

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Research

Over the last 150 years, the divorce rate – number of new divorces each year per capita – has increased in the United States (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). According to a report released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2018 called “Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2015”, there are about 13.7 million single parents in the U.S., and there are 22.4 million children raised by those single parents. Out of the 22.4 million children raised by single parents, 27% are children under 21 years old in the U.S and 40% of these single parents are divorced (Wolf, 2018). The divorce rate in Indonesia has also risen. According to the data released by *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) in 2019, there were 353,843 divorce cases in Indonesia in the year 2015. By 2018, that number has increased by about 15% since 2015, with a total of 408,202 divorce cases that year (Jayani, 2020).

Divorce impacts various aspects of a family’s life, the children being one of them. Adolescents in specific are impacted negatively considering adolescence on its own is already a time filled with many changes. According to Papalia and Martorell (2014), “adolescence is a developmental transition between childhood and adulthood entailing major physical, cognitive and psychosocial changes” (p. 323). Adolescence is a time of transition and therefore provides people with opportunities for development and risks. Adolescence is a time when people try to make sense of themselves and find their identity. According to Erikson, adolescents who manage to find their identity

develop the virtue of fidelity which is the feeling of belonging to a loved one, identification with a set of values, religion, or community (Papalia & Martorell, 2014).

Besides the many changes that happen during adolescence, adolescents experiencing parental divorce experience an additional drastic change they need to adjust to (Montemayor, 1984). There is a substantial amount of research that indicate that divorce has a negative impact on children (Haimi & Lerner, 2016). Parental divorce can be traumatic and stressful for children, putting them at risk for developing academic, social, emotional, and behavioural problems (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). On average, children in divorced families are more likely to exhibit behavioural and emotional problems, lower social competence and self-esteem, less socially responsible behaviour, and poorer academic achievement (Amato, 2001; Anderson, Greene, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1999; Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992, as cited in Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Improvements in psychological functioning over time have been reported by some longitudinal studies (Edwards, 1987 as cited in Short, 2002), but some studies have shown that they continue to have more of these problems than their peers with intact families during adulthood (Amato, 1999 as cited in Short, 2002).

Despite having varying degrees of adjustment problems immediately after parental divorce, a vast majority of children from divorced families demonstrate resilience and do not experience ongoing emotional, behavioural, cognitive, or relational problems caused by the divorce over time (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). According to a study by Kelly and Emery (2003), approximately 75% to 80% of children and adolescents of divorced families experience no major psychological

problems, are able to achieve educational and career goals, and experience positive family and intimate relations (as cited in Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Considering that there are a lot of children in single parent families and a variability in their abilities to adjust after parental divorce, it is important to identify factors that can help children with divorced parents to adapt better. It has been found that resilience is a key factor in a child's ability to adapt to changes in family structure such as the separation of parents (Sharma & Jasleen, 2017). Masten (2001) also said that the most essential factor in adjusting to parental divorce is resilience, which is a process that takes effort and time (as cited in Altundağ & Bulut, 2014). Resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back from stress (Smith et al., 2008).

According to Marston (2014), researchers have found that resilience can make positive outcomes possible for children experiencing extreme stressors and hardships (Taylor & Conger, 2017). Resilience can help adolescents overcome their past problems and leave them behind, and it also helps them bounce back from the big setbacks they may face in life. Moreover, resilience does not only help protect adolescents from adversities but also enables them to reach out and be proactive in doing what they want in life, despite their past (Reivich & Shatté, 2002). Therefore, resilience may also help adolescents in completing the "tasks" adolescents face after their parents' divorce conceptualized by Wallerstein (1983).

A theory that seems to go in tandem with resilience is attachment theory (Rasmussen, et al., 2018). Both attachment and resilience become present in an individual during stressful situations since an individual's attachment system is activated in times of distress and resilience is needed to bounce back from the distress.

Furthermore, attachment influences an individual's responses to life stressors, which means their resilience would be influenced too. According to Bowlby, attachment is a bond formed between an individual and their caregiver (in Erdem, 2017). In this study, attachment is seen as emotional bonds formed with attachment figures such as parents, peers, family, and the community. Attachment theory was first developed by John Bowlby and then further refined by Mary Ainsworth (Atwool, 2006). Ainsworth categorized infants' attachment styles, based on home observations and The Strange Situation laboratory experiment, into three types: secure, avoidant, and anxious (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) then proposed that there were two dimensions of attachment underlying all categorical measures of attachment: attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (in Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment avoidance refers to feelings of discomfort with being close to and depending on others. Attachment anxiety corresponds to being excessively worried and vigilant about abandonment and rejection by an attachment figure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

During adolescence, individuals tend to spend less time with parents and more time with peers (Scharf & Mayseless, 2007). Moreover, research shows that adolescents receive more felt security from their peers in helping to regulate distress. Even though adolescents create new ties of attachment with their peers, they still need to maintain attachment to their parents (West, Rose, Spreng, Sheldon-Keller, & Adam, 1998). This variation in attachment figures helps adolescents individuate but also provides them with support when they need it (Scharf & Mayseless, 2007). Attachment security in adolescence is important because it "provides a secure base that fosters

exploration and development of cognitive, social and emotional competence” (Moretti & Peled, 2004; Sroufe, Carlson, Levy & Egeland, 1999 in Wambua, Obondo, Bifulco, & Kumar, 2018, p. 2). Additionally, according to Youngblade et al. (2007), adolescents that develop in a positive way tend to have supportive connections with parents and communities (in Papalia & Martorell, 2014).

