



# Open Access Indonesia Journal of Social Sciences

Journal Homepage: <https://journalsocialsciences.com/index.php/OAIJSS>

## The Effects of Parental Conflicts and Divorce Towards Self-efficacy in Romantic Relationships of Young Adults Male

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Father parenting  
Parental divorce  
Relationship efficacy  
Romantic relationship  
Self-efficacy

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All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

<https://doi.org/10.37275/oaijss.v6i2.158>

### ABSTRACT

Parental conflict and divorce trends have been increasing over the years and hinder parents from nurturing their children, particularly fathers. Fathers are more likely to disengage in parenting after a divorce. This may affect children in their romantic relationships in later life. This study aimed to examine the effects of parental conflict and divorce and father parenting practices towards self-efficacy in romantic relationships of young adults male. The study applied quantitative methods with correlational, comparative, and regression analysis. 62 male and single young adults whose parents were divorced before the age of 18 were involved and chosen with purposive sampling. The data was collected by using the children's perception of interparental conflict scale ( $\alpha=0.92$ ), parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire ( $\alpha=0.86$ ), and self-efficacy in romantic relationship scale ( $\alpha=0.89$ ). The results revealed that there is a partial correlation between parental conflict intensity and relationship anxiety and other aspects related to the self-efficacy of young male adults. Paired t-test illustrated differences in self-efficacy in romantic relationships based on individual characteristics and father parenting practices (negative). Regression analysis also demonstrated a significant effect of father parenting practices, both positive and negative, towards self-efficacy in romantic relationships. In conclusion, the efficacy of romantic relationships in early adulthood from divorced families is influenced by negative paternal parenting.

### 1. Introduction

In living a household life, husband and wife couples certainly experience ups and downs in the form of conflicts, arguments, and conflicts with varying frequencies and intensities. The causes of the issue also vary, which can affect the severity of marital conflict. Conflicts in the household can become constructive conflicts if they can be resolved in adaptive ways. However, if the conflict is not resolved properly and drags on, the marriage relationship will be affected and can lead to divorce. Article 38 of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia number 1 of 1974 concerning marriage states that divorce is one of the causes of the breakup of a marriage apart from death

and annulment of court decisions.

Divorce cases in Indonesia are increasing every year, both talak and contested divorces. BPS statistics (2022) show an increasing trend of divorce, with 8,862 cases (2016-2017) and 33,686 cases (2017-2018). Divorce causes children to live with families that have an incomplete structure. Lestari (2018) found 2015 SUPAS data regarding parents who became single mothers after divorce as many as 24 million people, of which approximately 20 million people were single mothers, while 4 million others were single fathers. From these data, it can be concluded that there are more children who are only raised by their mothers and have lost a father figure.



The number of divorces that occur due to disputes and quarrels alone reaches 279,205 cases in 2021 (BPS, 2022), being the first cause of divorce, while other reasons include economic problems, domestic violence, and one of the spouses leaving the house. Hastuti (2015) said that families full of conflict create an environment that is not conducive to optimal child psychosocial development. Moreover, children's development is also largely influenced by the family as the environment closest to the child. Nonetheless, the dynamics within the family are also heavily influenced by the surrounding environment (Puspitawati, 2018).

The impact of parental conflict depends on the frequency, intensity, and resolution of problems that are carried out during the conflict (Sağkal et al., 2019). One of the influences of parental conflict and divorce is on their future romantic relationships. This occurs through learning mechanisms and children's observations of conflict management, relationship commitment, and attitudes toward divorce shown by parents in dealing with household problems (Sağkal et al., 2019). If the coping of problems shown by parents is negative and not adaptive, then it is likely that children will do the same when facing conflicts with their partners, both consciously and unconsciously. This study aimed to examine the effects of parental conflict and divorce and father parenting practices towards self-efficacy in romantic relationships of young adults male.

## 2. Literature Review

After the divorce, the child will live with one of the parents with the custody arrangement that was agreed during the divorce process. This affects the way parents provide care for children, especially from the father's perspective, who often does not get custody and does not live with the child. Fathers who tend not to be involved in childcare can be said to "reject" children. According to acceptance-rejection parenting theory (Rohner et al., 2019), this type is categorized as undifferentiated rejection parenting or rejecting

without hatred because, basically, the father chooses not to pay attention to the child's needs both physically and psychologically. This is also reflected in the decreased frequency of interactions between fathers and children after divorce.

