

The Relationship between Fatherless and Marriage Anxiety in Early Adult Women in Surabaya

Hubungan antara Fatherless dengan Kecemasan Pernikahan Pada Wanita Dewasa Awal di Surabaya

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Abstract



The decline in the number of marriages in Surabaya, which reached 14,194 events in 2025, reflects a change in the perspective of young adults toward commitment, partly triggered by the fatherless phenomenon due to divorce. This study aims to determine the relationship between being fatherless and marriage anxiety in early adult women in Surabaya. This study uses a correlational quantitative approach with purposive sampling techniques involving 156 early adult women (18-40 years old) who experienced fatherlessness due to parental divorce. The research instrument used the fatherless scale based on aspects from Lamb, Pleck, Levine, and Charnov, and the marriage anxiety scale based on aspects from Obeid et al. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson Product Moment correlation through JASP software. The research results showed a correlation coefficient value of $r = 0.573$ with a significance of $p < 0.001$, indicating a positive relationship between fatherlessness and marriage anxiety. The higher the level of fatherlessness, the greater the tendency for marriage anxiety experienced. This condition manifests in the emergence of negative perceptions toward relationships, fear of commitment, and a tendency to prioritize personal life as a form of self-defense.

Keywords: Fatherless, marriage anxiety, early adult women, parental divorce

Abstrak

Penurunan angka pernikahan di Surabaya yang mencapai 14.194 peristiwa pada tahun 2025 mencerminkan adanya perubahan cara pandang dewasa awal terhadap komitmen, yang salah satunya dipicu oleh fenomena fatherless akibat perceraian. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan antara fatherless dengan kecemasan pernikahan pada wanita dewasa awal di Surabaya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif korelasional dengan teknik purposive sampling yang melibatkan 156 wanita dewasa awal (18-40 tahun) yang mengalami fatherless akibat perceraian orang tua. Instrumen penelitian menggunakan skala fatherless berdasarkan aspek dari Lamb, Pleck, Levine, dan Charnov dan skala kecemasan pernikahan berdasarkan aspek dari Obeid dkk. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan korelasi Pearson Product Moment melalui software JASP. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan nilai koefisien korelasi sebesar $r = 0,573$ dengan signifikansi $p < 0,001$, artinya terdapat hubungan positif antara fatherless dan kecemasan pernikahan. Semakin tinggi tingkat fatherless, semakin meningkat pula kecenderungan kecemasan pernikahan yang dialami. Kondisi ini terwujud dalam munculnya persepsi negatif terhadap relasi, ketakutan akan komitmen, hingga kecenderungan memprioritaskan kehidupan pribadi sebagai bentuk pertahanan diri.

Kata Kunci: *Tanpa ayah, kecemasan pernikahan, wanita dewasa awal, perceraian orang tua*

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Early adulthood is a developmental phase characterized by increasing social demands, including independence, career establishment, and relational commitments (Paputungan, 2023). At this stage, individuals are expected to achieve emotional, social, and economic maturity, as well as begin planning their future, including marriage (Dwilianto et al., 2024; Nugsria et al., 2023). One of the primary developmental tasks in early adulthood is to form stable intimate relationships and prepare for family life (Paputungan, 2023). Although marriage is generally perceived as a positive and desirable life goal, for some individuals, particularly those from non-intact families, it may instead evoke anxiety due to negative past experiences (Kurniati & Rozali, 2021).

In recent years, concerns surrounding marriage have become more prominent, as reflected in the declining marriage rates in Indonesia. Data from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) indicates a significant decrease in the number of marriages between 2021 and 2023, with similar trends observed across several provinces, including Jawa Timur (Hasibuan, 2025). This phenomenon is also evident in Surabaya, where the number of marriages has consistently decreased over the past three years, accompanied by a relatively high divorce rate (BPS, 2026). Based on data from the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) of Surabaya City, there has been a consistent decrease in the number of marriages over the past three years, recorded at 15,870 events in 2023, decreasing to 14.284 in 2024, and further declining to 14.194 events in 2025 (BPS, 2026). This situation is exacerbated by the high rate of family breakdowns in the same area, where in 2025, there were 5,609 recorded divorce cases (BPS, 2026). In addition, the emergence of social narratives such as “marriage is scary” reflects shifting perceptions of marriage among young adults, many of whom choose to delay or avoid marriage (Fauziyah & Putri, 2024). These conditions suggest the presence of doubt and anxiety in facing marital commitment.

