



Stress Coping Strategies of Students from Broken Homes

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ABSTRACT

The stress experienced by students from broken homes can impact their academic performance and problem-solving abilities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how stress coping strategies are used by students from broken homes. This study uses qualitative research with a phenomenological design. The research subjects consisted of students at junior high and senior high school levels, and had broken homes. A total of 4 subjects in the research area will be involved as participants, including students from junior high and senior high schools, both public and private schools, to obtain various perspectives and experiences. The data in this study were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The results of this study indicate that stress coping strategies used by students in this study include emotion-focused coping and problem focused coping. Both coping strategies are influenced by the presence of social support, personality characteristics, and the type of stressor.

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INTRODUCTION

Every married couple hopes for a harmonious marriage. However, some married couples fail to maintain the integrity of their marriage, which ends in divorce. Divorce is interpreted as the end of a marriage when a husband and wife have not found a way out of their problems that do not bring happiness to their marriage (Hurlock, 2011). Divorce in marriage does not only affect a husband and wife, but also affects the development of the child. Children who are victims of their parents' divorce are known as children who are victims of broken homes. In general, society assumes that children are said to be victims of broken homes if their parents are declared legally separated by the court, have separated residences, or in Islam, a divorce has been issued (Gul, 2017).

However, in several psychological theories, it is explained that children who are victims of broken homes are not only children whose parents are divorced either legally or religiously. Cracks in parental relationships that make the home atmosphere disharmonious and have an impact on the child's condition are also included in broken homes. Chaplin (2008) defines a broken home as a broken family or a household that is in disarray due to the absence of one or both parents due to divorce, death, or leaving home. Lestari (2013) adds that a broken home is a condition where a family is not harmonious and not in harmony, not peaceful, and not prosperous because there are often riots and disputes. So, it can be concluded that a broken home is a condition of a family that is not harmonious, cracked, and messy.

Children who are victims of parental divorce generally have problems in their psychological development (Schaan, 2019). This often appears at school as a result of the child's disappointment with their family situation. This condition certainly also has an impact on learning outcomes and their ability to solve problems. Based on the results of interviews conducted with guidance and counseling teachers in several schools, it was obtained that most students who have problems at school have

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broken home family conditions. On the other hand, school is a place where students receive education (Smith, 2002).

At school, students are taught to have good character such as discipline in time, attendance, obeying rules, studying in class and outside class, doing assignments, practicing, and others, all of which must be followed to create a quality generation in accordance with applicable regulations. The many activities of students at school will certainly create a burden or stressor for students (Mardatilla, 2025). Where at this phase parents have a very large role in accompanying their children through challenges in learning. However, not all students receive complete assistance from their parents, especially for students who are victims of broken homes (Haq & Khan, 2024).

Each individual has the ability to face different demands of life, including students. This ability is determined by personality characteristics, parenting patterns, past experiences, environment, and of course the type of problem being faced. The severity of the type of problem faced by an individual can be a stressor in itself. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984) stress is an interaction between an individual and their environment that is considered as something that can be dangerous. More clearly, Papalia (2001) added that stress is a process of assessing an event as a challenge, threat, or something dangerous, and also responding to the event. Each individual assesses a challenge with different perceptions. With the same stressor (source of stress), two people can have different responses and different abilities to manage stress. Likewise, students who have different abilities in facing demands both personal and academic (Mayo, 2012).

The ability to deal with stress itself is called stress coping. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define stress coping as a process in which individuals try to manage demands, both from themselves and from the environment, with resources used in dealing with stressful situations. Stress coping is divided into two, namely stress coping strategies by focusing on solutions to problems (problem focused coping) and stress coping strategies by focusing on managing emotions (emotion focused coping). Each individual has a different stress coping strategy. Problem focused coping is used when individuals try to find solutions to problems that cause stress so that the stressor is reduced (Riley, 2014). While emotion focused coping is used when individuals try to manage their emotions to accept the stressful situation (Baker, 2007).

Factors that influence stress coping ability according to Smet (1994) consist of internal and external factors. Internal factors include age, gender, ethnicity and culture, physical condition, economic status, and personality characteristics. While external factors include social support including from family, environmental conditions, and demands of responsibility. Several of these factors cause each individual in this case students to have different responses when responding to stressors. Responsibilities as students and developmental tasks as teenagers have their own stressors for students, which are added to by social support from families that are considered to have broken down, which adds to the stressors for students. Students with broken homes experience stressors in the form of academic, social, and parental demands. This situation certainly requires good stress management skills in order to carry out roles adaptively. How students survive amidst the many stressors and how stress coping is done.

