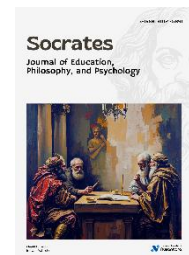




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Growing up Without a Father: Social Support in Emerging Adulthood Experiencing Fatherlessness

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Abstract: This study was motivated by the importance of social support for individuals in emerging adulthood who have lost a father figure due to their parents' divorce. The study aims to describe social support among individuals in emerging adulthood who have lost a father figure due to their parents' divorce. This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach, involving 100 respondents aged 18–29 years who were selected using purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using a social support scale comprising emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and appreciative support. The data were analyzed using categorization techniques. The results indicate that the majority of respondents had high levels of social support. Informational support was the most frequently received form of social support among respondents, followed by emotional support, appreciative support, and instrumental support. The results indicate that individuals in emerging adulthood who have lost their fathers due to their parents' divorce continue to receive various forms of support from their social environment. Social support serves as an important resource in helping individuals cope with the various developmental challenges of emerging adulthood.

Keywords: Social Support, Emerging Adulthood, Fatherlessness.

INTRODUCTION

The transition to adulthood is often marked by various major life changes known as “emerging adulthood.” Emerging adulthood is a new life stage between adolescence and young adulthood; in other words, it refers to the period when a person is no longer a teenager but is not yet fully an adult, occurring between the ages of 18 and 29 and characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and the search for a more settled life direction (Arnett et al., 2014). The transition from adolescence to adulthood is a crucial period in a person's life because it is a time when individuals begin to break free from the dependence of adolescence but have not yet reached the stage of adult responsibility (Lekatompey et al., 2023). During this phase, individuals have a unique opportunity to explore various lifestyles and make choices regarding education, romance, and careers (Mukhallisa et al., 2023). This transitional period often leads to anxiety, fear, and confusion regarding these choices (Arini, 2021).

Not all individuals are able to cope with the various challenges of emerging adulthood; some find this period to be a difficult and anxiety-inducing time (Masluchah et al., 2022). The process of identity formation experienced by individuals during emerging adulthood is often not straightforward and may not meet expectations; for instance, the desire to continue one's education may be hindered by financial constraints, finding employment may be difficult due to fierce competition, and one may not yet have found a partner to marry. Consequently, these circumstances have the potential to trigger a developmental crisis during emerging adulthood (Wijaya & Saprowi, 2022). Individuals who successfully navigate the period of emerging adulthood are generally those who have prepared themselves well, enabling them to go through this phase more smoothly and feel ready to enter adulthood (Masluchah et al., 2022). Individuals capable of adapting during emerging adulthood will be able to overcome the challenges and obstacles of this stage (Lekatompessy et al., 2023). This developmental process can be influenced by various factors, one of which is family circumstances. The loss or absence of a father figure can affect an individual's development during emerging adulthood.

This condition of the absence of a father's role is known as 'fatherlessness'. According to Grehenson (2025), fatherlessness or the absence of a father figure within the family is a significant concern in the psychological development of children in Indonesia, as this term describes not only the physical absence of a father but also his emotional absence. The reality in Indonesia shows that not all children have the opportunity to grow up and experience the presence of a father in their lives; this situation can be triggered by various factors, one of which is divorce (Fajarrini & Umam, 2023).

According to data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (2025), the number of divorces in Indonesia stood at 399.921 cases. Of this total, West Java is one of the provinces with the highest divorce rates, with 98.903 cases, including those in the City of Bekasi (3.798 cases) and Bekasi Regency (3.984 cases); the combined total of 7.782 cases in the Bekasi area thus places it amongst the regions with a relatively high divorce rate compared to other areas in West Java, such as Tasikmalaya (4.421 cases), Sukabumi (3.098 cases), Ciamis (2.993 cases), Kuningan (2.436 cases), Depok City (2.958 cases), Cirebon City (737 cases) and Banjar City (699 cases) (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jawa Barat, 2026). These high figures indicate that divorce remains a fairly serious family issue, particularly in the Bekasi area. The rise in divorce rates in Bekasi City is reflected in the surge in cases received by the Bekasi Religious Court, rising from 4.786 cases in 2024 to 5.605 cases in 2025, with 3.555 cases being divorce by petition and 1.187 cases being divorce by repudiation, leading to an increase in the number of cases adjudicated to 5.408 in the same year (Info Bekasi, 2025). Divorce cases in Bekasi Regency have also shown an alarming surge, with 4.508 cases recorded throughout 2025, the majority of which 3.368 cases were divorce suits, and this trend continued into early February 2026, with 350 cases of divorce by petition out of 515 cases filed, the majority of which were triggered by economic problems and the negative impact of online gambling on households (Wicaksono, 2026).

