Dissociative Dynamics and Social Withdrawal in Adolescents from Divorced Families: A Qualitative Case Study in Indonesian Secondary Education

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Abstract

Background: Parental divorce and family dysfunction disrupt crucial socialization processes during adolescence, frequently manifesting as maladaptive peer interaction patterns. However, detailed single-case investigations illuminating the nuanced interactional mechanisms and social factors in secondary school settings remain scarce. **Objective:** This study investigated the structural forms of social interaction, underlying sociodynamic factors, and the comprehensive psychological-relational impacts of a broken home environment on an affected middle school student. **Method:** Employing a qualitative single-case study design, one 15-year-old male ninth-grade student (FRL) at SMP Negeri 3 Bekasi was selected via purposive sampling out of 13 screened candidates exhibiting prominent social withdrawal following parental divorce. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews (with member checking), peer triangulation, and institutional documentation. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, verified through rigorous trustworthiness criteria. **Key Results:** The subject exhibited predominantly dissociative social interaction patterns, marked by active conflict engagement, selective primary contact, and impaired verbal disclosure. Out of four classic social interaction factors, only identification (focused on the father and isolated figures) and limited sympathy remained functional, whereas imitation and suggestion were severely attenuated. Broken home dynamics severely compromised domestic educational, socialization, affective, and protective functions, exacerbating negative self-perception and peer friction, which was further compounded by physical bullying. **Conclusion:** Family breakdown drives severe social disengagement, shifting interaction from associative adaptation to passive avoidance or reactive conflict. School counseling interventions must transcend individual student sessions to incorporate systemic family-oriented support and anti-bullying framework structures.

Keywords: *Adolescent Socialization; Broken Home; Case Study; Dissociative Interaction; Guidance and Counseling; Peer Relations*

1. Introduction

The family institution serves as the foundational domain for human character formation and primary socialization. Within developmental psychology, the family functions as the primary educational and emotional platform where children internalize societal norms, interpersonal values, and behavioral boundaries. During adolescence—a developmental milestone characterized by heightened emotional volatility, self-identity exploration, and psychological stress—family cohesion becomes paramount. Unstable domestic environments marked by persistent parental conflict or marital dissolution generate significant systemic distress, commonly characterized in socio-educational literature as a 'broken home'.

Global and national demographic metrics demonstrate a sharp escalation in divorce rates. Official statistical records in Indonesia indicate that divorce cases rose significantly to 438,168 in 2025, representing an approximate 11% increase from 394,000 cases recorded in 2024. The resulting structural family fragmentation severely undermines the psychological stability and social competence of developing adolescents. Adolescents undergoing family dissolution frequently experience acute affective deprivation, diminished parental supervision, and shattered attachment security. Consequently, these socio-emotional deficits manifest directly within secondary educational institutions, where peer-to-peer and student-teacher interactions take center stage.

Social interaction represents the fundamental dynamic process through which individuals construct social reality and establish interpersonal relationships. According to classical sociological framework, social interaction requires two mandatory prerequisites: social contact and communication. Furthermore, interactional dynamics are driven by four core psychological mechanisms: imitation, suggestion, identification, and sympathy. These processes manifest structurally along two primary trajectories: associative processes (cooperation, accommodation, assimilation) leading to social cohesion, and dissociative processes (competition, contravention, conflict) causing relational fragmentation.

Despite extensive literature investigating the general consequences of broken home environments on academic achievement or broad behavioral problems, significant empirical gaps persist. Existing studies predominantly employ broad quantitative surveys or aggregate cohort assessments, often failing to capture the intra-psychic and interactional nuances experienced by individual adolescents in school settings. Furthermore, single-case qualitative investigations tracing how domestic dysfunction directly shifts an adolescent's social interaction mechanisms from associative to dissociative patterns within urban public middle schools remain exceptionally rare.

