Syntax Literate: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia p–ISSN: 2541-0849 e-ISSN:

2548-1398

Vol. 7, No. 12, December 2022

TEENAGERS PERCEPTION OF COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP ON THEIR PARENTS INFIDELITY IN NORTH SUMATRA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the committed relationship on teenagers whose parents experienced an infidelity to divorced. This study uses a qualitative method with aphenomenological approach. Qualitative is one of the methods used in research that focuses on understanding the meaning of individuals or group originating from a problem in social life (Creswell, 2016). The data collection technique used in this study was to conduct interviews and observations with five informants aged 17 to 21 who live in North Sumatra. Then the data that has been collected will be analyzed by researcher to be more structed. The result of this study is a description of how parental infidelity bring an impact to the teenager's perception in seeing a committed relationship. Divorce parents brings positive and negative impacts on teenagers. moreover, there are some things that are quite different between participants were them who has a low level of communication with their cheating parents tend to have high trust issues problems.

Keywords: Parental Infidelity, Perception, Committed Relationship, Teenagers.

Introduction

According to (Balderrama-Durbin, Allen, & Rhoades, 2012; Thorson, 2009; Wallerstein, 2005) Infidelity is one of the most frequently cited caused of marital conflict and subsequent divorce. (Fish, 2010; Moller & Vossler, 2015; Moné, MacPhee, Anderson, & Banning, 2011) mentioned Infidelity is one of the most commonly reported presenting problems incouples therapy and one of the most difficult problems to treat. Infidelity is often associated with relational conflict and tension in the couple relationship (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Dean, 2011; Fish, Pavkov, Wetchler, & Bercik, 2012). Thus, children may experience indirect consequences of parental infidelity that are more directly related to expressions of inter-parental conflict. A child who is chronically trapped in loyalties divided between distrusting parents eventually loses faith in both parents (Agustin, 2017; Balderrama-Durbin et al., 2012; Blodgett Salafia, Schaefer, & Haugen, 2014; Matondang, 2014) determined that conflict between parents was moderately related to poor parent-child relationships. The emotional climate of the family also plays a role

How to cite: Sauli Safitri, Lucy Pujasari Supratman (2023) Teenagers Perception Of Committed Relationship On Their Parents Infidelity In North Sumatra, Syntax Literate: Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia (7)12,

http://dx.doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v7i12.10903_

E-ISSN: 2548-1398
Published by: Ridwan Institute

inhow children interpret conflicts between parents. (Agustin, 2017; Blodgett Salafia et al., 2014; Moller & Vossler, 2015) reported that children in families who engaged in more expressions of negative than positive emotions were more likely to blame themselves for conflicts between their parents. (Evanita & Trinanda, 2017; Lubis, Hinduan, Jatnika, & Agustiani, 2021) states that children's sense of security is more strongly rooted in their observations of the relationship between their parents than in the emotional connection between parents and children.

Parents in high-conflict relationships have reported using harsh parenting techniques and showing less love and affection than those in relationships characterized by less conflict (Amelia, Rahmania, & Dewi, 2020), which can reduce children's confidence in their parents as caregivers. Hesitation to trust creates stages for problematic future relationships for the adult child, since individuals with feelings of being treated unjustly by their parents are more likely to adopt asense of destructive entitlement, where they seek to compensate for this need by ignoring others (Apostolou & Demosthenous, 2021). As what (Amelia et al., 2020; Apostolou & Demosthenous, 2021; Dilham, Meliany, & Sofiyah, 2021; Lubis et al., 2021) founded in their study of Latin American undergraduate students found that memories of higher levels of parental conflict were associated with poorer relationships with mothers and fathers. (Thorson, 2009) wholearnt how families maintain rules about how and when to tell their children about parental infidelity. The findings showed that adult child participants were more likely to talk to their mothers than fathers about one parent's infidelity, and that parents and children set a fluctuating permeability boundary as they decided who to tell inside and outside the family. (Amato & Afifi, 2006) found that adult children whose parents were in highconflict marriages were more likely to report feeling trapped between their parents and drawn into their parental disputes than participants whose parents were divorced, especially to daughters. However, it is important to consider how individuals make meaning out of infidelity and conflict between parents (Moné et al., 2011) and how the cultural context affects family expectations, expression of conflict and acceptance of infidelity.

