

# Social Support for Post-Divorce Role Readjustment

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## Abstract

Divorce causes changes in social roles and relationships both in the family and in the society. Readjustment requires greater attention and effort, especially by women, regarding the socio-economic impacts it causes. This research aims at explaining the forms of family social supports and social networks for post-divorce role readjustment. A qualitative approach was used by conducting in-depth interviews with eight deliberately selected participants who had experienced the divorce in the last one to three years and they had children. Social support from family and social networks have a significant positive impact on the post-divorce readjustment process. Key findings highlight that emotional, practical, and informational support and positive feedback play an important role in helping the individuals navigate their complex life changes after the divorce. Parents are the first parties to provide emotional support in the form of empathy, motivation, advice, and a place to share feelings as a form of self-acceptance for the children. Parents are also the source of material support to help finance living needs and child care. Support from social networks includes providing information about available resources or services and advice to overcome the post-divorce difficulties, but there is a relative lack of perceived support and positive responses. This research provides important insights with how social support can facilitate the post-divorce readjustment process and emphasizes the need to integrate the strategies for strengthening the social support into individual readjustment interventions.

## Keywords

divorce; social support; role readjustment

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## INTRODUCTION

Although divorce in Indonesia has a negative impact (Devi, 2019; Kusumawati, 2020), it still occurs frequently. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the divorce rate in Indonesia increased from year to year, except in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, when relatively few divorce cases entered the Religious Court. In West Sumatra, the divorce rate in 2022 was recorded at 8,967 cases, and 8,036 cases in 2023 (bps.go.id).

Divorce is not only the end of a marriage bond but also the beginning of a complex adaptation journey for the individuals involved. In this context, the role of social support becomes very important in helping individuals navigate the changes and adjustment to the post-divorce life. Chanda (2022) defines social support as resources available from social interactions and interpersonal relationships that aim to provide assistance, attention, and empathy to the individuals experiencing difficulties or significant life changes. In the context of divorce, the support from family, friends, and professionals is an important foundation in supporting individuals through the challenges that arise in the post-divorce readjustment process (Nazarifar, 2018; Barrera, 2019).

The post-divorce readjustment process requires maximum effort because of the complexity of the various causes of divorce. Research shows various factors that cause divorce, such as the absence of children, early marriage, ongoing conflict, drunkenness, gambling addiction, polygamy, domestic violence, cheating spouse, and psychological problems (Nafi & Al Amin, 2018; Fachrina, 2018; Canbulat, 2017; Khumas, 2015). The cause of divorce will influence the social support received after the divorce, such as divorce that occurs due to domestic violence, then victims of domestic violence tend to receive social support from various parties. The impact of divorce on women, economically, socially, and psychologically, is often exposed more than on other parties. Women often have to face additional responsibilities in caring for children and meeting daily living needs, as well as social pressure and

stigma related to widowhood (Parker et al., 2016). Therefore, a divorce is an important moment that drastically changes the life, with the readjustment process towards social roles and relationships being the main challenge faced.

In this context, the social support plays a key role in helping individuals overcome post-divorce difficulties. This support includes various forms of assistance, empathy, and social interaction provided by family, friends, and other social networks. Cobb (2000) emphasized that social support is not only about physical presence but also provides strength for individuals in facing trials and difficulties.

West Sumatra Province, with a majority Minangkabau community that adheres to a matrilineal kinship system, has its characteristics in providing social support to women after divorce. Kinship relations are very close in Minangkabau society. The strength of the relationship is based on shared goals and interests, namely the ownership of houses and land. Women live in an extended family kinship system and have an important role as guardians of inheritance and successors of the bloodline (Munir, 2015). Divorced women relatively do not need to worry about economic burdens because women are guaranteed with *pusako* property or land. Apart from that, there is also the value of nephews being the mother's responsibility (Yazid, 2014). Likewise, there is the term "*berdunsanak sehulu semuara*" for its members, which means "brothers by descent from the past until the end of time," with the principle that "tribes that cannot be mixed up, shame that cannot be shared with shame," is guided by the ethics of life, the basis for thinking and acting. Minang people's behavior, thereby, creating a high sense of solidarity within the kinship environment (Syahrizal and Meiyenti, 2012). Ideally, women will receive social support, especially from their families, both nuclear and extended families after the divorce.