To address this literature gap, the present study conducted a deep single-case investigation at SMP Negeri 3 Bekasi. The study was formulated to address three central research questions: (1) What specific structural forms of social interaction (associative vs. dissociative) characterize an adolescent student from a broken home? (2) How do underlying interactional factors (imitation, suggestion, identification, sympathy) operate in this context? and (3) What are the systemic domestic impacts and institutional behaviors resulting from family disruption?

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted an in-depth qualitative single-case study design. The case study approach was selected because it facilitates an intensive, holistic, and contextual exploration of a contemporary real-world phenomenon—specifically, the complex interactional dynamics of a student experiencing parental divorce—where boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

2.2. Participant Selection

Participant selection was conducted via purposive sampling at SMP Negeri 3 Bekasi, West Java, Indonesia. Initial screening was performed during the researcher's Field Pedagogical Practice (PPL) through guidance box submissions and preliminary intake assessments across Grade IX. Thirteen students reported acute family hardship. Following individual exploratory counseling sessions, one male student (pseudonym: FRL, aged 15) was selected as the focal subject. FRL satisfied all explicit inclusion criteria: (a) experienced severe parental divorce during elementary school; (b) demonstrated marked negative transformation in peer sociability post-divorce; (c) exhibited severe social withdrawal and conflict-prone behavior; and (d) demonstrated willingness to participate in extended research sessions.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection employed a multi-method qualitative apparatus conducted over extended school terms:

1. Non-Participant Observation: Systematic classroom and extracurricular observations were conducted to evaluate FRL's real-time behavioral responses, group work engagement, communication initiation, and peer conflict dynamics.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with FRL using a pre-validated thematic interview protocol. Follow-up interview sessions were executed specifically for member checking. Triangulated cross-interviews were simultaneously conducted with FRL's closest peer to verify behavioral consistency.

3. Institutional Documentation: School counseling records, intake logs, problem-box artifacts, and academic progress reports were analyzed to contextualize the qualitative narrative.

2.4. Data Analysis & Trustworthiness

Qualitative data were analyzed iteratively using the interactive analytical model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Methodological rigor and trustworthiness were established via Lincoln and Guba's criteria:

- **Credibility:** Achieved through technique triangulation (observational logs, interview transcripts, documents) and source triangulation (focal subject cross-referenced with peer informant data and counselor notes), alongside formal member checking.
- **Transferability:** Ensured by providing a thick, detailed contextual description of the subject's academic, domestic, and social setting.
- **Dependability & Confirmability:** Maintained via audit trails involving academic advisor review of raw interview transcripts and expert consultation regarding counseling interpretative frameworks.

3. Results

The subject, FRL, is a 15-year-old male ninth-grade student residing with his biological father following his parents' divorce during his elementary school years. Historical counseling logs confirm that prior to marital disruption, FRL was an active, highly sociable child. Post-divorce, FRL underwent a profound personality shift toward social withdrawal, affective detachment, and heightened irritability. This emotional strain was further escalated by experiences of physical appearance-based bullying at school.

3.1. Forms of Social Interaction

FRL's social interactions manifest predominantly along dissociative lines, characterized by conditional associative efforts and dominant conflict behaviors.

Interaction Domain	Observed Behavioral Manifestation	Qualitative Evidence / Subject Quote
Associative: Cooperation	Restricted to mandatory, highly structured academic environments; strong preference for solo work.	*"Because my social skills are not good, if there is work, I prefer working alone over group work."*
Associative: Accommodation	Passive conflict avoidance driven by low self-worth rather than active reconciliation; collapses under domestic stress.	*"I usually apologize first, even if it's not my fault... but if I have too many family thoughts, I just stay silent."*
Dissociative: Conflict	Dominant response pattern; high verbal reactivity to peer teasing and physical boundary intrusions.	*"If I'm overwhelmed with thoughts and someone bothers me, I yell at them. If they yell back, we end up fighting."*

3.2. Prerequisites and Underlying Factors of Social Interaction

Evaluation of the fundamental prerequisites for social interaction revealed severe structural blockages:

- **Social Contact:** Highly selective and primary-contact restricted. FRL limits real-life contact to two close peers, preferring digital text channels where crowds and physical exposure do not trigger feelings of vulnerability.