Infidelity is often associated with divorce and parental separation that threatens the family system. The results of the study show that the influence of parental infidelity and conflict between parents can last a long time, which affects the lives of children until they grow up. Infidelity is also often conceptualized as a form of trauma, with one partner identified as the traitor and one partner identified as the victim. These types of highly contrasting labels can predispose a child to develop feelings of being trapped between parents, which can lead to an overall lower sense of subjective well-being. Unfortunately, Parentswho are unable to effectively deal with infidelity will expose their children to escalating conflict (Blodgett Salafia et al., 2014) like trauma and grief-like symptoms (Moné et al., 2011). Parental infidelity can also cause feelings of guilt,

anxiety, fear, worry, depression, shock, and aggression in children, all of which can hinder healthy emotional development (Matondang, 2014).

Using sample of adult children whose parents committed infidelity, (Nogales & Bellotti, 2009) found that 80% of participants' attitudes toward love and relationship were influenced by their parent's infidelity. Same study also found 70% of participants reported that their parent's infidelity have hindered or reduced their ability to trust their romantic partners. Where trust plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of healthy and satisfying relationships. Individuals who experience less trust in their relationship are more likely to engage in infidelity. Consistent with this, adult children exposed to parental infidelity in their childhood are more likely to engage in infidelity within their own romantic relationships (Balderrama-Durbin et al., 2012). On the previous study conducted by (Evanita & Trinanda, 2017) the findings showed respondents most likely to engage in infidelity had experienced a parental infidelity, had parents who were not currently married, and reported lower parental marital satisfaction and greater parental conflict. When family-of-origin experiences were considered simultaneously, parental infidelity and parental satisfaction were associated with offspring's infidelity behaviour.

As expected, Parental infidelity emerged as a stronger predictor of offspring infidelity behaviour compared to other family-of-origin variables. And this finding is also consistent with the statement (Cui & Fincham, 2010) who found that specific behaviours seen at the parental levelare most closely linked to the offspring's equivalent behaviour. The family consisting of father, mother and children is the smallest group of parts in the society. Every family member, especially children certainly want to have a peaceful family that can make them feel to be loved, comfort and secure. Unfortunately, not all the children could imagine what it would be like to have a harmonious family. Family conditions that are not harmonious, there is always a commotion in a household, husband and wife who interact roughly will affect the children which will create a feeling of discomfort to mentally burdened with problems that arise in their family which can lead to rebellion in their soul. Behavior of children is fabulously dominated by the influence of the atmosphere of a house where they live, the atmosphere of the environment around the house to the atmosphere of interaction between the family members. Which causes these children prefer to spend their time outside the house because they are reluctant to go home just to see the fights that occur in their families (Aziz, 2015). Also, the behaviors shown by broken home children with different problem backgrounds tend to have similarities in the form of mentaldepression.

The involvement of problems that often lead to disputes and quarrels as well as differences of opinion that occur between parents has become something that is considered normal happening a family. Regrettably, if these fights and disputes occur continuously in a family, the affection of love between the family member could be disappear and

cause hatred, prejudice, and loss of trust between one another (Matondang, 2014). One of the problems that arise and considered fatalin the family system is parental infidelity that could lead into divorce (Dean, 2011). Divorce of parents or the parents who have remarried will make children grow faster than their age, because these children are forced by the circumstances to be able to stand between two worldsin understanding the series of events that have changed their lives. So often these children have a much more mature mind and independent than children who grow up in a harmonious family environment and often they must take responsibility for themselves and their siblings. Although each children shown and vents their emotions in different ways, both in positive and negative ways. Parental infidelity has various consequences for the children based on gender, age and even their culture. Even so, the impact caused by parental infidelity also has a different impact on children and teenagers, mentions its impact on children, their cognitive and emotional state can inhibit or perpetuate one-sided loyalty to their parents and feelings of guilt, betrayal, and abandonment when they face in parental infidelity. That it allows the children to become a person who tends to be quiet, gloomy, or even angry. While teenagers are less blaming themselves, eventhough they still have difficulty dealing with the causes and consequences of parental infidelity, still their confusion can turn into fear that can shape the mindset of teenagers thus creating a sense of trauma and fear to get involved in matters related to committed relationships. (Wallerstein, 2005) stated that young people's awareness of their parent's infidelity did not have any effect on the level of commitment, trust, or dysfunctional beliefs in a romantic relationship. This statement apparently contradicts to the one of informants in this study, which VPM admitted that her father's infidelity made her not at all interested in being involved in a committed relationship and even said that shedid not want to get married. VPM admits she's better off on her own, no boys mean no cases. According to her, the best option is to avoid the root of all the problems that exist in a committed relationship, which is not getting involved in a committed relationship or getting married. The statement stated by VPM also reinforced by previous study conducted by (Aziz, 2015) Parental infidelity provides a relationship to the perception of adult children who are becoming the victims of parental infidelity about love, marriage, and intimate relationships. Where the subjects consider a trust in a relationship as very important and if it has been damaged it will be difficult for them to be able to trust again. The subjects also considered marriage as unnecessary although some others still thought marriage was important. Love is still something that the subjects want, even though they are aware of the potential of love to cause hurt and create conflict in it. This study shows that adult children who experience parental infidelity has quite an influence on the formation of these adult children's perception of love, marriage, and intimate relationships. Seeing this, researcher is eager to find out what are the reasons behind the formation of teenagers' perception in seeing a committed relationship after they are exposed to their parents' infidelity. On the other

