

## Characteristics of Children Experiencing Fatherlessness

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**Abstract:** Indonesia ranks third among countries with the highest number of fatherless children. The lack of paternal involvement in a child's life can lead to various long-term negative impacts. The consistent presence and involvement of a father figure plays a fundamental role in shaping a child's personal identity, enhancing social skills, and helping the child cope with emotional challenges. This study aims to explore the common characteristics found in children who experience fatherlessness, as well as how these characteristics are formed as a result of the absence of paternal involvement in parenting. The method used in this research is a systematic literature review by analyzing a number of scientific articles obtained through Google Scholar and ResearchGate using the keywords "Fatherless," "Child Characteristics," and "Indonesia." Based on relevance criteria, 10 journals were selected as the primary sources for analysis. The findings indicate that children experiencing fatherlessness tend to display characteristics such as difficulty regulating emotions, aggression, lack of empathy, low self-trust and trust in others, dependency, and high resilience. These characteristics are influenced not only by the absence of a father figure but also by parenting styles, modeling from the primary caregiver, and the child's social environment. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the impact of fatherlessness on child development and may serve as a foundation for designing psychological interventions to support fatherless children.

**Keywords:** fatherless, parenting, children

**How to Cite:** Rohmah, R., & Tobing, D.H. (2025). Characteristics of Children Experiencing Fatherlessness. *Intuisi: Jurnal Psikologi Ilmiah*. 17(1), 37-45

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.26714/intuisi.17.1.2025.37-45>

## Introduction

Indonesia ranks among the top 10 countries globally with the highest prevalence of "fatherlessness", a condition where the father is physically present but remains uninvolved in child-rearing (Rinaldi, 2020). Furthermore, Indonesia is ranked 3rd globally as a "fatherless country" (Sakti, 2017). UNICEF data from 2021 indicates that 20.9%, or approximately 2,999,577 out of 30.83 million children in Indonesia, lack a father figure. According to Prastiwi (2021), fatherlessness is defined as the absence of a father's physical or psychological presence during a child's development; even when present, the father may fail to optimally fulfill his paternal role. Fathers play a critical role in providing for the family, continuing the lineage, modeling behavior, offering affection, and providing direct care, such as skills training (Wahyuni, Siregar, & Wahyuningsih, 2021). This paternal role is irreplaceable by other figures, such as grandparents or professional caregivers (Nabila, Arifin, & Syam, 2025). Siswadi (2023) further defines fatherlessness as a condition where an individual grows up without a father figure due to death, divorce, or emotional and physical absence. Paternal knowledge regarding the importance of involvement in parenting remains low, often compounded by work-related time constraints (Asy'ari & Ariyanto, 2019).

In this study, fatherlessness is defined as growing up without a paternal presence. The absence of a father figure can adversely affect a child's self-confidence, courage, and mental health (Damayanti, Wahid, & Simanjuntak, 2023). Research also indicates that paternal absence, whether due to death, divorce, long-distance employment, or family conflict, can lead to disparities in psychological development (Zahra, Fitriani, & Yeni, 2024). Previous studies demonstrate that fatherlessness significantly impacts emotional

and social development, moral growth, self-concept, and self-control. These impacts ultimately shape the child's distinctive characteristics.

Fatherlessness resulting from divorce often limits a child to receiving affection from only one parent, which can hinder psychological development as the child matures. Meanwhile, fatherlessness due to paternal death can lead to the loss of a life model, family integrity, and a clear sense of direction (Nabila, Arifin, & Syam, 2025). The phenomenon is often driven by divorce or patriarchal culture. In Indonesia, patriarchal norms define strict gender roles, which frequently trigger discrimination (Elindawati, 2021). Octaviani (2023) notes that while women in Indonesia are often marginalized in education, they are simultaneously expected to be the primary educators for their children. Indonesian culture generally perceives childcare as an exclusively maternal duty, whereas men are solely responsible for financial provision (Oktaviani, 2021). Consequently, patriarchy is intrinsically linked to the high rates of fatherlessness. Additionally, divorce cases increased by 15.31% between 2021 and 2022 (Statistics Indonesia [BPS], 2022), directly contributing to the fatherless phenomenon. In 2022, 12.72% of Indonesian households were headed by women (BPS, 2022), indicating that a significant number of children are developing without paternal involvement.