However, changes in the structure of the extended family to the nuclear family occurred (Munir, 2015). The nuclear family is not as dependent as other family units on

a wider network of relatives. The existence of extended families tends to no longer support the continuity of the nuclear family life. The nuclear family relatively no longer receives assistance from the extended family and vice versa. Social control between the two also has a weak basis (Ihromi, 1999). With this assumption, do the divorced women receive post-divorce social support? Likewise, it is related to the negative stigma of widow status in society (Fachrina, 2013; Parker et.al, 2016). Does society also provide social support for them?

This is different from death divorce. According to (Goode, 2007), divorce due to the death of the husband or wife in every society is a relatively honorable divorce. After the divorce, the adjustment process tends to receive support both morally and materially from family and relatives as well as from the wider community such as neighbors, friends, and the community. All parties can be said to feel a strong moral responsibility to help. Goode further explained that if there is a dispute between the family and the in-laws/daughters-in-law, most tend to be put aside. Therefore, the form of divorce due to death is not faced with the complexity of post-divorce readjustment.

The role of social support for women after divorce still needs to be understood more deeply. This article aims to dig deeper into the dynamics of post-divorce social support, which is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the post-divorce readjustment process and become the basis for developing more effective interventions in supporting the post-divorce individuals in Indonesia.

Divorce is considered an attempt to get out of problems in marriage, seeking freedom and happiness (Fachrina, 2018). However, the divorce has a broad impact, not only on children and partners but also on other family members (Purwanto, 2020). However, divorce does not mean the end of everything, because there is still a bond between family members. Life must continue without the presence of a partner, which requires redefinition and adjustment to social roles and relationships.

Adaptation is the ability to live and interact with the environment, which is important for individual and environmental satisfaction (Ningrum, 2013). This adjustment continuously develops with changes in the environment (Runyon, 1984), with five characteristics of good adjustment, including perception of reality, ability to cope with stress, positive self-image, expression of feelings, and good interpersonal relationships.

The causes of divorce can affect post-divorce readjustment. Factors such as time after divorce, impact of the divorce decision, quality of the relationship, having children, and evaluation of marriage and divorce influence adjustment (Cabilar & Yilmaz, 2022). The breakdown of emotional bonds, feelings of loneliness, and the need to restructure parenting with ex-partners are issues relevant to adjustment. which can result in a positive or negative adjustment. According to Ahron, as quoted by Gulardi (Ihromi, 1999), the form of readjustment is also determined by the pattern of Relational Styles that are developed after the divorce, such as ex-partners as friends, as enemies or not friends and enemies.

Social support is needed in the post-divorce adjustment process. Social support, according to Bishop (Poegoeh & Hamidah, 2016), is the help provided by other people that increases positive feelings and overall well-being. Social support can be in the form of emotional support, appreciation, instrumental, information, perception, and positive responses from the people around them. This support helps minimize the psychological burden that can affect later life (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013).

Social support is a basic element that supports psychological stability, continuity of family function, and social interaction. According to Abbey et.al (2010) as quoted by Sawitri and Alfiasari (2022), "Social support can also affect subjective well-being. Social support can lighten the burden of problems individuals face to improve subjective well-being". This support can be physical or non-physical, coming from the family, social environment (friends, neighbors), and

community institutions, which positively influences problem resolution and recovery.

Cabilar & Yılmaz (2022) indicate that the reasons behind a divorce can also influence the post-divorce readjustment process. Factors such as the time elapsed since the divorce, the impact of the decision to divorce, the quality of the relationship that was severed, the presence of children in the marriage, and the evaluations of the marriage and divorce, all of these influence the adaptation after the divorce. Decreased emotional attachment due to loss of close relationships, feelings of loneliness due to declining social relationships, and the need to restructure parenting patterns with the ex-partner's parents are problems associated with adaptation. In addition Fatimah (in Fatchurahman & Saputra, 2021) stated that, physiological, social environmental, cultural, and religious factors have an impact on an individual's ability to adapt. According to him, adjustment can be positive when individuals can take advantage of new situations and meet their needs relatively well. Conversely, the adjustment can be negative when individuals have difficulty in adjusting to the change.