Marriage anxiety refers to feelings of fear, uncertainty, and doubt regarding future marital relationships, which may arise from various factors, including negative family experiences, traumatic events, and uncertainty in partner selection (Masrurroh et al., 2025; Sofana, 2025). Previous studies have shown that individuals who grow up in disharmonious families, particularly those experiencing parental divorce, are more likely to develop concerns about long-term relationships (Oktaviani & Krismono, 2025). One of the factors associated with the emergence of marriage anxiety is the fatherless condition, defined as the absence or lack of a father’s role during an individual’s development (Sofana, 2025). Empirical studies indicate that individuals with fatherless backgrounds tend to experience difficulties in forming secure relationships, including trust issues, fear of loss, and emotional dependence on partners (Sintamaharani et al., 2025).

Research also highlights that women in early adulthood with fatherless experiences are more likely to experience emotional insecurity and challenges in building stable romantic relationships (Febriani & Iswinarti, 2025). This vulnerability is further intensified when

fatherlessness results from parental divorce, which often leaves psychological impacts that shape negative perceptions of marriage (Diana & Agustina, 2023). Consequently, these individuals may develop heightened anxiety toward marriage, particularly during the phase of making long-term relational decisions.

Despite growing research on fatherlessness, studies specifically linking it to marriage anxiety in early adult women remain limited. Prior research has mainly focused on attachment, self-control, or general well-being rather than marriage anxiety (Junaidin et al., 2023; Sasono et al., 2025). Additionally, empirical studies in urban contexts such as Surabaya are still scarce, despite the potential influence of social pressure, family dynamics, and high divorce rates

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the relationship between fatherlessness due to parental divorce and marriage anxiety among early adult women in Surabaya. This research is expected to contribute to the development of psychological literature, particularly in understanding the role of family background in shaping individuals' readiness and perceptions toward marriage.

Method

This research uses a quantitative approach with a correlational type, which is a study aimed at determining the relationship between two variables without providing special treatment (Creswell, 2022). This research aims to determine the relationship between fatherless and marriage anxiety in early adult women in Surabaya. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for the objective testing of variable relationships through statistical analysis.

Sample / Population

The population in this study is early adult women aged 18 - 40 years residing in Surabaya. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique, which is a method of selecting samples based on the researcher's considerations, where the chosen samples are deemed to represent the characteristics needed in the study (Purwanza et al., 2022). The following are the sample criteria in this study, including (1) Women aged 18 – 40 years. (2) Residing in Surabaya. (3) Experiencing fatherless due to parental divorce. The determination of the sample size in this study was conducted using the G*Power software with (α) set at 0.05 and an effect size of 0.30, resulting in a minimum requirement of 84 respondents.

The subjects obtained in this study amounted to 156 early adult women who experienced fatherlessness due to parental divorce.

Table 1. Subject Description

Gender	Total
Female	156
Total	156

Age	Total
18 – 24	103
25 – 31	41
32 – 39	12
Total	156

Table 1 presents a description of the characteristics of the respondents involved in this study, which includes 156 early adult women in Surabaya who experienced a fatherless condition due to parental divorce. Based on the age distribution, the majority of respondents are in the 18–24 age range, with 103 participants. The next group of respondents is in the 25–31 age range, with 41 people, and the smallest group is in the 32–39 age range, with 12 respondents. The dominance of respondents in the 18–24 age category indicates that the participants in this study are mostly in the early adulthood transition phase, where individuals begin to actively explore romantic relationships and face developmental tasks related to preparing for long-term commitments or marriage.

Data Collection Techniques

This research uses a questionnaire as a data collection technique. Data was collected using a scale online through Google Forms. Respondents filled out an informed consent form before answering the research scale. The distribution of the scale was conducted via social media, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, X, and TikTok.