Divorce is not the ultimate goal of marriage, but rather a form of pressure that arises when a family faces problems (Cristy & Soetikno, 2023). Divorce is a decision taken when domestic conflicts can no longer be resolved and no solution is found; however, in the present day, such occurrences are becoming increasingly common and give rise to various impacts be it social, economic, emotional, social stigma, or the psychological well-being of children including the loss of the father's presence and role in supporting the child's growth and development (Anshary & Abdullah, 2025). Children who experience fatherlessness as a result of their parents' divorce will experience differences in their upbringing compared to children who maintain a relationship with their father (Anas et al., 2024).

Divorce often results in children growing up without the full presence of a father figure in their daily lives, as custody is generally awarded to the mother, meaning the father's involvement is limited to visits or the provision of maintenance; this can ultimately create an emotional distance between father and child. This situation is further exacerbated when some fathers find it difficult to remain present and fulfil their role after divorce, even though children still need a

father's love, guidance and role (Nata, 2026). The findings of a study by Dewi et al. (2025) show that children who experience the loss of a father due to divorce face a sense of emptiness and emotional instability because, although the father is still physically alive, his role as a guiding, protective and reassuring figure is disrupted or no longer fulfilled, resulting in a void in the father figure and psychological distress as well as emotional instability. This aligns with John Bowlby's view that changes in the patterns of relationship and communication between children and parents resulting from divorce can hinder emotional and psychological development.

Social support for individuals growing up without a father is a crucial aspect in coping with the psychological and social impacts of the absence of a father figure, where the roles of family, friends and the wider community in providing understanding, advice, motivation and care are essential to creating a supportive environment (Alisa et al., 2025). In line with the research by Ummikalsum et al. (2024), which shows that attachment to parents and support from friends play a vital role in building self-esteem in children who have grown up without a father. Social support also acts as a buffer that can reduce the likelihood of feelings of loneliness (Maslakhah et al., 2025). Such support helps individuals in emerging adulthood feel cared for and understood. This study highlights that fatherlessness is not always caused by the physical absence of a father, but can also result from a lack of the father's emotional involvement in the child's life. Social support is a potential protective factor for individuals experiencing fatherlessness. Taylor (2012) explains that social support is information obtained by an individual from their social environment which demonstrates affection, appreciation and a sense of belonging to social relationships characterised by mutual communication and reciprocal responsibility. According to Sarafino & Smith (2011), social support consists of concrete actions provided by others or support received by an individual, and encompasses the perception that comfort, care and assistance will always be available when needed. The social support referred to here encompasses emotional, instrumental, informational and appreciative support, which may come from one's immediate environment, such as one's mother, friends or partner.

It is hoped that the results of this study will provide an insight into social support during emerging adulthood for those who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce. The findings of this study may also serve as a source of information for families, the wider social environment and psychology practitioners regarding the importance of social support in fostering individual development. It is also hoped that these findings will form the basis for further research examining the experience of growing up without a father across different age groups and life contexts.

Based on the above, the aim of this study is to examine the nature of social support among emerging adults who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce. This study focuses on four forms of social support: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and appreciative support.

METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to gain an understanding of social support amongst individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce. The study sample comprised 100 participants aged 18–29 who had grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce. The sampling technique employed purposive sampling, with participants selected on the basis of being aged 18–29 and having experienced fatherlessness due to their parents' divorce. The research was conducted from 13 April 2026 to 21 May 2026 in Bekasi City and Bekasi Regency. Data collection was carried out online using Google Forms, which were shared via various social media platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram. The researchers also recruited participants via the Instagram account of the 'broken home' community, @behome.id. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information about the aims of the study and asked to give their consent to take part in the research.

The instrument used was a social support scale based on the theory of Sarafino & Smith (2011) and modified from the social support scale developed by Melati (2024). This scale measures four forms of social support, namely emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and evaluative support. The social support scale consists of favourable and unfavourable items measured using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Unfavourable items are scored in reverse, whilst favourable items are scored directly. The higher the score obtained, the higher the level of social support perceived by the individual. The results of the reliability test indicate that the social support scale has a reliability coefficient of 0.796, with a total of 27 valid items. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics via a score categorisation technique to describe the level of social support among individuals in emerging adulthood who were fatherless as a result of their parents' divorce. Categorisation was carried out based on the method proposed by Azwar (2021). The low, medium and high categories were determined using categorisation intervals based on a hypothetical mean and a hypothetical standard deviation. The results of the categorisation were then presented in the form of frequencies and percentages to illustrate the levels of emotional support, instrumental support, informational support and appreciative support among the study's respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings begin with a presentation of descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the level of social support amongst individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce. The descriptive statistics, which include the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Social Support