According to Cohen et al. (in Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010) defined social support as "the social resources that persons perceive to be available or that are actually provided to them by nonprofessionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships". Several dimensions of social support include emotional support, appreciation, instrumental, information, perception, and positive social responses to individuals experiencing divorce. Social support, both in emotional and instrumental form, provided by various parties, has a positive impact on family members in reducing their psychological burdens that can affect later life (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Resilience, the ability to recover from difficulties, is often obtained through support and help from the surrounding environment (Reitschlin et al in Taylor, 2015).

Social support is a basic need that acts as a support system for the continuity of family functioning, maintaining social

relationships, and maintaining psychological stability. Social support given by someone in the form of comfort, attention and assistance when needed to others will make him feel appreciated or loved. This support can be both physical and non-physical. A person can get social support from various social networks, including parents, relatives, friends, coworkers, and the community (Sarafino & Smith, 2012). Divide social support into three forms based on the closeness of the relationship. First, sources of support from people who are always there or together in everyday life, such as parents, relatives, and friends. Second, support from individuals who have fewer roles in daily life and may change over time. Lastly, social support from individuals who rarely provide support but have the potential to influence individuals, such as teachers or community leaders (Khan & Aftab, 2013).

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a focus on case studies. A qualitative approach allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences in dealing with divorce and their readjustment process. Therefore, informants were selected through the purposive sampling technique, namely informants were selected based on certain criteria that are in accordance with the research objectives (Afrizal, 2014). Informant criteria include women who have divorced within 3 years, have children, are Minangkabau ethnic group and still have parents or extended family members. The purpose of selecting this technique was to ensure diversity in divorce experiences and levels of social support received. Inclusion criteria included experiencing divorce in the last one to three years, having children, and receiving social support from various sources.

Data collection was carried out using primary data collection techniques, namely free in-depth interviews with 8 informants living in the city of Padang as the research location. Uninvolved observation is also car-

ried out to observe family conditions and role implementation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Questions in the interview focused on the experience of divorce, the type of social support received, and its impact on the readjustment process.

Data analysis was carried out using a qualitative approach. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns, themes, and categories in experiences of divorce and social support. This analytical approach allows researchers to understand the complexity and depth of individual experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Divorce is an official action to end a marriage bond, which can be done both according to religious law and applicable positive law (Ihromi, 1999; Fachrina, 2018). There was no one who hoped or wanted the divorce as part of their married life. However, in the journey of living together, many challenges and problems can be faced, which ultimately became the trigger for them to decide the divorce. Likewise with the informants in this study. The causes of a divorce are found to be very varied, namely disharmony in domestic relationships which arises from repeated arguments due to negligence in fulfilling obligations on the part of both husband and wife, such as husbands who are addicted to gambling, and domestic violence. Apart from that, there are also reasons for infidelity, the husband's practice of polygamy, and the husband leaving without giving any news. However, it is important to note that the decision to divorce here is rarely based on just one reason, but rather is the result of an accumulation of the various factors above (Pathan, 2015).

After a divorce occurs, the previously intact family structure, consisting of the father, mother, and children, becomes incomplete. In Minangkabau society, in general, children tend to go with or live with their mother or maternal relatives (parents), as was experienced by all informants in this study. As a result, they experience additional

roles, the roles of mother and father. They have to care for, educate, and fulfill the daily needs of the family more heavily because the role of the father, in the context of divorce in this study, tends to disappear. Some ex-husbands were found to also tend not to help meet their children's needs. In fact, as an ex-wife, she has basic rights after divorce, which should be the responsibility of the ex-husband, such as the rights to *mut'ah*, *iddah* living, and *Madhya* living (Islamic law compilation Article 149), likewise with the obligation to provide child support. According to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Prof. Dr. HM Syarifuddin, SH, MH, "Divorce decisions do not necessarily make it easier to deduct a portion of the ex-husband's income for the ex-wife's support and child maintenance allowance. As a result, women and children are vulnerable to being trapped in poverty and even vulnerable to becoming victims of crime."