Based on this explanation, the researcher is interested in analyzing how stress coping strategies are used by broken home's students, especially in facing their responsibilities as students, teenagers, and also as children whose families are considered to be broken.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses qualitative research with a phenomenological design. Qualitative research emphasizes descriptive data presented in sentences or stories derived from various data collection techniques (Creswell, 2014). This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences of students who

are victims of broken homes in carrying out stress coping strategies (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). A theoretical foundation serves as a guide to ensure that the research remains aligned with real-world findings.

Participant and Procedure

The research subjects consisted of students at junior high and senior high school levels, and had broken homes. The sample was selected by purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) students at junior high and senior high school levels, (2) variation in school background, (3) variation in age and gender, and (4) having broken homes. A total of 4 subjects in the research area will be involved as participants, including students from junior high and senior high schools, both public and private schools, to obtain various perspectives and experiences.

Data collection was conducted by directly engaging with the subjects, primarily through interviews. Procedures included obtaining informed consent regarding the confidentiality of the research subjects' identities, their willingness to participate, and obtaining permission from their parents and schools. The researcher-built rapport, asked open-ended questions, and encouraged reflection to gather in-depth responses regarding the subjects' experiences in managing stress. The names of the participants were disguised as a code of research ethics. The following are the participant demographics.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

No.	Initials	Age	Gender	Educational level
1.	R	15	Male	Private junior high school
2.	K	13	Female	State junior high school
3.	N	17	Female	State senior high school
4.	F	18	Male	Private senior high school

Research Instruments

The main instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. The questions were designed to explore the subject's behavioral patterns, emotional responses, and motivations during the interview process. Each interview is estimated to last for 60-90 minutes. Observation and document studies were also used as supporting instruments to enrich and validate interview data.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) based on the approach developed by Eatough & Smith (2017). IPA was chosen because this method allows researchers to understand the subject's experience in depth. Triangulation was also conducted to increase validity and gain a deeper understanding of the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Condition of Students' Families from Broken Homes

Based on the known interview results and document studies conducted on subject R, his teacher, and his grandmother, it is known that R has parents who separated since he was in 1st grade of elementary school. After the divorce, R lived with his father, but after his father married someone else, R decided to live with his mother. But not long after, his mother also married someone else. After two years, R's mother divorced her new husband again and decided to work abroad due to economic circumstances. Since then, R has been entrusted to his grandmother until now.

Meanwhile, for subject N, it is known that subject N has the same family conditions as subject R. Subject N's parents divorced when subject N was in 4th grade of elementary school. Subject N's father remarried a widow who already had children, so that subject N chose to live with her biological

mother. However, a few years later, subject N's mother also married another man. After her mother got married, the subject continued to live with her biological mother and stepfather. However, after 1 year of marriage, subject N's mother experienced problems that caused subject N's mother to decide to divorce again. After the divorce, subject N's mother went to work out of town, so subject N lived with his uncle and aunt. This data was obtained from interviews with subject N and his aunt.

Almost similar to subjects R and N, subject F also had parents who divorced when subject F was in 3rd grade of elementary school. Both of his parents have remarried to other people who also have children. Initially, subject F lived with his biological father and stepmother until subject F was in 8th grade of junior high school. However, after that, subject F asked to live with his grandparents until now. This data was obtained from interviews with subject F and his grandparents.

Different from the condition of subject K where her parents have not legally divorced. Another one that when subject K was in 5th grade of elementary school, her father and mother no longer lived together until now subject K is in 7th grade of junior high school. Currently subject K and her mother live with his grandmother in subject K's grandmother's house. Unlike the previous three subjects, subject K's father and mother have not remarried to other people until now. Subject K's father lives alone in her house and occasionally meets with subject K and subject K's mother. This data was obtained from interviews with subject K and his mother.

In accordance with the definition of broken home according to Chaplin (2008) who defines broken home as a broken family or a broken household due to the absence of one or both parents due to divorce, death, or leaving home. In addition, Lestari (2013) also added that broken home is a condition where a family is not harmonious and not in harmony, not peaceful, and not prosperous because there are often riots and disputes. Based on this opinion, it can be said that the four subjects in this study were students who were victims of broken homes.