- **Communication:** Extremely compromised. FRL lacks a trusted confidant for emotional disclosure. When confronted with personal distress, FRL routinely responds: 'There is no one... I just stay silent.'

Analysis of the four driving factors of social interaction illustrates an asymmetrical profile:

> **1. Imitation (Absent):** FRL explicitly rejects copying peer behaviors ('Never'), choosing to preserve his original personality even at the cost of social isolation.
>
> **2. Suggestion (Absent):** Complete absence of positive role models or influential mentors ('As far as I know, no one'), leaving him without positive social orientation.
>
> **3. Identification (Active/Distorted):** Identifies with his biological father and isolated historical figures (Theodore Kaczynski), reflecting an internal pull toward social withdrawal and nature isolation.
>
> **4. Sympathy (Latent/Functional):** Retains passive empathetic presence ('I just stay by their side silently'), showing that core capacity for connection remains intact despite verbal suppression.

3.3. Systemic Impacts of Broken Home Dynamics

The broken home environment impacted FRL through interconnected internal and external socio-psychological vectors:

1. Internal Vectors: FRL exhibited deep self-concept degradation, stating, 'I feel like my value is completely gone... I am a bad person.' This internal devaluation caused academic demotivation, resulting in a severe drop in grades.

2. External Vectors: Domestic dysfunction directly disrupted four essential family functions: (a) Educational (loss of academic guidance); (b) Socialization (exposure to shouting and aggressive conflict at home, which FRL internalized and replicated); (c) Affective (emotional neglect following his father's remarriage and stepfather pressure); and (d) Protective (inability of the family to buffer against school bullying).

4. Discussion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that broken home dynamics fundamentally alter an adolescent's social interaction structure, causing a pronounced shift from associative adaptation to dissociative self-defense. In alignment with classical sociological frameworks, social interaction requires stable psychological readiness. When domestic breakdown compromises an adolescent's core security, associative processes like cooperation and genuine accommodation collapse, giving way to reactive conflict and emotional withdrawal.

Comparing these findings with existing literature reveals vital conceptual alignment and critical nuances. Similar to findings by Burhanuddin (2024) and Sunarsih & Sunarti (2020), adolescents from broken homes frequently experience profound social barriers, low self-esteem, and elevated contravention. However, whereas Kusuma & Asri (2023) observed varied peer

adaptation mechanisms, this study highlights how concurrent school bullying acts as a severe multiplier, compounding domestic trauma and accelerating total social withdrawal.

Theoretical implications of this research underline the imperative of evaluating family dysfunction through functional sociology. The complete breakdown of domestic affective and protective functions directly impairs the psychological prerequisites of communication. Furthermore, the persistence of latent sympathy and selective identification demonstrates that social disengagement in broken home adolescents is not an inherent trait, but a protective coping strategy against perceived social vulnerability.

> **Theoretical Contribution:** Demonstrates that adolescent social withdrawal in broken homes is driven by the structural breakdown of family protective/affective functions combined with external peer trauma.
>
> **Practical Guidance Application:** School counselors must move beyond individual student cognitive therapy. Interventions require systemic family psychoeducation, peer-support network integration, and robust anti-bullying enforcement.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that parental divorce and domestic dysfunction severely disrupt adolescent social interaction, driving behavioral transformation toward dissociative patterns, conflict vulnerability, and severe verbal communication suppression. Although basic capacities for sympathy and selective social contact persist, the absence of positive social suggestion and domestic protective buffering leaves affected students highly vulnerable in educational environments.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

The primary limitation of this study lies in its single-subject qualitative design, which limits direct statistical generalizability. Future studies should adopt multi-case comparative designs across diverse socioeconomic contexts and evaluate specific clinical counseling interventions (e.g., group play therapy or systemic family therapy) to quantitatively measure social interaction recovery in broken home students.

6. Reference

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