For informants who previously had no income, they made adjustments by working to be able to meet their living needs after the divorce. Informant W runs a business making various cakes, while Informant S opens a shop at home selling necessities and food. There are also jobs in a salon and as a household assistant. Children are even asked to work selling fried foods at school and in shops to supplement their family income. For those who were working before the divorce occurred, such as informants Dm and Nl, they tried to save money, lower their standard of living, and even move to their parents' house as part of efforts to adjust to financial problems.

Apart from making adjustments by working to earn an income, the informant also gave more attention and affection to the child because of feelings of guilt and pity. They also do more activities both at home and outside. Apart from that, they also gather more often with friends and attend the events in the environment such as the *taklim* assembly—one informant, namely Ds, remarried after being widowed for approximately 2 years.

Apart from financial problems, informants also experienced changes in psycho-

logical aspects. Early in a divorce, the loss of a partner causes feelings of emptiness without someone to share with, as well as increased emotional responses to the situation, such as frequent anger with children or irritability by what parents say. However, they feel more “happy and relieved” compared to when they were still together as husband and wife. Freedom from existing problems and the ability to determine the next steps provide a sense of happiness and relief. Living without a partner is considered better than being in an unhappy marriage (Gulardi in Ihromi, 1999). In this context, informants tend to accept the situation with resignation and draw closer to God by increasing their worship, so that they can face post-divorce life more sincerely. As conveyed by one of Em’s informants, “there is no other way I can do it, I can only surrender to Allah, it is my destiny to be like this and I will live it as best I can to make myself and my children happy.”

When the decision to divorce must be taken and faced, various impacts arise, both for the divorcing couples and for the children. Various studies show that divorce has an impact on physical and mental health, finances, education, work, childcare, status, and roles in the family and society (Khan and Aftab, 2013; Luppacini & Saleh, 2017; Fachrina, 2018; Purwanto et al, 2020). Facing all of these things requires a readjustment process to the changes that occur after the divorce, as previously explained. Post-divorce adjustment cannot be done alone and requires support from both the family and the social environment

### **Social Support in Post-Divorce Readjustment**

In living daily life and rebuilding social relationships after a divorce, individuals expect social support. This support is important to assist in the process of adaptation and adjustment to the changing roles both in the family and community environment. This social support can take the form of assistance, both physical and non-physical,

which can be obtained from family members, friends, neighbors, and certain communities. The availability of social support can speed up the individual’s adjustment process after a divorce.

### **Support from the closest people**

One source of social support according to Khan & Aftab (2013) comes from the closest people around us in everyday life. This means that they are always there or together living life like parents (father, mother), siblings or those who are considered as parents, siblings and friends.

The first thing that informants hope for when facing the divorce is moral support related to feelings of comfort or convenience in living their next life. This comfort is expected through support from children and parents not to constantly question the reasons for the divorce, or blame the informant’s decision and doubt whether the informant can live a life after the divorce. By not discussing the issue, the informant feels free from feeling guilty. In general, at the beginning of their post-divorce life, informants received moral support in the form of parental acceptance of the decision to divorce and help provide suggestions and advice that did not question the divorce decision taken, especially from the family or parents. They realized that this decision was a personal matter and the informant’s right because they knew the informant’s marital life situation before the divorce. Only one informant, namely Um, felt that she was to blame for the divorce where the parents and children did not accept her existence. This informant left home leaving the children with her ex-husband.

Another moral support that research informants received was an attitude of caring. The caring attitude shown by children, parents, and friends. They respected the informant’s decision to divorce by not ridiculing the act of divorce. Children, parents, and friends still love and pay attention because they also understand what the informant has experienced in her married life. Likewise, with widow status, the informant did not feel that children, parents or friends

and neighbors gave negative views or attitudes. They treated the informant as usual as before the divorce. However, it was stated that informants were always advised and reminded by their parents to maintain their good behavior in daily activities, such as not dressing up excessively, staying at home more often or not traveling much for things that were not necessary, not being flirtatious when talking especially with men and so on. This is necessary for the informants to maintain a positive view of society towards themselves. The positive support received from family and community makes the informants more comfortable and confident. Be confident in your widow status by displaying positive behavior so that your family and society do not have a negative view of you. Self-confidence is also shown in independence in caring for, educating, and meeting children's life needs.