This study shows that each subject has a different family condition. Subjects R, N, and F are children who are victims of broken homes where they found that both of their parents were legally divorced. Subjects R, N, and F have parents who have divorced where their father and mother have each remarried to someone else. Subjects R, N, and F are also raised by their grandmother and siblings. While subject K lives with her mother because her father and mother have not remarried to someone else. This is also influenced by the condition where the father and mother of subject K have not legally divorced.

Stressors Experienced by Students from Broken Homes

Based on the results of interviews and observations conducted with subject R, it is known that there are various stressors faced by subject R. These stressors come from family and school. Stressors from the family itself consist of several things, the first is that subject R feels burdened by his parents' decision to divorce and remarry someone else. Subject R feels that both of his parents are quite selfish by prioritizing their own feelings without considering R's feelings.

In addition, subject R also feels very disappointed because subject R's mother remarried a man who is not liked by subject R without subject R's consent. Subject R stated, *"My mother is selfish, she didn't ask my opinion about her new husband"*. Subject R also feels ashamed of his mother's socially unfavorable nature. Subject R has met his father, but according to subject R, his stepmother did not show a pleasant attitude because R had asked for pocket money and subject R's father gave him Rp. 20,000 because he did not have any money. Subject R feels confused and sad because he does not know who to ask for money to go to school. Subject R once helped his father work in a workshop to get pocket money of Rp. 10,000 – Rp.20,000,- /day if subject R comes to the workshop where R's father works. However, R admitted that it was quite tiring because after school he had to work to get pocket money from his biological father. The second stressor for subject R was his grandmother's character who was quite strict and often brought up the mistakes of subject R and subject R's parents. Subject R felt that he was often compared to other grandchildren and was considered a burden to

his grandmother. According to subject R, her grandmother behaved differently from her other grandchildren.

Meanwhile, according to subject R's grandmother, subject R's mother often caused trouble and brought shame to the family. Subject R's grandmother said "*Subject R's mother has often brought shame to the family since long ago*". The next stressor was obligations at school. Subject R admitted that there were no special difficulties that he encountered at school, it was just that subject R felt confused and sad when the school invited parents to a meeting and take care of school needs. According to the teacher and guidance and counseling teacher at school, subject R often had difficulty concentrating on assignments and activities at school. Subject R felt sad because his mother could not attend since working abroad, while subject R's father was considered less concerned about subject R's school affairs. R also felt that he did not have a place to complain like his other friends when there was a school assignment that required the role of parents.

Almost similar to the stressors experienced by subject R. Subject N also admitted that the most common stressor she encountered was family stress. According to subject N, difficulties in her life were often due to the absence of his parents. Subject N even said that she did not want her mother to accompany her if she ever got married because according to her, her mother was very selfish and made her feel ashamed. Subject N also felt disappointed with her father who did not visit her when she was hospitalized.

The next stressor experienced by subject N was her presence in her uncle and aunt's family. She felt like a burden because she often heard her uncle and aunt arguing. According to her, one of the causes of the frequent arguments she had with her was herself. However, subject N had no other choice but to stay with her uncle and aunt. According to subject N, stressors from school were not too many. She could still participate in activities and do assignments. However that sometimes she was confused when her mother could not send pocket money and made the subject reluctant to tell her uncle. In addition, subject N felt sad because her parents were never present and were always replaced by her uncle.

The stressors faced by subject F also came from his family, especially his parents. Since childhood, subject F was mostly cared for by his grandmother, but after his father and mother had their own families, subject F's father asked him to live with his father. However, subject F felt that his stepmother did not treat him fairly and prioritized his stepbrother. This made the subject uncomfortable and chose to live with his grandmother. The relationship between the subject and his grandmother was like the relationship between a child and his mother. Subject F comfortably asked his grandmother for what he needed. However, subject F felt uncomfortable at home and preferred to look for a boarding house.

According to him, he felt stressed if he met relatives or other people at home who always asked about his parents' condition. The subject also felt sad and angry every time there was a family event that made him feel embarrassed and wanted to be alone. He had encountered stressors from school when he was in 10th grade of high school where he almost failed a class because he often skipped school and his grandmother didn't know. Subject F secretly worked to earn extra pocket money. F's brother admitted that his grandmother had met his needs including when asking for a vehicle. However that F was tempted by the job offer that could add to his pocket money.