During the "golden age," children possess immense developmental potential, making it the ideal period to instill character values (Cahyaningrum, Sudaryanti, & Purwanto, 2017). Characteristics refer to the unique traits, lifestyles, and values that develop consistently within an individual, making behavior more predictable and observable (Kadir, Ningsih, & Qadrianti, 2021). Erik Erikson's (1950) theory of psychosocial development posits that experiences in each life stage influence the resolution of future crises. In the Trust vs. Mistrust stage, secure attachments and parental affection, including from the father, are vital for developing self-confidence. Erikson argued that fathers provide a unique role model distinct from mothers, helping children understand their place in the family and society. Conversely, father absence can disrupt the Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage, where children should develop a sense of control over their environment. This disruption often stems from a lack of stable behavioral modeling and paternal support. Paternal-maternal relationships are foundational to child development (Kholifah, 2018), and paternal attachment significantly influences emotional intelligence (Ramadhanti, Agustin, & Rachmawati, 2021). Higher paternal attachment correlates with better emotional intelligence, enabling children to recognize and manage emotions, show empathy, maintain motivation, and build healthy relationships.

Active paternal involvement is crucial for physical, emotional, social, and moral development, as well as identity formation. Consistent paternal presence enhances social skills and helps children navigate emotional challenges (Amalia et al., 2022; Majid & Abdullah, 2024). In contrast, children without a father figure often lack direction, exhibit lower levels of responsibility, and face challenges in social integration and identity formation (Damayanti, Wahid, & Simanjuntak, 2023).

Given these multifaceted impacts, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is necessary to conduct an in-depth analysis of the characteristics that emerge in children experiencing fatherlessness and to understand how these traits are formed. By synthesizing existing literature, this study aims to raise social awareness, particularly among fathers, regarding their vital role. Ultimately, this SLR serves as an effort to increase paternal motivation for active involvement and to foster more positive father-child relationships.

## Method

This study was conducted using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. The SLR approach allows the researcher to identify and examine journals through a structured process, following established protocols at each stage (Triandini, Jayanatha, Indrawan, Putra, & Iswara, 2019). This systematic review involves selecting and extracting data from scientific articles relevant to the topic. Specifically, this article presents the results of an SLR concerning the impact of fatherlessness on child development and characteristics.

The data sources for this literature review were obtained via the internet from research articles focusing on the characteristics of fatherless children, sourced from Google Scholar and ResearchGate. The search was conducted using the keywords "Fatherless," "Child Characteristics," and "Indonesia," restricted to the last five years (2021-2025). The selection of articles for this review adhered to the following inclusion criteria:

- 1) The research was published within the 2021-2025 timeframe.
- 2) The research variables directly pertain to fatherless parenting or fatherlessness.
- 3) The studies utilized qualitative research methods to ensure in-depth findings.

Furthermore, the selected articles were limited to full-text versions, excluding undergraduate theses (skripsi) and conference proceedings, and were restricted to those available for download. The review included articles published in both Indonesian and English. The complete selection process for the literature sources is illustrated in Figure 1.