However, not all informants get this. As experienced by informant Um, a mother who had 3

children when she divorced. She revealed that her children still questioned the divorce even though they often witnessed arguments with their father. They also knew their father had another woman, but they didn't want their mother to separate. The children also did not receive care, especially when this informant decided to leave home and leave the children with their father. The family did not provide either moral or material support for the divorce that occurred. The in-laws' family still blamed the informant for leaving home, especially when it was discovered that she had remarried a year later. Likewise, her parents didn't seem to care because from the start of the marriage they didn't give their blessing and blamed her choice, so when the divorce happened they didn't respond. After the divorce, the informant did not receive social support, both moral and material. In fact, support was obtained from previous school friends. Her friend was willing to let her stay at her house temporarily and gave her a loan. The lack of social support obtained from the family in the early days after divorce slightly hampers the adjustment process. Lone-

liness and a sense of loss are often present, making this informant often lock herself in her room. However, the presence of friends who continue to provide support, especially encouragement and attention, makes her stronger and tries to get out of the situation. Working to help a friend's business and together fulfilling daily activities can ultimately make it easier to carry out life after divorce. As time goes by around 4 years after the divorce when the children start to become teenagers, the relationship with the children continues to improve. Communication with children is starting to develop and meeting children has become more frequent. One of the children, namely his first son, is already working and helping the informant financially.

Social support from friends as experienced by Um informants was not found in other informants. In this case, they feel reluctant to tell friends about problems related to their divorce. Besides that, they also tend to be less confident that friends can help. They even believe that it can cause other unexpected problems later if friends are involved, such as creating disharmonious relationships. Here a friend is believed to be someone who is only there when they are happy and not necessarily there when they are experiencing trouble.

In the case of informants who previously had no income and were completely financially dependent on their husbands, working became an alternative in dealing with the situation after a divorce. Working to meet living needs caused the informant to leave the children at home. Here parents assist in looking after or caring for children. Children are left at their parents' homes. As stated by informant NS, she had to leave her children to do a small business to earn some income because her husband had left home without news. Not only that, NS also received material assistance in the form of business capital from her mother and financial assistance to meet the children's needs, whereas after the divorce the children's father did not provide any assistance. The daily business of selling and caring for children can forget her feelings of loneliness over the

loss of her husband, so in the end she decided not to remarry until the time this research was conducted. Then Ns chose to live at her parents' house and now has a shop next to her house. The children have grown up, have finished school and some have gotten married even though their fathers are not there at all to come or meet the children. Yanasti et al (2021) call the husband leaving the house the term "*baganyi*". A tradition in Minangkabau, a husband's marriage can be caused by problems in his marital life that can no longer be resolved and if he wants to be picked up he has to do so according to custom. Normatively, husbands as *sumando people* in Minangkabau must be able to maintain their self-respect at the homelander so they do not get embarrassed. Women who stay *Baganyi* by their husbands and not go home to house their wives will have an impact on unclear marital status. According to state law, this woman can sue her husband for divorce (Nofardi, 2018).

When a divorce occurs, the informant experiences many things—starting from financial issues, childcare, and social relationships to matters related to psychological aspects such as being more emotional, stressed, and less confident. As the closest person, a warm welcoming hand, a loving embrace, and enthusiastic support from parents, in addition to material support, really helped the informant in the process of living life with children and family so that it was easier to get through the days without her husband's presence. The mother of one of the informants stated that she was very sad and sorry to see her daughter have to experience divorce in her life. Guilt was present in him due to the divorce because he was the one who introduced the man to his child even though at that time he did not insist on getting married. However, he realized that this was the fate his children had to face and asked them to stay at home so they could help their children through the difficult times after the divorce. Thus, all aspects of social support in the form of emotional support, appreciation, instrumental, information, perception, and positive responses were obtained from the parents of divorced

women. Where this support can help minimize the burden (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Positive support from parents is very helpful in the readjustment process so that you can then accept the conditions after the divorce and can also face problems positively. The best support is support obtained from the family (Smet, 1994)