hand, the researcher also wanted to know whether the teenagers who had been exposed to this parental infidelity had the potential to repeat what their parents had done before. Then, the researcher will also discuss clearly what the reactions are shown by these teenagers and find out the factors that influence the perception patterns of these teenagers after being involved in the infidelity of their parents in assessing a committed relationship.

Researcher chose North Sumatera as the research location where according to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS) data in 2021, North Sumatera ranks number fourth as the highest divorces cases in Indonesia, which has contributed as many as 17,270 cases out of a total of 447,743 divorces cases in Indonesia. In addition, North Sumatera is a place where the researcher was born and raised. Growing up in an environment surrounded by various issues, one of them are infidelity and divorce. Coupled with researcher and the closest people such as friends who are also victims of parental infidelity. Researcher is starting to realize the lack of knowledge and understanding of the impact that parental infidelity can have to the teenagers, especially with the lack of literature in North Sumatra that specifically discusses about how teenagers there in perceive a committed relationship with their parents having an affair, thus giving rise to a new curiosity of researcher that is broader and more comprehensive by contribute to this research. Withthe biggest hope of finding a conclusion and solution to the problem that can satisfy the curiosity that has been aroused. Therefore, anyone can use this research as a broad and complex means of self-development which can be used as an education, knowledge, and reference both for the researcher and for those who need details about how parental infidelity shapes teenagers' perception about committed relationship. Based on the explanation above, the researcher has a reason for conducting this research and raised the tittle "Teenagers Perception about Committed Relationship on their Parent's Infidelity in North Sumatera".

METHOD

This research conducted a Qualitative method with a phenomenology approach. Qualitative is one of the methods used in research that focuses on gaining an understanding of themeaning of an individual or a group that originates from a problem in a social life (Creswell, 2016). The data collection techniques used in this research is by doing interviews, documentations, and observation with five informants aged 17 to 21 years old who lived in North Sumatra. Then the data that has been collected will be analyzed by researcher so it will be more structured and easierto understand.

RESULTS

This research was conducted by researcher face to face with informants in North Sumatra. Consisting of 5 teenagers aged 17 to 21 years, from high school students to

university students who are exposed to the issue of parental infidelity. The cheating parents are all from the father's side and most of their parents already divorced, only one from them whose parents still together. Most of the informants have a close relationship with researcher. These five informants are both struggling to be able to rise from the dark story they experienced.

Feelings that arise after knowing parents' infidelity

Researcher found the same opinion from all both male and female informants. All the informants showed negative emotional reactions such as upset, angry, disappointed, sad, dejected, embarrassed and speechless when they found out about their parents' infidelity.

Reaction and consequences of parents' infidelity based on teenagers' gender

Researcher found that the first reaction shown by the informants differed based on their gender.

- Female

All female informants when asked about the reactions they showed were silent because they have no idea how to react. And the consequences of parental infidelity felt by the female informants also had something in common, which made all female informants admitted that it had raised a trust issue in themselves, especially to trust men.

- Male

While to the male, it showed a different reaction which they express their anger towards their parents clearly and even vents the anger to the object around. As what SA confessed "I was angry with my parents, you know there was no family discussion but suddenly the divorce papers came home. Angry, disappointed, crying, I can't do anything, so I vented by hitting the glass and wall near me". Meanwhile, the consequences of parents' infidelity gave different results to male informants, he tends to have a fear of hurting women, because when he sees his father hurt his mother by having an infidelity. It creates a sense of empathy and fear of hurting a woman. As stated by SA "Seeing my mom being betrayed by my dad and seeing how much pain she felt, it makes me scared to hurt womenfeelings even though in case that woman is wrong but still I better give in and believe as long it is not going to hurt her feelings. I prefer to respect the women's feelings".