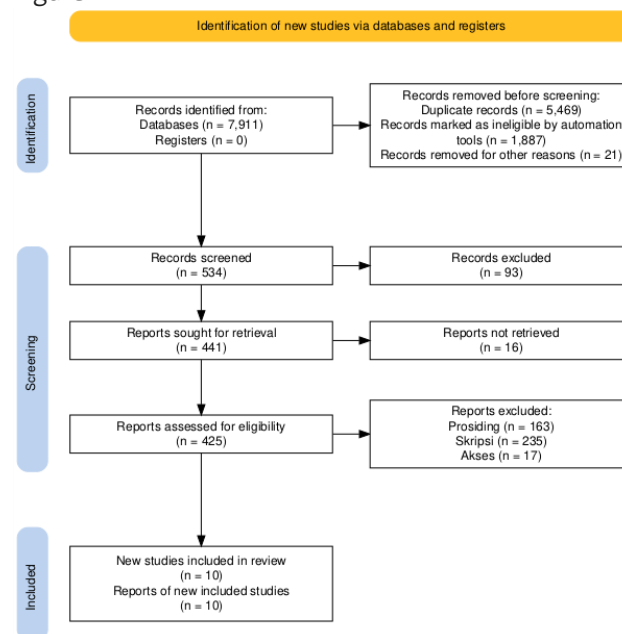


Figure 1. PRISMA Research Diagram

## Result and Discussion

The results of the systematic literature review (SLR) conducted on ten research articles, authored by Sobari (2022); Iskandar and Kertamuda (2023); Hadi, Hastuti, and Marthalena (2024); Utami, Rakhmat, and Zulkarnaen (2023); Nurjanah, Jalal, and Supena (2023); Noviantie (2024); Iskandar, Prasetyo, and Mulya (2023); Romadhon, Wijayanti, and Ikom (2023); Padang, Rindengan, and Naharia (2024); and Mutmainna, Ramadhana, and Amir (2023), are summarized in Table 1. All research articles analyzed in this SLR utilized qualitative research methods. Through this review, the author identified several characteristic patterns commonly observed in children experiencing fatherlessness. The following sections detail the findings synthesized from the literature sources included in this study.

Table 1. Literature Review Result

| Article Title                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Research Objectives                                                                              | Methods                                                                                                                             | Research Results                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sobari, M. M. (2022). Gambaran kemampuan self-control pada anak yang diduga mengalami pengasuhan fatherless. <i>Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education (JOIECE): PIAUD-Ku</i> , 1(1), 1-5. <a href="https://doi.org/10.54801/piaudku.v1i1.91">https://doi.org/10.54801/piaudku.v1i1.91</a> | To examine self-control capabilities in children experiencing fatherless parenting.              | Design: Qualitative case study<br>Subject: A 6-year-old male experiencing fatherlessness                                            | The findings indicate that self-control is significantly influenced by the family environment. The lack of paternal rule-setting meant the child struggled to understand boundaries and limits.                        |
| Iskandar, R. N., & Kertamuda, F. E. (2023). gambaran konsep diri pada pria dewasa awal yang mengalami fatherless akibat perceraian. <i>INQUIRY: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi</i> , 14(02). <a href="https://doi.org/10.51353/inquiry.v14i02.585">https://doi.org/10.51353/inquiry.v14i02.585</a>      | To investigate the self-concept of young adult males experiencing fatherlessness due to divorce. | Design: Qualitative case study<br>Subjects: One 22-year-old male and three informants.                                              | The subject reported feelings of guilt regarding sexual deviations and a lack of attraction toward the opposite sex, attributed to the lack of paternal involvement.                                                   |
| Hadi, F. H., Hastuti, E., & Marthalena, D. (2024). dampak fatherless terhadap kecerdasan sosial dan emosional. <i>ADAPTASI : Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Dan Keagamaan</i> , 1(1), 54–66.                                                                                                            | To determine the impact of fatherlessness on children's social and emotional intelligence.       | Design: Exploratory qualitative case study<br>Subjects: 10 female adolescents (comparing fatherless and non-fatherless conditions). | Fatherless children struggle to build relationships, exhibit lower social skills and self-confidence, and face difficulty understanding their own and others' emotions.                                                |
| Utami, N. D., Rakhmat, C., & Zulkarnaen, R. H. 2023. the impact of fatherless in the ability to control self-emotions in children. <i>Jurnal Pendidikan Amarta</i> , 2(2), 96-111. <a href="https://doi.org/10.57235/jpa.v2i2.638">https://doi.org/10.57235/jpa.v2i2.638</a>                     | To analyze the impact of fatherlessness on children's emotional self-control.                    | Design: Qualitative study<br>Subjects: Three children (fatherless due to divorce, death, or physical absence).                      | Paternal absence, particularly when the father is still alive but uninvolved, results in an inability to solve problems or regulate emotions. Subjects exhibited deep sadness, low confidence, and attention deficits. |
| Nurjanah, N. E., Jalal, F., & Supena, A. (2023). studi kasus fatherless: peran ayah dalam pengasuhan anak usia dini. <i>Kumara Cendekia</i> , 11(3), 261-270. <a href="https://doi.org/10.20961/kc.v11i3.77789">https://doi.org/10.20961/kc.v11i3.77789</a>                                      | To examine the father's role in early childhood parenting.                                       | Design: Qualitative case study<br>Subject: A 5-year-old child in Boyolali, Central Java.                                            | Findings show a total lack of paternal involvement, leading to poor father-child attachment, reduced independence, and behavioral control issues due to minimal interaction time.                                      |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Noviantie, A., (2024). Characters identifications of children who grow up without father's role. <a href="https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.28616.33287">https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.28616.33287</a>                                                                                        | To identify the characteristics of children growing up without a father's role in parenting.                   | Design: Descriptive phenomenology<br>Subjects: Toddlers, elementary-aged children, and high school adolescents.  | Fatherless children must work harder to regulate mental and emotional states than their peers. They tend to exhibit more aggressive defenses, stubbornness, and irritability.         |
| Iskandar, A. S., Prasetyo, E., & Mulya, H. C. (2023). Dinamika self-esteem pada emerging adulthood yang fatherless. Jurnal Psikologi Indonesia, 11(2), 173-197. <a href="https://doi.org/10.33508/exp.v1i12">https://doi.org/10.33508/exp.v1i12</a>                                           | To observe self-esteem dynamics (positive and negative) in fatherless emerging adults (divorce context).       | Design: Qualitative phenomenology<br>Subjects: Two 21-year-old males with a childhood history of fatherlessness. | Paternal absence negatively impacts self-esteem, manifesting as feelings of inadequacy. However, positive traits such as adaptability and resilience were also observed.              |
| Romadhon, A. E., Qoni'ah Nur Wijayanti, S. I., & Ikom, M. (2023). fenomena penolakan "afeksi" terkait hubungan romantisme (berkencaan) pada perempuan remaja akhir Jurnal Media Akademik (JMA), 1(1). <a href="https://doi.org/10.62281/JMA/v1i1.23">https://doi.org/10.62281/JMA/v1i1.23</a> | To explore affection rejection in romantic relationships among late-adolescent females raised without fathers. | Design: Qualitative phenomenology<br>Subjects: Four female adolescents with strong emotional ties.               | Fatherlessness significantly affects female adolescents, causing fears of rejection, betrayal, and being hurt. Subjects reported feelings of emptiness, loss, and identity confusion. |
| Padang, P. P., Rindengan, M. E., & Naharia, M. (2024). gambaran self acceptance remaja yang mengalami fatherless di matani satu kecamatan tomohon tengah. PSIKOPEDIA, 5(1), 65-72. <a href="https://doi.org/10.53682/pj.v5i1.8649">https://doi.org/10.53682/pj.v5i1.8649</a>                  | To describe self-acceptance among fatherless adolescents in Matani Satu, Tomohon.                              | Design: Qualitative phenomenology<br>Subjects: Two late-adolescent individuals (aged 21–22).                     | Self-acceptance levels varied; while one subject met all aspects of self-acceptance, the other had not yet fully accepted their circumstances or identity.                            |
| Mutmainna, N., Ramadhana, N., & Amir, Z. (2023). fatherless dan kekerasan seksual. Journal Psikologi Forensik Indonesia, 3(1).                                                                                                                                                                | To investigate the factors behind repeated sexual abuse in a fatherless context.                               | Design: Qualitative case study<br>Subjects: A 14-year-old female victim and her mother.                          | Fatherlessness leads to a lack of attachment and security, making the child overly trusting and prone to seeking attachment elsewhere, which increases vulnerability to exploitation. |