Data collection on fatherlessness used the fatherless adoption instrument from Yuliana et al. (2023), and the marriage anxiety adoption instrument from Sofana (2025). Respondents were asked to choose among the answer alternative SS (Sangat Setuju), S (Setuju), TS (Tidak Setuju), and STS (Sangat Tidak Setuju) on both scales.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several stages, including assumption testing and hypothesis testing. Assumption test consisted of normality and linearity tests. Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis in JASP to ensure data were normally distributed. The data is said to be normally distributed if the skewness value is within the range of -2 to +2 and the kurtosis value is within the range of -7 to +7 (Hair et al., 2022). Linearity was examined through the Partial Regression Plot to determine whether the relationship between variables followed a linear pattern. Hair et al. (2022) state that linearity can be assessed by observing the pattern of point distribution on the graph. If the points do not form a specific pattern, then the relationship between the variables can be said to be linear. Hypothesis testing was performed using Correlation Pearson Product Moment to examine the relationship between fatherless and marriage anxiety.

Results

The researcher provides a descriptive overview of respondent's family conditions after parental divorce, including post-divorce living arrangements and the duration of absence from the father, as key context for understanding their fatherless experience.

Table 2. The condition of the respondent's family

Characteristics	Category	N	Dominant Score Category
Living arrangements	Mother	111	Moderate
	Others guardian	42	Moderate
	Others (Alone/sibling)	3	Moderate
Duration without father	< 1 year	9	Moderate
	2 – 3 years	60	Moderate

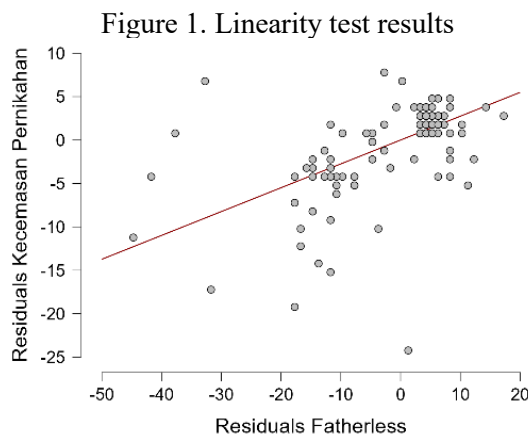
	4 – 5 years	37	Moderate
	> 5 years	50	Moderate
Total		156	

The research results show that the majority of respondents live with their mother post-divorce with the duration of the father's absence mostly in the range of 2-3 years. Descriptively, the score distribution on both variables is dominated by the moderate category, with 124 respondents on the fatherless variable and 139 respondents on the marriage anxiety variable. These findings indicate a consistent pattern where the level of father absence and marriage anxiety tends to be at a moderate level, regardless of variations in living background or the duration of separation from the father figure.

Table 3. Normality test results

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis
Fatherless	-2	5
Marriage Anxiety	-2	6

The results of the normality test in Table 3. show that the fatherless variable has a skewness value of -2 and a kurtosis value of 5. Meanwhile, the marriage anxiety variable has a skewness value of -2 and a kurtosis value of 6. Based on these guidelines, the data for both variables are normally distributed.



The points appear to be randomly scattered around the diagonal line without forming systematic patterns such as curves, U-shapes, or other patterns. This random distribution indicates that there is no deviation from linearity, so it can be concluded that the relationship between the fatherless variable and marriage anxiety is linear.

Table 4. Hypothesis test results

Variable	N	Pearson's	p-value
Marriage Anxiety	156	0.573	<.001

Referring to the guidelines for interpreting quantitative research results according to Creswell (2022), the relationship between variables can be said to exist if the significance value is below the specified threshold, namely $\alpha = 0.05$. Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between fatherlessness and marriage anxiety ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation is positive and falls within the moderate category, indicating that higher

levels of fatherless experience are associated with higher marriage anxiety. Thus, the research hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant and positive relationship between fatherlessness and marriage anxiety in early adult women. This suggests that higher levels of father absence or low involvement are associated with greater anxiety toward marriage, including fear of commitment and concerns about long-term relationships. This result can be explained through attachment theory from Bowlby, which emphasizes that early relationships with caregivers shape relational patterns in adulthood (Stern et al., 2025). The father figure plays an important role in developing emotional security, trust, and interpersonal relationship models, particularly in helping women understand cross-gender relationships and form expectations toward partners (Puspita & Setiadarma, 2024). When this role is absent, individuals may experience difficulties in building trust, forming healthy relationship models, and making relational decisions, which can lead to increased marriage anxiety (Vatarisa & Selian, 2025).