Effects of parents' infidelity on engagement in committed relationships

Researcher found that there was a difference in effects on teenagers who exposed their parents' infidelity when they were still little and teenagers who felt their parents' infidelity when they wereteenagers.

- Exposed to parents' infidelity since little

The infidelity felt when teenagers was a little gave a greater sense of

trauma than teenagers who felt it as a teenager. Children who are exposed to their parents' infidelity when they are young tend to struggle more to give their trust to others, especially to men. Where this also makes it difficult for them to open their hearts and are not willing to be involved in a romantic relationship. They assume that they do not need a male figure in their life. Even worse, they do not want to be involved in marriage because they think marriage will only present many sources of problems in the future. As what VPM said when researcher asked about her perception about committed relationship after seeing her parents' infidelity. She stated "It's a bullshit, a committed relationship should be a relationship based on mutual trust, where someone committed to being loyal with only one person for the rest of their life. And you know why I said it was bullshit? Because from the reality that I saw, and value of my environment is not like that. Most of them who are committed are also the one who break their own rules. And most of them are men, although women also do them same, but they are still a minority. Most of men never feels enough with only one woman and still looking for something more and more". When researcher tried to find out more, whether she was not interested in giving herself the opportunity to be involved in a committed relationship. VPM replied "if someone already have a trust issue, it's hard for them to give other people the opportunity to approach us. Because we struggled with those issues, the problem come from myself. What I saw around makes me thinks if it will be worth itor not and forms something within myself". And VPM added "I don't want to get married because I am afraid, I'll be cheated like what my mom felt. So, I'd better stay single, no partner means no case, no problem, and no stress".

- Exposed to parents' infidelity during adolescence

Teenagers who felt their parents' infidelity when they are teenagers show a tendency that it does not have a significant effect on seeing romantic relationships. They still want to believe in love and feel that everyone deserves it. In essence, they are willing to give the opportunity to open their hearts to a romantic relationship whit other people, they still want to get married even though they have seen the infidelity of their parents.

Effects of parent's infidelity on the teenager's social environment

The researcher found that all the informants who had been interviewed admitted that they did not have a significant problem in their social environments. None of the informants said that they had been ostracized in their social environment. They even get support from their friends when they tell their family problems. Some of the informants' friends also felt the same way and that made them strengthen each other. Although one of the informants with the initials ADF admitted that she was a little annoyed with her

neighbors who interfered in other people's household matters, it did not have any impact on her, in fact ADF tended to ignore and feel safe so far.

Tendency to engage in infidelity

The researcher found that two out of five informants had an affair when they were in a romantic relationship. They admit that they did it just for fun and felt bored. One of them thought that they have the right to avenge their partner because cheated on them, like what NS stated "I did an affair because I was annoyed and felt bored. I've played with boys up to 2 or 4 boys. A lot". NS also added "I don't care at all, and I felt no guilty when I cheated on someone. That person just deserves to be cheated on and you know I don't trust men anymore. But in case if I was cheated on by my partner, I would just ignore it and disappear from him". And already explained in previous study by (Briere, 1996) stated self-trauma model demonstrates howtrauma alters a child's development, particularly their attachment style. One of the primary action systems which that regulates threatening responses and avoid them from interfering on daily action systems is the attachment system. When the attachment system has been compromised, individuals' primary emphasis shifts to matters such as security and safety, and they lag behind in areas such as exploration, learning, and interpersonal interactions (Lyons-Ruth, 2003). Because of the disturbance to their attachment system, individuals who were traumatized as childhood may develop problematic attachment patterns with their love relationships.

Effects of the low communication level between cheating parent and teenagers

Two out of five informants who have a low level of communication with their cheating parents tend to have more difficulty forgiving their father. This low level of communication between daughter and father seems to cause an awkwardness and lack of concern that informants feel from their father. Those who do not have intense communication with their fathers also have serious trust issues, which make it difficult for them to open to a committed relationship and difficult for them to trust others, especially men

Differences between parents' that still together and have separated

Researcher found some differences in informants whose parents were still together and whose parents had separated.

-Parents' that still together

The researcher found that the only parents who were still together were from VPM families. Her father is still fully responsible and still pays for all the necessities of life for his family. So that in financial matters, VPM and family do not have problems. When researcher find out more deeplythe reason behind her parents not separated was because her mother does not have a job and it makes her mother afraid for her child's future if they separate. This has been discussed in a previous study conducted by (Apostolou & Demosthenous, 2020) where one of the most popular findings found that having children

and financial dependence on a partner are the popular reasons for parents not to separate from their partners even after being betrayed.