Parenting has a very important role in the development of a child's personality and interpersonal relationships. Suh et al. (2019) confirmed that the quality of the father-son relationship is the basis of knowledge for individuals to form healthy romantic relationships. Individuals build an internal working model or an understanding of self-worth to be loved and believe in others. Factors in a father's care that influence include warmth, psychological control, attention, praise, affection, and time spent with children. Weisskirch (2018) also emphasized that comfort in romantic relationships comes from feeling comfortable in the child-parent relationship.

Relationship efficacy or relationship self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in his ability to overcome conflict with his partner, facilitate the partner to be able to compromise about the differences between the two, manage the relationship so that it is maintained properly, and achieve individual rights in romantic relationships (Cohen, 2018). The efficacy of romantic relationships affects the behaviors that individuals raise in relationships, including the willingness to engage in problem-solving discussions, persistence to solve problems, and constructive problem-solving styles (Horne et al., 2018). In addition to the ability to overcome problems, this belief also contains expectations that the relationship that is lived will be healthy, happy, going well, and it also reduces the individual's tendency to have an affair (Cohen, 2018).

The development of the divorce phenomenon is one of the environmental influences that ultimately influences a person's decision to have a romantic relationship, especially a long-term romantic relationship such as marriage. Several previous studies have found other factors that support



reluctance to marry in young adults, namely feeling mentally unprepared for marriage, not finding the right partner, having trauma from experiences of romantic relationships in the past, and still wanting to achieve other things outside of marriage (Himawan, 2019). These factors also support early adult men choosing non-exclusive or casual romantic relationships. The probability is 16 times higher than early adult women (Shulman et al., 2018).

Previous studies have not specifically explained the impact of parental conflict and divorce, and paternal care on self-efficacy in children, specifically on the ability to establish romantic relationships. The research focuses on men because of the expectation of men to be the initiators of romantic relationships in a patriarchal culture. There are indications that this early adult generation prefers alternative non-exclusive romantic relationships as compensation for the negative attitude shown toward marriage.

### 3. Methods

#### Research participants

In this study, the sample design used was nonprobability sampling with a purposive sampling technique to get participants who fit the research needs. Participant recruitment uses social relations and social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and dating apps to capture a wide range of potential participants. There were 62 participants who were willing and met the inclusion criteria, namely men aged 20-30 years who had never been married and had parents who divorced before the age of 20. Research participants filled out a self-report questionnaire through the Google Forms platform, which was distributed online.

#### Research instrument

The study used 3 (three) self-report scales whose reliability had been tested by means of a pilot study on a sample of men from divorced families and the Cronbach alpha statistical reliability test. Parents'

perceptions of conflict and divorce were measured using the adapted and modified children's perception of the interparental conflict scale ( $\alpha=0.92$ ). There are three answer choices, namely True (1), Fairly True (2), and False (3). There are 11 statement items that must be assessed by the participants. This scale measures conflict (frequency, intensity, and resolution), threat (feelings of being threatened and coping with children), and self-blame (frequency of children's involvement in conflict and feelings of guilt for conflicts that occur in parents). One example of a statement on the scale is, "My parents often hate each other even though I'm around them"

Acceptance-rejection parenting by fathers was measured by an adapted and modified parental acceptance-rejection questionnaire scale ( $\alpha=0.86$ ). This scale measures warmth/affection, hostility/aggression, indifference/neglect, and undifferentiated rejection. There are five answer choices from very inappropriate (1) to very appropriate (5). There are 10 statement items that must be assessed by participants. One example of a statement on the scale is "Dad is too busy to answer my questions."

Romantic relationship efficacy with self-efficacy in romantic relationship scale ( $\alpha=0.89$ ). This scale measures mutuality, emotional control, and differentiation. There are five answer choices from very inappropriate (1) to very appropriate (5). There are 12 statement items that must be assessed by the participants. An example of a statement on the scale is, "Failure in a romantic relationship prompted me to try to be in a relationship more persistently."