Based on the systematic literature review of the ten selected journals, the author identified that fatherlessness significantly influences child characteristics, specifically: emotional dysregulation, aggression, insensitivity, lack of self and social trust, diminished independence, and, conversely, high levels of resilience.

### Emotional Dysregulation

Research by Noviantie (2024) suggests that fatherless children, particularly those from divorced households, often struggle to regulate their emotions. These children must exert greater effort to achieve emotional control compared to their peers. When faced with adversity, they tend to focus on negative affects, such as sadness and resentment, rather than adopting a constructive perspective. Consequently, these children often manifest stubbornness and communication difficulties during conflict. This aligns with Prabawati's (2024) findings that the capacity for emotional management is inversely related to the child's sense of paternal loss; a higher sense of loss correlates with lower emotional regulation skills. Furthermore, Utami et al. (2023) noted that while children from divorce may resort to self-harm when experiencing anger or disappointment, those who lose a father to death or maintain long-distance relationships often exhibit better emotional control due to the internalisation of paternal advice.

### Aggression

Closely linked to emotional regulation, Noviantie (2024) posits that fatherless children may develop aggressive defense mechanisms due to the lack of a paternal figure to provide emotional scaffolding. This aggression manifests in both negative and positive emotional expressions; younger children may resort to tantrums, while adults may express anger through uncontrollable crying. In high-arousal positive states, children may exhibit excessive physical activity (e.g., jumping/running), while adolescents and adults may display uncontrolled laughter. Sobari (2022) attributes this aggressive behavior to a lack of paternal boundary-setting and discipline, which leaves children unaware of behavioral limits. This is often exacerbated if the remaining parent utilizes physical violence. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2024) demonstrated a positive correlation between the degree of fatherlessness and adolescent aggression, a sentiment echoed by Febriana and Situmorang (2019), who identified peer environments and self-esteem as contributing factors.