Type	Hypothetical Mean (μ)	Standard Deviation (σ)
Emotional Support	22.5	4.5
Instrumental Support	15	3
Informational Support	10	2
Appreciative Support	20	4

Table 2. Categorisation of Social Support

Type	Low		Category Medium		High	
		%		%		%
Emotional Support	10 respondents	10%	11 respondents	11%	79 respondents	79%
Instrumental Support	33 respondents	33%	20 respondents	20%	47 respondents	47%
Informational Support	2 respondents	2%	10 respondents	10%	88 respondents	88%
Appreciative Support	5 respondents	5%	26 respondents	26%	69 respondents	69%

Table 2 shows that, in terms of emotional support, 10 respondents (10%) fell into the low category, 11 respondents (11%) into the moderate category and 79 respondents (79%) into the high category. For instrumental support, there were 33 respondents (33%) in the low category, 20 respondents (20%) in the moderate category and 47 respondents (47%) in the high category. For informational support, there were 2 respondents (2%) in the low category, 10 respondents (10%) in the moderate category and 88 respondents (88%) in the high category. Meanwhile, for the form of appreciative support, 5 respondents (5%) were in the low category, 26 respondents (26%) in the moderate category and 69 respondents (69%) in the high category. This indicates that the form of information support is the form of social support most highly received by respondents compared to other forms of social support.

Research findings show that the majority of emerging adults who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce have high levels of social support. These findings suggest that although individuals experience the loss or reduced involvement of a father figure as a result of their parents' divorce, they still receive social support from various sources within their immediate environment. This social support may come from their mother, peers, partners, or other social circles, all of which play a role in helping individuals cope with the various challenges of emerging adulthood. According to Arnett et al. (2014), the phase of emerging adulthood is characterised by identity exploration, self-focus, the ambiguity of 'feeling in between' as individuals view themselves as straddling adolescence and adulthood optimism about the future, increased independence, and the expansion of social relationships. An individual's involvement in educational settings, work, organisations and communities enables the formation of a wider network of relationships. These circumstances provide opportunities for individuals to obtain various forms of social support from a diverse range of sources.

The categorisation results show that informational support had the highest percentage of responses compared to other forms of social support. This finding indicates that the majority of respondents received information, advice, guidance and feedback that can help individuals in emerging adulthood to cope with various problems and developmental tasks. Informational support takes the form of advice, guidance and feedback (Sarafino & Smith, 2011). The high level of informational support in this study is understandable, as emerging adulthood is a period characterised by identity exploration, particularly in the areas of education, work and interpersonal relationships. In line with Arnett (2000), who explains that individuals during emerging adulthood are characterised by identity exploration in the areas of education and work; consequently, individuals at this stage begin to prepare for their professional roles and often explore various educational options for the future. These circumstances make the need for information regarding education, careers and academic strategies increasingly important for individuals as they face the various developmental demands of emerging adulthood. This finding is consistent with the research by Banya et al. (2026), which shows that informational support is an important form of support for individuals, particularly when obtained from sources outside the family. This finding is supported by Wood et al. (2017), who explain that families play a role in providing guidance, advice and information that helps individuals in emerging adulthood to cope with various developmental tasks, including education and career. Informational support can also be obtained from sources other than the family, such as peers, partners, or other social circles. The high level of information support identified in this study suggests that individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce still have access to sources of information that can help them cope with various developmental challenges. This support plays a role in helping individuals find direction, weigh up their options and make decisions relating to education, careers and other aspects of life.

Emotional support also showed a high percentage in this category. These findings indicate that respondents received attention, empathy, care and affection from their social environment. According to Sarafino & Smith (2011), emotional support encompasses empathy, affection, attention, encouragement for the individual, and support that provides a sense of comfort, acceptance and being loved, particularly when facing stress. Emotional support in the form of attention, empathy, affection, and the willingness of others to listen to an individual's concerns can help those in emerging adulthood who are fatherless as a result of their parents' divorce, so that they feel more accepted, cared for and not alone. Research by Dewi et al. (2025) indicates that individuals who have lost a father due to their parents' divorce often experience an emotional distance from their father, a sense of being neglected, and difficulties in their social lives. The absence of a father figure creates more complex emotional needs as the individual loses a primary source of support (Ahmad et al., 2025). In line with Anesti & Abdullah (2024) the absence of a father figure can lead individuals to seek greater emotional closeness and a substitute figure in their interpersonal relationships, making emotional support one of the most important forms of support. These findings are supported by research by Zahida & Khairi (2026),

which explains that the absence of a father figure leads to changes in patterns of receiving emotional support, which is subsequently redirected towards other figures such as the mother, family members or the wider community. The presence of emotional support from the social environment indicates that individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father receive attention, care and acceptance from their social environment. Such support can help individuals feel understood and assist them in coping with the various developmental demands of emerging adulthood.