Subject K has stressors that are also almost similar to the three previous subjects. Subject K once witnessed her father and mother fighting to the point of physical violence. She felt very sad, stressed, and scared. Subject K lives with her mother and does many activities with her mother. It's just that subject K often feels embarrassed when many people ask about her parents' relationship plus many people ask about her parents because she has responsibilities with several people that have not been completed. This condition makes subject K prefer to be alone in her room and avoid other family members during family events and holidays. To help her and her mother's financial condition, subject K helps her mother sell food at school that he brings from home. In terms of

education costs, subject K is greatly assisted by her father's family, however, subject K still feels unhappy when meeting her father because she is still disappointed with her father's treatment of her mother.

At school, subject K was worried when she was going to enter junior high school. She was one of the prospective students who could not be accepted because of the zoning of the place of residence. Subject K's mother tried so that subject K could attend a public school so that she did not have to pay tuition fees. In the end, subject K was successful in being accepted into a public school through the achievement path. During the learning process at school, subject K received a lot of help from her mother in doing assignments and participating in extracurricular activities at school.

Papalia (2001) explains that stress is a process of assessing an event as a challenge, threat, or something dangerous, and also responding to the event. Based on the results of interviews conducted with the four respondents in this study, it can be concluded that students who experience broken homes face more stressors from the family. The four subjects felt sad, angry, disappointed, and stressed when they found their parents separated.

In line with research conducted by Ardilla & Cholid (2021) which shows that psychologically children who experience broken homes will feel disappointed, sad, depressed, and selfish. In subject R, the role of the grandmother also added to the stress for subject R because she often complained with negative sentences about subject R's parents. Subject N also felt that the frequent quarrels between her uncle and aunt made her feel guilty and depressed. Meanwhile, in subjects F and K, the role of the family who cared for them was basically considered very helpful, it's just that other relatives who often brought up the condition of subject F and K's parents made subjects F and K feel stressed, embarrassed, and uncomfortable at family events.

In line with research conducted by Kusuma, et al. (2025) that social support, especially from the family, has an influence on the stress levels of children who experience broken homes. While stressors originating from school were not felt much by the four subjects. It was just that in subject R it was known that he often had difficulty concentrating so that subject R was often late or did not convey information at school. The four subjects considered that the difficulties encountered at school were due to the absence of parents in helping the four subjects.

Stress Coping Strategies Used by Students from Broken Homes

In dealing with stressors, subject R often uses an emotion-focused coping strategy where he prefers to remain silent and tries to accept the source of his stress. When subject R was disappointed with his mother's choice of stepfather, subject R did not try to express his dislike but chose to remain silent and accept it. Likewise, when he received a reprimand from his grandmother, he chose to go into his room. When there was an assignment and information from school, subject R was often late in conveying it to his grandmother so that the subject's grandmother had to seek help from other relatives or neighbors. When facing stressors, he often diverted his annoyance by meeting his friends. Subject R also began to respond to stressors with negative coping, he admitted that he had tried smoking with his friends. Currently, subject R is used to buying cigarettes secretly every time he feels upset and often just follows his friends. Subject R feels more accepted by his friends than by his family.

Slightly different from the stress coping carried out by subject N, where subject N tends to apply problem focused coping in responding to stressors. Subject N admitted that in the past she often kept her problems to herself because she did not dare to express them. However, lately she began to learn to find a way out of her problems. She often received advice from her uncle and aunt who took care of her to convey her difficulties and seek help. She often asked for help from her uncle and aunt when she felt in trouble. She explained that her uncle and aunt had helped her a lot, and this made subject N feel like a bother to her uncle and aunt. Subject N is committed to repaying the kindness of her uncle and aunt who have taken care of her. Subject N also helps a lot with housework

to help her aunt. It can be concluded that the stress coping carried out by subject N leads to the search for positive solutions.

The stress coping strategies carried out by subject F also lead to problem focused coping. However, for some things, subject F chooses to avoid stressors. Based on the results of interviews conducted with subject F, guidance and counseling teachers, and subject F's grandmother, it is known that subject F will try to find a way out if the stressor encountered is related to his goals. Such as in choosing a school, subject F will try to find information to be able to attend the school he wants. Subject F also once told his uncle and aunt who live in his grandmother's house that he is not comfortable with his stepmother and asked for help with several things such as replacing his smartphone and shoes. He also tries to earn money by working part-time. However, for stressors related to family, subject F tends to avoid problems. Such as when there is a call from his parents to come to school, subject F keeps it a secret so that his parents and grandmother do not know about subject F's problems at school.

