their tendency to engage in emotion-focused coping strategies (Theodoratou et al., 2023). Another notable finding pertains to the participants' ages 22 and 25 years which fall within the typical range of the quarter-life crisis period. According to Putri & Fatmawati (2023), individuals with lower self-acceptance are more susceptible to experiencing a quarter-life crisis. Lastly, this study revealed that the age at which parental divorce occurred did not appear to significantly influence the participants'

level of self-acceptance. This suggests that the duration of time since the divorce does not necessarily determine the degree to which an individual achieves self-acceptance.

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The small number of participants restricts the generalizability of the findings, as the lived experiences of only two early adult women were explored. In addition, the limited time frame of data collection may have constrained the depth and richness of the narratives obtained. The reliance on self-report and accounts from significant others may also introduce subjectivity and recall bias. Future research is encouraged to expand the participant pool, include diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, and employ longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of self-acceptance across different developmental stages. Such efforts would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how fatherlessness influences psychological adjustment and identity formation in early adulthood.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that self-acceptance in early adult women who have experienced fatherlessness due to parental divorce is constructed through multiple dimensions. These include self-awareness, acceptance of life circumstances, enhanced perceived quality of life, resilience-building efforts accompanied by coping strategies, social support from the surrounding environment, and personal hope or future-oriented aspirations. While these components tend to be present in individuals demonstrating self-acceptance, it is important to acknowledge that each individual may exhibit these aspects differently. Consequently, the parameters defining each component cannot be uniformly applied across all early adult women. The construct of self-acceptance remains inherently subjective and can only be accurately interpreted by the individual themselves.

This study explores how self-acceptance manifests among early adult women who have experienced father absence due to parental divorce. Nonetheless, the study is not without limitations. A key limitation lies in the limited timeframe for data collection, which may have restricted the depth and richness of the findings. Future studies are encouraged to draw on this research as a reference for both literature review and methodological refinement. For example, focusing on a more narrowly defined age range of participants may provide more specific and in-depth insights.

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