The results of the categorisation of appreciative support show that the majority of respondents have a high level of appreciative support. These findings indicate that individuals in emerging adulthood who have experienced fatherlessness due to their parents' divorce continue to receive recognition, appreciation and positive evaluation from their social environment. According to Sarafino & Smith (2011), appreciative support is a form of support provided through expressions of appreciation and positive evaluation of an individual's abilities. Research by Yu et al. (2025) shows that social support is positively associated with self-esteem. Individuals receiving low levels of social support are known to have lower self-esteem than those receiving high levels of social support. These results indicate that the appreciation, recognition and positive evaluations provided by one's social environment can help individuals develop self-confidence and a positive self-image. According to Arnett et al. (2014), during the phase of emerging adulthood, individuals begin to explore various possibilities in the areas of work, interpersonal relationships and the kind of life they wish to lead. Engagement in these various roles and social environments enables individuals to receive recognition, appreciation and positive evaluations from a variety of sources. The absence of a father figure can prevent an individual's self-esteem from developing properly, leading them to seek affection and acceptance from others (Grehenson, 2025). The findings of this study are supported by research by Devi et al. (2025), which shows that individuals who have grown up without a father still require appreciation and support from those around them, as the support and recognition provided such as acceptance of an individual's hobbies and interests play a vital role in helping them feel valued and not alone. The support and recognition received from family, peers and one's social environment can be a source of positive reinforcement for individuals. Such support enables individuals to feel valued and accepted by those around them, thereby strengthening their belief in their own abilities and aiding the process of adjustment during emerging adulthood.

The categorisation results show that instrumental support has a lower percentage in the 'high' category compared to other forms of social support. According to Sarafino & Smith (2011), instrumental support is direct and tangible, such as financial assistance, the provision of goods, or help in completing tasks. These findings suggest that individuals during emerging adulthood begin to develop independence and responsibility in various aspects of life. Arnett (2000) explains that emerging adulthood is a transitional period towards maturity, characterised by individuals' increasing efforts to become more independent. In line with Nopiyanti & Febriani (2025)'s description of the developmental phase of emerging adulthood, individuals are in a transitional stage marked by the process of learning to be independent in their daily lives. Febriani & Iswinarti (2025) state that the impact of fatherlessness on individuals in emerging adulthood is evident in their ability to make decisions and manage their lives independently. These characteristics mean that direct assistance, whether in the form of material or practical support, is not the most dominant form of support compared to informational support, emotional support and appreciative support. Jiandra (2020) research explains that material support, whether formal or informal, has only a minor influence, whilst social and emotional involvement has a significant impact; consequently, the trauma resulting from the absence of a father means that individuals have a greater need for emotional closeness than for material assistance. These findings may explain why instrumental support had a lower percentage in the 'high' category compared to other forms of social support in this study. Individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father tend to have a greater need for the presence of people who can provide attention, acceptance and guidance than for material or practical assistance.

The overall research findings indicate that individuals in emerging adulthood who have experienced fatherlessness as a result of their parents' divorce have high levels of social support across all four forms of social support. These findings suggest that, although individuals experience the loss of the father's role within the family, they are able to obtain support from their surrounding social environment. This support may come from their mother, other family members, peers, partners, or other social circles that play a role in helping individuals cope with the various developmental tasks of emerging adulthood. The presence of these four forms of social support demonstrates that needs for information, emotional support, recognition, and practical assistance can still be met through the individual's social relationships. This study has several limitations. Firstly, it focuses solely on individuals in emerging adulthood who have experienced fatherlessness as a result of their parents' divorce; consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to cases of fatherlessness arising from other circumstances. Secondly, the varying durations of the respondents' parents' divorces may have led to differences in the process of emotional adjustment and the way in which each individual makes sense of the loss of a father figure. Thirdly, data collection was carried out online using a questionnaire; consequently, the researcher was unable to control the respondents' circumstances whilst they were completing the questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that individuals in emerging adulthood who have grown up without a father due to their parents' divorce tend to have high levels of social support. Informational support was the most commonly received form of support, followed by emotional support, appreciative support and instrumental support. These findings suggest that although individuals experience the absence of a father figure due to their parents' divorce, they still receive various forms of support from their social environment. Social support serves as a vital resource in helping emerging adults cope with developmental tasks, make decisions regarding education and careers, and adapt to the various challenges during the transition to adulthood. It is hoped that the results of this study will enrich the literature on fatherlessness and social support and provide a basis for families, peers, and the wider social environment to offer support tailored to the needs of individuals experiencing fatherlessness.

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