The absence or low involvement of a father figure may hinder the development of secure attachment, leading to trust issues, fear of intimacy, and doubts about relationship stability (Timothy & Sanjaya, 2025). This condition becomes particularly relevant in early adulthood, a phase characterized by the demand to establish stable romantic relationships oriented toward marriage. Without a father as a secure base, individuals may experience greater vulnerability in making relational decisions and facing long-term commitments (Apranda & Ninawati, 2025). As reflected in the findings, respondents showed tendencies such as trust issues, fear of commitment, emotional tension, and prioritizing independence as a protective strategy.

Based on the research findings, marriage anxiety among respondents is reflected across four main aspects. (1) Negative perceptions of oneself and a partner indicate trust issues stemming from the absence of a father figure as a relational model. (2) Fear of emotional commitment and financial dependency reflects trauma related to the instability often associated with parental divorce. (3) Tension when facing marriage-related issues represents emotional and physiological responses to narratives of domestic failure. Meanwhile, (4) prioritizing personal life emerges as a compensatory strategy, where individuals emphasize independence to avoid repeating similar negative experiences. These aspects demonstrate that fatherlessness has a broad impact, influencing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions in how individuals perceive and approach marriage.

In terms of family conditions, most respondents experienced prolonged absence from their fathers and lived with their mothers after parental divorce. Although support from other caregivers may be present, the father's role in modeling relationships remains difficult to replace. As a result, respondents tend to exhibit trust issues, fear of commitment, emotional tension, and a tendency to prioritize independence as a protective strategy against potential relationship failure. These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that fatherlessness is associated with higher marriage anxiety and negative perceptions of marriage (Diana & Agustina, 2023; Kurniati & Rozali, 2021). Additionally, prior research suggests that negative family experiences contribute to doubts about relationship stability and readiness for marriage (Junaidin et al., 2023; Masrurroh et al., 2025).

However, the majority of respondents fall into the moderate category, suggesting that other factors such as social support, family environment, emotional maturity, as well as social and cultural pressures, may also influence the level of marriage anxiety. External factors such as social pressure, cultural expectations, and negative narratives about marriage may also contribute to the development of marriage anxiety (Tabkhi et al., 2025; Saragi et al., 2025). Overall, this study highlights that fatherlessness due to parental divorce is an important factor associated with marriage anxiety, while also emphasizing the role of broader contextual influences. These findings reinforce the role of early family experiences in shaping individuals' readiness and perceptions toward marriage.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between fatherlessness and marriage anxiety in early adult women. Higher levels of father absence are

associated with greater tendencies toward marriage anxiety, which may manifest in negative perceptions of oneself and partners, fear of emotional commitment and financial dependence, tension when facing marriage, and a tendency to prioritize personal life. These findings indicate that the absence of a father figure is closely related to how individuals perceive intimate relationships and long-term commitment. Thus, fatherlessness is an important factor associated with marriage anxiety in early adulthood, particularly in shaping individuals' readiness and perspectives toward marriage.

Recommendations

The results of this study are expected to help early adult women who experience fatherlessness increase awareness of their emotional conditions and relational patterns shaped by past experience, as well as develop emotional regulation, self-confidence, and self-understanding through reflection or professional support. Participation in premarital counseling, psychosocial support, or support communities may also help reduce marriage anxiety and improve psychological readiness for marital commitment.

Families are also expected to provide supportive environments, including the presence of positive surrogate figures, to enhance emotional readiness. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to involve more diverse participant in terms of number and gender, apply mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights, and consider additional factors such as social support, parent-child relationship quality, past romantic experiences, and social cultural pressures that may influence marriage anxiety.

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