#### Data analysis technique

Primary data from the questionnaire were processed through a series of processes in the form of data selection (sorting), scoring, data cleaning, statistical analysis, and interpretation of statistical test results using the Microsoft Excel program statistical package for social science (SPSS) 22.0 and



Smart PLS. The analysis used was descriptive analysis to describe personal characteristics, family characteristics, parental conflict and divorce, father parenting, and romantic relationship efficacy. Statistical analysis carried out included descriptive analysis, bivariate and partial correlation tests, different tests, and regression tests.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the average age of respondents is 24 years, with the youngest respondent being 20 years old and the oldest being 29 years old. In the table, it can be seen that most respondents are 26 years old (14 people). Most of the respondents (75.8%) had

completed their education up to strata 1, while the other 15 respondents (24.2%) had completed their education up to senior high school level. The average respondent currently has an income of 1,000,000 – 5,000,000 rupiah (32.2%). Most of the respondents experienced parental divorce before the age of 20 (96.8%), with the highest incidence of divorce occurring when the respondent was 10-15 years old (30.6%). As many as 75 percent of respondents lived with their mothers after their parents divorced. The rest were raised by their fathers (14.1%) or closest relatives (10.9%). The average respondent is currently not in a romantic relationship, either dating, engaged, or others (53.2%).

Table 1. Demographic distribution of participant characteristics.

Category	Respondent		Min – Max	Mean±Std
	n	%		
<b>Age</b>				
20	6	9.6	20 – 29	24,9±2,69
21	4	6.5		
22	4	6.5		
23	4	6.5		
24	4	6.5		
25	9	14.5		
26	14	22.5		
27	7	11.2		
28	4	6.5		
29	6	9.7		
Total	62	100.0		
<b>Recent education</b>				
Senior high school	15	24.2	3 – 4	3,76±0,43
College	47	75.8		
Total	62	100.0		
<b>Personal income</b>				
0-500.000	11	17.7	1 – 5	3,16±1,32
501.000-1.000.000	5	8.2		
1.000.001-5.000.000	20	32.2		
5.000.001-10.000.000	15	24.2		
Above 10,000,000	11	17.7		
Total	62	100.0		
<b>Romantic relationship status</b>				
Not having a romantic relationship	33	53.2	0 – 1	0,47±0,503
Have a romantic relationship	29	46.8		
Total	62	100.0		



Table 2 describes the distribution of indices on parental conflict and divorce, paternal parenting history, and romantic relationship efficacy in early adult males. As many as 32 people (50.8%) of respondents rated the conflict and the impact of their parent's divorce at a low level. As many as 40 people

(63.5%) of respondents rated paternal care positively at a low level. A total of 52 people (82.5%) respondents rated paternal care negatively at a low level. As many as 34 people (54%) stated a low level of romantic relationship efficacy.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of research variables.

Category	Low (<60)		Medium (61 – 80)		High (>80)		Total	Mean	Standard deviation
	n	%	n	%	n	%			
Parental conflict and divorce	32	50,8	23	36,5	8	12,7	63	54,83	22,546
Positive father parenting	40	63,5	10	15,9	13	20,6	63	50,65	29,232
Negative paternal parenting	52	82,5	5	7,9	3	4,8	63	32,54	28,057
Romantic relationship efficacy	34	54,0	16	25,4	13	20,6	63	59,13	23,394

Furthermore, a correlation analysis (Table 3) was performed between the dimensions of conflict and parental divorce and parenting (positive and negative) and the dimensions of romantic relationship efficacy. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant relationship between the intensity of

parental conflict and anxiety in relationships ( $r=0.250$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and other aspects related to self-efficacy ( $r=0.264$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). Based on the threshold Cohen (1988) in Lovakov and Agadullina (2021), these two correlations have effect sizes in the low level ( $0,1<r<0,3$ ).

Table 3. Correlation test between dimensions of parental conflict and divorce, paternal parenting, and romantic relationship efficacy.

Correlations			
Dimensions	Relationship anxiety	Efficacy in romantic relationships	Other aspects related to efficacy
Conflict frequency	,090	,102	,028
Conflict intensity	,250*	,093	,264*
Feeling threatened	,045	-,031	,044
Conflict resolution	,103	,021	-,042
Feeling guilty	,019	-,055	,046
Warmth/affection	-,150	-,246	,009
Hostility/aggression	-,081	-,059	,139
Indifference/neglect	,006	,015	,227
Undifferentiated rejection	-,047	-,037	,076

\* $p<0.05$  level (2-tailed); \*\*.  $p< 0.01$  level (2-tailed).



Then the analysis of the paired difference test (paired t-test) (Table 4) between early adulthood characteristics, parental conflict and divorce, and paternal parenting (positive and negative) with romantic relationship efficacy. The results showed that there were significant differences in the efficacy of romantic relationships based on paternal care

(negative) (M=26.587; SD=36.065), personal income (M=55.937; SD=23.136), last education (M=55.365; SD=23.398), romantic relationship status (M=58,651; SD=23,345), age when parents divorced (M=56,444; SD=23,218), primary caregiver after parents divorce (M=57,778; SD=23,406), and custody rights (M= 57.873; SD=23.364).