- Parents' that has separated

The researcher found that all the informants whose parents had separated, their father tended to ignore their responsibilities as a father especially to the financial responsibilities. The majority of informants mother who work super hard to support their children's survival. The participation of their father's responsibilities can be calculated as it was so low even the most informants claimed not to be supported by their father.

Effects of parents' infidelity in giving forgiveness

Researcher found a variety of reasons from the informants in apologizing to their father as a cheating parent.

-Forgive completely

Two out of five informants admitted that they had forgiven their father because they thought that his father was still his parent. They think that there is no point in hating their father, what has happened will not return to the way it used to be, so they think that forgiveness is the bestway to let go of what has happened.

-Not fully forgive

Two other informants admitted that they could not fully forgive their father because they still felt hurt and disappointed with what his father had done as VPM stated "I can forgive him but not completely because cheating is just a big no for me. Papa can't turn things back the way they used to be. He can't heal the pains and disappointed he caused. He's forgiven but it's not 100% it just like 55% or even below than that. Once we've been hurt by someone, it's hard for us to accept that fact. Unless you really have a sincere and kind heart, which I don't have that kind of sincere and good heart like that". While the other informant has not been able to forgive his father completely because his father is not responsible for his family, like what GAL stated "Honestly, I can't really forgive my father. Overall, I've made peace with the situation, but I can't forgive my father because he's not responsible for his family also he doesn't provide for his family and that's what I can't forgive from him".

-Not forgiving at all

One informant confessed that she couldn't forgive her father at all, as what NS stated "I can forgive him (swearing her father to be die). It's too painful to remember, but I just let itgo what has happened".

Behavior patterns in accepting parents' infidelity

Although some of the informants could not fully forgive their cheating parents, they agreed that they must continue to live their lives and accept the fact that what they have experienced is just a part of the destiny that has been determined by them. All

informants tend to be able to control themselves by not venting on negative things such as drugs or other negative stuff. All informants have the will to move forward and become a better person for the future.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with the result of research conducted by (Amelia, 2008) that showed the impact of divorce on children who are victims of their parents' divorce, who eventually experience emotional instability that makes them feel inferior, lack self-confidence, and sometimes vent their emotions by doing things that are contrary to the regulations around them. This is also in line with previous study by (Huurre et al., 2006) which also found that children who are victims of divorced families will tend to have few close friends who can help them because they will tend to close themselves and do not like to talk about personal matters, especially about issues that occur in their family.

Differences in terms of the good relationship that still exists between children and parents, as well as the divorce process involving the opinion of children can be an important distinguishing factor regarding the reaction in their relationship with their current partner. However, the perception of divorce is equally visible where there is a fear from both participants for the cause of the divorce of their parents. On the other hand, the causes from financial side and infidelity, make participants also feel afraid that later they will not be able to make their partner and parents happy. And there is a fear of having an affair or repeating the mistakes that have been made by both parents. In addition, the cause of divorce accompanied by domestic violence also made participants afraid that they would face marriage with the same thing as experienced by their parents. This is because early adulthood of both divorced parents will be more likely to remember more negative than positive messages from their parents (Arizqa & Wisnu, 2011).

The more complex impact of divorce could be seen when there are factors of violence in it whether it be physical, psychological, sexual, or economic neglect (Putri, 2008). This will have a bad influence on children who have experienced violence, especially physical because the pain that children get will make them build their own principles which are a fortress for them not to experience the same thing as their parents, such as wanting to do everything alone and not want todepend on others to be appreciated by others. Principles that are adhered to by this will be able tolead to high conflict due to lack of social skills such as negotiation and compromise (Amato et al., 1995) although they are more likely to maintain their principles and end up making the partner who must give in more in their relationship. This perceived impact will also have an impact when someone makes a commitment with their partner in the future. Adult children who come from divorced families will tend to feel happywhen they finally find someone who they feel attracted by the nature and attitude of their partner and the identity of the relationship they are living (Kuhn & Mcpartland, 1954).

The strength of the attraction that is felt by a person to their partner will determine how much they feel to stay and commit to their relationship. This can be seen from the two participants who feel confident and steady with their current choice, which is still choosing to commit in a relationship and not looking for another one with a hope that their current partner could be their last. Both participants feel satisfied with the relationship they are in and feel they have found the best person compared to their previous partner. Where their current partner is more accepting of themselves as they are, has a nature of guiding their lives, protecting them, and making them feelcomfortable and trusted to share any personal problems they feel.

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