Attachment quality is especially important in adolescents with divorced parents because according to Ainsworth (1989), one’s attachment system determines responses to life stressors, including parental divorce, in adolescence and even up to adulthood (in Galatzer-Levy & Bonanno, 2013). Studies have found that experiencing parental divorce during childhood and adolescence has been associated with higher reports of attachment anxiety and avoidance in clinical and community samples (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Brennan et al., 1991; Mallinckrodt, McCreary, & Robertson, 1995 in Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Divorce causes many changes that a family has to adapt to, and parents may have less time or energy to devote to parenting because of that (Anderson, 2014). Parental caregiving is one of the factors that influences attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), which may explain why parental divorce is associated with higher reports of attachment avoidance and anxiety.

An individual’s attachment system plays a role in influencing resilience because attachment systems determine an individual’s reactions to distress through their internal working models (IWM). Individuals develop internal working models (IWM) that include schemas of their internalized interactions with their attachment figure (IWM of others) and representations of their own efficacy and worth (IWM of self) (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment avoidance is conceptualized as an

individual's IWM of others (positive vs. negative), while attachment anxiety is conceptualized as one's IWM of self (positive vs. negative). A positive IWM of others and positive IWM of self is associated with the factors that can promote resilience such as receiving support from family and peers, being involved in communities, having a positive self-esteem and self-concept, and having an internal locus of control.

Being low in both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety results in that person being securely attached (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). They have a long-lasting sense of attachment, trust in attachment figures and are willing to rely on others for support. These individuals are able to use security-based representations, which are memories of receiving security from attachment figures that are now an aspect of the self, to self-soothe. These security-based representations help alleviate distress and help a person cope effectively with the adversity or problem. This gives the ability to mobilize positive emotions despite the presence of distress, which is an ability resilient people have (Bonanno, 2004; Fredrickson, 2001; Zautra, Smith, Affleck & Tennen, 2001, in Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

On the other hand, being high on attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety forces the individual to use secondary strategies to attain security. They don't have security-based representations that secure individuals have. These strategies are deactivation and hyperactivation of the attachment system. Individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to use deactivation strategies. They avoid the problem and suppress needs of comfort. This avoidance decreases their opportunities to practice adaptation and therefore they are lower in resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). Individuals high in attachment anxiety use hyperactivations strategies. They depend

excessively on others to receive security and have a “helpless” mindset in the face of adversity. They are unable to turn problems into a challenge, which is a characteristic of resilient people. This pessimism and over dependence on others will make them have lower levels of resilience.

Previous research has found that the outcome of quality of attachment is complex, but most findings state that there is a positive correlation between attachment and characteristics of resilient individuals (Erdem, 2017). Research by Arend, Grove, and Sroufe (1979) and Kobak and Sceery (1988) also found that attachment is directly associated with measures of ego resiliency (as cited in Erdem, 2017). According to a meta-analysis by Rasmussen, et al. (2018), there is a positive correlation between the quality of attachment and the development of resilience. Insecure attachment was correlated with lower levels of resilience while secure attachment was correlated with higher levels of resilience (Rasmussen, et al., 2018). According to Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno (2013), higher attachment anxiety is associated with poor outcomes in most studies while the link between attachment avoidance and adjustment usually depends on the stressor event. Galatzer-Levy and Bonanno (2013) found that resilient students in their study had significantly lower levels of attachment anxiety while attachment avoidance did not predict resilience.

Previous research has found that there is a correlation between attachment and resilience but there is little research on this topic with adolescents with divorced parents as the subject. Furthermore, there is little research that views attachment as a two-dimensional variable in adolescence since most studies adopt the concept of attachment as typologies. It is necessary to view attachment as a dimensional variable since it

provides more flexibility and dynamics to the study. Instead of labelling an individual as having “anxious attachment” or avoidant attachment”, it is acknowledged that all individuals will have both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in different amounts. Adolescents in general already have a lot on their plate as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents with divorced parents have more changes they have to adjust to, and resilience is an important factor in their ability to adapt. Attachment is also important to address because adolescents will need someone they can trust and “belong to” while facing hardships like parental divorce. Attachment in this study is seen as attachment in general, which means it includes parents, peers, mentors, family, and so on. Since attachment and resilience are both important, therefore this research wants to find out whether adolescents with divorced parents’ attachment affects the levels of resilience they have.

## **1.2 Problem Formulation**

Based on the phenomenon in the background of the research, it can be concluded that the problem formulated in this research is: Does attachment affect resilience among adolescents with divorced parents?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to examine whether attachment affects resilience among adolescents with divorced parents.

## **1.4 Benefit of the Research**

### **1.4.1 Theoretical Benefit**

This research hopes to add to the literature of Positive Psychology and Developmental Psychology concerning attachment and resilience, specifically among



adolescents with divorced parents. This research will help to explain whether attachment will help develop resilience among adolescents with divorced parents and help them to adapt better.

#### **1.4.2 Practical Benefit**

The benefit this research would give to adolescents with divorced parents is the knowledge that their attachment affects the development of resilience that can help them through their problems. This research would also be beneficial for parents since it can help them understand that their attachment relationship with their children, along with their children's other attachment relationships, affect the ability for their children to bounce back from adversity. Through this new knowledge, professionals such as counsellors and therapists should be able to better understand and help adolescents whose parents are divorced.