Table 4. Difference test between romantic relationship efficacy based on characteristics of early adulthood, parental conflict and divorce, and paternal parenting.

Test variables	p-value*
Romantic relationship efficacy – paternal (positive) parenting	0,101
Romantic relationship efficacy – paternal (negative) parenting	0,000
Romantic relationship efficacy - parental conflict and divorce	0,269
Romantic relationship efficacy - ultimate education	0,000
Romantic relationship efficacy - personal income	0,000
Romantic relationship efficacy - romantic relationship status	0,000
Romantic relationship efficacy - age when parents divorce	0,000

\*Dependent t-test, p<0,05.

Furthermore, multiple regression analysis (Table 5) was performed between parental conflict and divorce, paternal parenting (positive and negative), and romantic relationship efficacy. The results showed

that there was a significant influence between (positive) paternal parenting (sig.=0.023) and (negative) paternal parenting (sig.=0.037) on romantic relationship efficacy.

Table 5. Multiple regression test of parental conflict and divorce and parenting on the efficacy of romantic relationships.

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	47,014	11,400		4,124	,000
Parental conflict and divorce	,298	,159	,287	1,871	,066
Paternal parenting (Positive)	-,298	,128	-,373	-2,338	,023
Paternal parenting (Negative)	,335	,157	,401	2,129	,037

<sup>a</sup>Dependent variable: Romantic relationship efficacy.

The results showed that most of the early adult males had low levels of romantic relationship efficacy. Romantic relationship efficacy is an individual's belief in his ability to overcome conflict with his partner, facilitate the couple to be able to compromise about the differences between the two, manage the relationship so that it is maintained properly, and

achieve individual rights in a romantic relationship (Cohen, 2018). Beliefs in establishing relationships affect the behaviors that individuals raise in relationships, including the willingness to engage in problem-solving discussions, persistence to solve problems, and constructive problem-solving styles (Riggio et al., 2013; Horne et al., 2017). In addition to



the ability to overcome problems, this belief also raises expectations that the relationship that is lived will be healthy, happy, and going well and reduce one's tendency to have an affair (Cohen, 2018; Soloski et al., 2013).

The efficacy of romantic relationships is known to be related to parental conflict and divorce that occur during the child's development period before entering adulthood and the parenting style of the father after the divorce. Parental conflict and divorce affect individual attitudes in viewing problem resolution in relationships. Early adulthood individuals tend to have a positive attitude towards divorce as a resolution to problematic relationships. As a result, expectations of relationship success are low and affect perceived satisfaction in relationships (Kwan et al., 2013; Eversole et al., 2014; Sağkal et al., 2019). The quality and satisfaction of romantic relationships among individuals who experience parental conflict and divorce are reported to be lower than individuals from intact and non-conflict families (Sağkal et al., 2019).

In conflicts that occur between parents, there are several aspects that affect children, such as frequency (how often parents conflict), intensity (how intense the conflict occurs), the sense of threat that children feel when parents conflict, parental conflict resolution observed children, and feelings of guilt because they feel they are the cause of parental conflict (Moura et al., 2010). The results of the study found a relationship between the intensity of parental conflict with relational anxiety and other aspects related to self-efficacy. These results are in line with previous research, which found that the level of intensity and frequency of parental conflict is related to one's expectations to love and be loved in an interpersonal relationship, especially in a romantic relationship (Soloski et al., 2013). Compared to marital status, parental conflict affects relational anxiety and expectations in romantic relationships more (Smith-Exterberria et al., 2020). This happens because parental conflict becomes an example that is

internalized by children in managing problems in relationships, so a bad example reduces their belief in being able to resolve conflicts with partners and maintain the continuity of romantic relationships. Furthermore, low romantic relationship expectations are influenced by insecure attachment to fathers.

Furthermore, answering the second hypothesis in this study, the results show that there are differences in the efficacy of romantic relationships based on early adulthood characteristics, parental conflict and divorce, and paternal care. First, romantic relationship efficacy was found to differ based on negative paternal upbringing. Karre's research (2015) found observations of father-mother relationships related to the quality of early adult male romantic relationships. The way the father treats the mother is observed as the way the child functions in his romantic relationship, so if the father treats the mother well, then the son can also do it to his partner, and vice versa. This becomes the capital of relational knowledge in romantic relationships for children. In boys who are abandoned or have a tenuous relationship with their father, they lose a good example of maintaining a romantic relationship with their partner.