In addition, subject F also always looks for reasons with activities outside the home and chooses to live in a boarding house to avoid relatives who often come to his grandmother's house. Subject F tends to be in the boarding house more often and often has to be contacted by his grandmother to come home. Subject F prefers to spend time with his friends rather than at home. He also admitted that he has been used to smoking since he met his friends who also have parents from broken homes. According to him, meeting his friends can distract him from stress. When subject F is at home, he often chooses to be in his room when other people come, including during Eid. He only chooses a few families that he thinks he should meet. Subject F feels that often people who meet him mostly ask about his parents and this makes him stressed and feels cornered so he chooses to avoid them. Based on this, it can be concluded that the stress coping strategy carried out by subject F is influenced by the type of stressor he faces. He does problem focused coping if it is beneficial and has demands of responsibility, while those related to family he tends to avoid.

Meanwhile, subject K more often uses emotion-focused coping in responding to stressors. Subject K is a person who tends to be introverted so she often keeps his problems to herself. She also feels unhappy meeting many people who also often ask about her parents' condition. Subject K often cries in her room whenever she feels disappointed and sad. According to her, this method is safer than telling other people and asking for help. Often she only gets advice and is blamed when she tells his story. When subject K gets a lot of homework at school, she tends to be less motivated to complete it which is then done by his mother. She has less effort to find solutions to the tasks she has to complete. It can be concluded that subject K uses emotion-focused coping strategies when facing stressors.

Based on the interview results from the four objects in this study, it can be described in this table 2.

Table 2. Stress Coping Strategies of Participants

No.	Initials	Source of stress	Stress coping strategies
1.	R	Family and social environment	Emotion focused coping
2.	K	Family and social environment	Emotion focused coping
3.	N	Family and social environment	Problem focused coping
4.	F	Family and social environment	Problem focused coping

Based on the results in the table above, it is known that all subjects in this study have sources of stressors originating from the family, in this case parents and family who care for them, as well as from the social environment such as relatives and people around the subject's residence. Sources of stressors originating from school were not found in the four subjects in this study. The difficulties faced by the subjects at school were caused by the absence of a role from parents who helped the

subjects participate in activities at school. Then, the stress coping strategies used by the four subjects in this study were different.

Differences in stress coping strategies are influenced by several things such as the type of stressor faced, personality characteristics, and support from those closest to them. These factors are in accordance with the opinion of Smet (1994) who explains that stress coping strategies consist of internal factors including age, gender, ethnicity and culture, physical condition, economic status, and personality characteristics. While external factors are social support including from family, environmental conditions, and demands of responsibility. However, there is no fundamental difference in gender factors, where male and female subjects show the same stress coping strategies.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the influence of the social environment has a very large influence in helping students develop good stress coping strategies. The results of the study conducted by Fitria & Barseli (2021) also showed that family contributions and support can provide motivation for students from broken homes. The results of this study indicate that the stress coping strategies used have been positive, such as in subject N who carried out problem-focused coping by seeking help to deal with his stressors. However, the other three subjects still showed negative stress coping strategies such as avoidance or avoiding problems that cause stress and engaging in negative behavior such as smoking at school age.

The results of this study can be used as an illustration for guidance and counseling teachers in assisting students from broken homes where guidance and counseling teachers can provide counseling that directs good stress coping strategies so that students can still excel in school. Broken home students must still get the same opportunities in education even without full support from both parents so that concern and understanding from the family, environment, and school have an important role. The results of this study also show that it is important for parents to maintain a good relationship with their children even though they have decided to separate from their partners.

This study certainly has limitations that need to be considered by subsequent researchers such as in novelty. Research related to broken home children has been done a lot. It's just that this study focuses on broken home children who live with relatives and is seen from the perspective of children as students who have responsibilities at school. So that subsequent researchers can enrich the study by exploring the role of guidance and counseling teachers in directing broken home students to more positive stress coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions that have been described above, it can be concluded that the stress coping strategies used by students in this study include emotional focused coping and problem focused coping. Where both stress coping strategies are influenced by the existence of social support, personality characteristics, and types of stressors faced. These results indicate that as parents, families, and social environments can provide support to children from broken homes by not bringing up their parents' problems and providing positive support so that children from broken homes can be more comfortable in their living environment. Teachers at school, especially guidance and counseling teachers, can provide guidance to form a healthy personality and train problem solving for broken home students so that they can be better at dealing with various types of stressors and developing positive stress coping strategies.

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