However, the support from kinship members other than parents such as maternal brothers (*mamak*), maternal sisters (*bako*), and cousins was relatively absent from almost all informants. One of them is influenced by the change in the structure of the extended family to a nuclear family. The existence of a nuclear family where the father and mother are fully responsible for the continuity of the family shifts the role of the mother to the nieces and nephews. *Mamak* is only fully responsible for her own nuclear family. Nowadays *mamak* is positioned as a symbol in traditional ceremonies such as weddings. Likewise, in the divorce decision-making process, the extended family (*mamak*) is not involved and is only informed after the decision has been taken. In fact, according to research by Fachrina and Rinaldi (2013), extended families have the potential to prevent divorce.

#### **Social support from people who rarely give support**

The social support referred to here comes from people who tend to be very little involved in the informant's daily life. However, according to Khan & Aftab (2013), they have the potential to provide influence and support when someone needs it, such as from teachers and community leaders.

Social support in the form of acceptance from the community was obtained by informants in carrying on with life after divorce. The community where the informant studied religion, such as the *Taklim* assembly group, became a place to express feelings to the teacher (*ustadzah*). The informant admitted that the teacher could lighten the burden through advice, views, and suggestions of a religious nature. Informants more often engage in religious activities to get closer to God. This causes the informant to



slowly be willing and resigned to accept the situation caused by the divorce. This sincerity and surrender make the informant more confident and emotionally strong so that he has a positive perception of the divorce itself. As revealed by research by Ano and Vasconselles (2005) which stated that “religious values significantly influence adjustment to stress” “So in this case someone who divorced can optimize the religious aspect through community social support.

#### **Social support from a person has a smaller role in daily life.**

Furthermore, sources of social support are known to be obtained from people other than family and friends. However, in this study, social support from other people like the general public did not seem to be desired by the informants. The informant did not expect any social support from other people because problems related to life, especially post-divorce life, were not for other people to consume. As something private, this must be kept confidential and not known to other people. This study found that those who relatively rarely met and interacted with informants, namely residents in residential complexes or around the informant's house, did not provide support, especially morally. This was felt by informants from their attitudes. Negative attitude views were felt when neighbors saw the informant coming home after 9 o'clock, such as by asking “At this hour before you come home,” with body gestures that were perceived by the informant as if they were cornering them. The informant also experienced unpleasant behavior when one day she was talking in front of her house with a neighbor's husband, suddenly his wife immediately called him to come home. The informant considered silence and not suspecting the widow's status as a form of support in carrying out daily activities. Here the informant appreciates the support of other people in the form of efforts not to interfere in the informant's life by not showing a negative attitude.

From the results of the research as explained above, it can be said that the interactions that take place between ex-husban-

ds and ex-wives are dominated by the unity of the relationship which points towards a relationship style that is neither as enemies nor as friends. In general, social support in this research was obtained by informants from the family (parents). Likewise from friends and the community in the neighborhood where they live. The support obtained is based more on their view of divorced women as victims who experience various problems related to the impacts caused by divorce. The society also relatively no longer views divorce as something that is taboo. Today's society tends to tolerate divorce in a person's married life (Fachrina, 2018, Karim in Ihromi, 1999).

Divorce can also occur due to infidelity committed by the husband or wife (Fajri, 2017). Will social support also be received by women who are divorced due to their extramarital affairs? This research did not find informants who divorced due to cheating. It is hoped that further research can be carried out to explain this.

## **CONCLUSION**

Social support, especially for women, found in this study plays an important role in helping post-divorce adjustment. Research shows that strong emotional support from family, friends, and the surrounding environment can reduce the negative impacts of divorce, such as stress and feelings of loneliness. So is financial support and assistance in caring for children. However, this study also found that not everyone gets sufficient social support as expected. This slows down their adjustment process.

Therefore, the community and related institutions need to develop intervention programs that support the post-divorce adjustment process, such as access to services or socio-economic empowerment programs. With more targeted interventions and adequate social support, it is hoped that post-divorce they can overcome various challenges better

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