### Insensitivity

Hadi et al. (2024) found that fatherless children frequently experience difficulty identifying and understanding emotions within themselves and others. This "insensitivity" often stems from a lack of paternal emotional validation, leaving the child unable to recognize their own affective states. Utami et al. (2024) support this, noting that dual-parent involvement enhances a child's responsiveness to their social environment. As Sakinah (2022) suggests, social-emotional sensitivity is a developmental milestone that requires consistent cultivation from early childhood to ensure optimal interpersonal functioning.

### Lack of Self-Confidence and Social Trust

A pervasive characteristic identified is a deficit in both self-confidence and trust in others. Children often suffer from low self-esteem as they compare their family dynamics to "harmonious" households, a feeling that persists into emerging adulthood (Iskandar et al., 2023). This is supported by Erikson's (1963) Psychosocial Theory (Trust vs. Mistrust), which emphasizes that paternal protection and affection are vital for a child to perceive the world as a safe place. Romadhon et al. (2023) observed that fatherless female adolescents often exhibit "affection rejection," feeling anxiety and fear in romantic relationships due to deep-seated mistrust and fear of betrayal. Conversely, Widyastuti et al. (2023) found that some fatherless children become overly trusting and "attachment-hungry," seeking a father figure in others. This heightened vulnerability makes them significantly more susceptible to sexual exploitation and crime due to an inability to establish healthy boundaries.

### Diminished Independence

The absence of a father negatively impacts the development of autonomy. Research indicates that fatherless children often exhibit suboptimal independence, remaining heavily reliant on the mother for

daily tasks (Fajarrini, 2021). While fathers typically encourage risk-taking and initiative, mothers may sometimes adopt more protective or authoritarian styles that inadvertently stifle a child's initiative. However, results are mixed: Mardiyah (2020) found that some fatherless women become exceptionally resilient and independent, while Padang et al. (2023) observed a dichotomy where one subject was highly self-reliant while another remained dependent on others for decision-making.

### High Resilience Levels

Despite the challenges, fatherlessness can also foster high levels of resilience. Iskandar et al. (2023) found that by emerging adulthood, many individuals choose to fulfill their affiliation needs by developing a strong, independent sense of self. These individuals often adopt a "never-give-up" attitude, solving problems independently as a result of their past experiences (Iskandar & Kertamuda, 2023). According to Santrock (2007), high resilience is characterized by successful adaptation to one's environment. For fatherless children, this resilience is often forged through positive interactions with peers and organizations outside the family unit, which serve as essential protective factors (Shaifudin & Naimah, 2021).

## Conclusion

The results of this systematic literature review indicate that children experiencing fatherlessness tend to develop specific characteristics, including emotional dysregulation, aggression, insensitivity, a lack of self and social trust, diminished independence, and high resilience.

Emotional dysregulation in these children is largely driven by a profound sense of paternal loss. Aggressive tendencies often emerge because children lack a supportive paternal figure to anchor their emotions, compounded by a lack of household rules that would otherwise help them internalize behavioral boundaries. Insensitivity occurs when fathers fail to validate a child's feelings, leaving the child unable to accurately identify their own emotions or those of others. Furthermore, deficits in self-confidence and trust in others stem from the lingering sense of loss and the tendency to compare their own family dynamics to more "harmonious" households. While diminished independence is often linked to authoritarian maternal parenting in the father's absence, the high levels of resilience observed suggest that a lack of trust in others can, paradoxically, motivate children to develop self-reliance and solve problems independently.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its structured mapping of the characteristics of fatherless children based on a synthesis of ten recent research articles. However, a notable limitation is that this review does not yet differentiate between various forms of paternal absence, whether due to parental separation, death, or emotional and psychological disengagement.

The implications of these findings underscore the vital importance of the father's role in character formation, serving as a call to action for parents and child development practitioners to prioritize paternal involvement. Consequently, future research should delve deeper into how specific types of paternal absence distinctly influence psychological development to provide more targeted interventions for children in these conditions.

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