Second, there are significant differences in romantic relationship efficacy based on recent education. The level of education is also known to be related to the expectations of marriage among adolescents and young adults. A high level of education was found to be associated with an increased probability of getting an easier job (Vespa, 2017). Third, there are significant differences in romantic relationship efficacy based on personal income. Limited job opportunities and increasing competition in getting a job cause it to be difficult for someone to have their own income. The occupational status itself has a role in encouraging self-efficacy and indicating maturity (Mortimer et al., 2016). Work is an indicator of success for young adults to be able to continue their lives independently (Willoughby et al., 2017).



Fourth, there are significant differences in romantic relationship efficacy based on romantic relationship status. Differences in romantic relationship efficacy are based on romantic relationship status. This finding supports the results of Cohen's study (2018), namely, individuals who are involved in romantic relationships have higher efficacy compared to those who are not involved in romantic relationships. This is because those who have romantic relationships have the confidence to carry out the relationship, while those who have low efficacy tend to delay or even avoid romantic relationships. In Poland, romantic relationship status was found to be related to attachment type in adult individuals. This attachment describes a person's need for love, how to love, how to respond to events in a romantic relationship, and how to maintain a romantic relationship. Individuals who are involved in an exclusive romantic relationship tend to have a secure attachment type so that they can grow confidence in undergoing a romantic relationship. Conversely, individuals who are not involved in a romantic relationship have an insecure attachment type, so they develop anxiety, fear, and distrust of their partner, which ultimately makes the romantic relationship unhealthy (Adamczyk et al., 2013).

Fifth, there are significant differences in romantic relationship efficacy based on the age at which parents divorce. Afifi (2015) states that when an individual's age ranges from infancy to pre-adolescence, individuals tend to be more able to adjust after their parent's divorce and do not perceive themselves as the cause of conflict and divorce. When conflicts and divorce occur when individuals are teenagers, this time is very vulnerable because individuals are in the process of developing and exploring identity.

The results of further research answered the third hypothesis, namely that there is an influence between paternal parenting on romantic relationship efficacy, but not parental conflict and divorce. Weisskirch's findings (2018) confirm that warm parenting is

positively correlated with the efficacy of romantic relationships, which is one of the components of intimacy in children. Parenting is one of the factors that underlie the way children function in their romantic relationships through imitation. Warm care will result in a secure attachment so that the child can also form a secure attachment with his partner (Simons et al., 2014). On the other hand, if the parent cares for it harshly or neglects it, the child develops an insecure attachment that negatively affects various aspects of himself, such as self-control, emotional management, and trust in others, which are important for sustaining romantic relationships.

Parental conflict and divorce are less significant in explaining the influence on romantic relationship efficacy. This is predicted because parental conflict and divorce have more influence on children's perceptions of marriage. Seeing parents conflict to the point of divorce makes children think that marriage will only end in divorce, thereby increasing the tendency for children to delay or avoid marriage, especially for boys (Kwan et al., 2013; Yaacob et al., 2016).

This study has weaknesses and limitations, including (1) accessibility and a limited number of respondents due to the uniqueness of the respondent's criteria. In addition, the sensitive research topic causes resistance to prospective respondents to fill out the questionnaire; (2) external influences such as sociocultural influences (personal values) or the mother's role that supports the father's care after divorce. Nonetheless, this study has attempted to explain the efficacy of romantic relationships as an aspect that is affected by family dynamics, as well as contribute to elucidating the role of conflict and parental divorce and parenting on romantic relationship efficacy in early adult males in the future.

Some aspects of this study that were not taken into account but are thought to have a relationship and influence on the efficacy of romantic relationships include the mother's role in parenting (Lee, 2017;





Smith – Exterberria et al., 2020), emotional maturity and personality development (Weisskirch, 2018), and social support during parental conflict and divorce (Jackson et al., 2017). There is a need for further studies that consider the influence of the variables mentioned above.

## 5. Conclusion

The efficacy of romantic relationships in early adulthood from divorced families is influenced by negative paternal parenting. The research findings did not find any effect of parental conflict and divorce on romantic relationship efficacy. There is a partial relationship between the intensity of parental conflict on relational anxiety and other aspects that affect self-efficacy. Levels of romantic relationship efficacy were also found to differ significantly by (negative) paternal parenting, personal income, last education, current romantic relationship status, and age at parental divorce.

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