

Building Resilience in a Child of Divorce: A Single-Case Study on Positive Psychological Interventions

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Abstract: *This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of positive psychological interventions in enhancing resilience among children of divorced parents in a rural, low-education context. A qualitative case study was conducted with a 13-year-old male participant from North Bengkulu, Indonesia, who had experienced parental divorce since early childhood. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interventions included gratitude journaling, hope building, positive self-affirmation, and enhancement of social relationships. Findings demonstrated improvements in resilience across four domains: (1) emotional regulation, shifting from destructive to adaptive emotional expression; (2) optimism, moving from pessimism toward setting small academic goals; (3) self-efficacy, progressing from negative self-image to increased confidence through positive affirmation; and (4) social relationships, developing from social withdrawal to active peer engagement. These results indicate that positive psychological interventions are effective in strengthening resilience in children from divorced families. The study contributes to filling a gap in research on the application of positive psychology for children of divorced parents in rural areas, with implications for designing culturally sensitive psychological support programs.*

Keywords: *Resilience, Positive psychology, Children of divorced parents, Psychological*

interventions, Emotional regulation

Introduction

Parental divorce is a critical event that can significantly affect the psychological development of children in the long term. According to Amato (2019) and Hetherington & Elmore (2019), children who experience parental divorce often face various psychological issues, including emotional instability, academic difficulties, and social problems. UNICEF (2021) further emphasizes that children of divorced parents are more likely to experience issues with emotional regulation and difficulties in building healthy social relationships. Furthermore, inconsistent parenting, whether permissive or authoritarian, exacerbates these issues, leading to negative effects on their emotional and social development (Khaleque, 2018). Secondary data shows that more than 50% of children who experience parental divorce in Indonesia exhibit a decline in academic performance and difficulty in social interactions (Badan Pusat Statistik Republik Indonesia, 2020).

The participant in this study is a 13-year-old male adolescent who has experienced parental divorce since early childhood. Initial interview results revealed that he was raised in an environment with inconsistent parenting—on one hand, his father allowed unrestricted use of gadgets, while his mother imposed strict rules. This inconsistency caused confusion and tension within the child, leading to significant emotional and academic challenges. This highlights the importance of consistent parenting in supporting the psychological development of children from divorced families.

The main issues faced by the participant include difficulties in emotional regulation, pessimism regarding his abilities, and a tendency to withdraw socially. Dubowitz & Lane (2020) state that emotional instability and poor emotional regulation are common outcomes for children raised in inconsistent parenting environments. Furthermore, alternating between permissive and authoritarian parenting exacerbates these issues, as found by Coyne & al. (2021) and Khaleque (2018). In addition, studies by Leppanen & al. (2020) show that uncertainty in parenting styles often contributes to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression in children.

It is critical to address these issues, as failure to do so may lead to more severe mental health disorders, such as depression or anxiety, as well as difficulties in forming healthy social relationships. Research by Masten (2021) shows that children who do not receive psychological intervention may experience long-term issues, including struggles with building self-confidence and positive interpersonal relationships. A study by McMahon & al. (2022) also emphasizes that without appropriate intervention, children of divorced parents tend to face emotional and social challenges that hinder their psychological development. Therefore, this study is crucial in understanding the potential to enhance resilience through positive psychology interventions.

Several studies have examined the effects of parental divorce on children, but few have focused on the application of positive psychology to strengthen their resilience. Waters & al. (2021) found that positive psychology interventions, such as gratitude journaling and self-affirmation, were effective in improving the well-being of children in various contexts. In Indonesia, Dickens (2022) demonstrated that positive psychology can improve self-efficacy and emotional regulation in adolescents, although research specifically targeting children of divorced parents in rural areas remains limited. Additionally, Seligman & al. (2005) emphasized the importance of positive emotions and strengths-based approaches in improving children's resilience. Research by Hendriks & al. (2020) in their meta-analysis highlighted the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions in building resilience and well-being in children and adolescents facing high-stress situations, including parental divorce. Studies by McMahon & al. (2022) and Leppanen & al. (2020) support the importance of providing psychological support to children of divorced parents, suggesting that interventions focusing on hope, optimism, and self-affirmation can improve emotional regulation and foster better social connections. Murniasih & Irvan (2023) further emphasized the role of social support and self-efficacy as mediators in the resilience-building process, showing that positive psychology interventions can offer significant

improvements in emotional well-being. Additionally, research by Uruk (2019) and Azizah (2020) identified hope and forgiveness as key resilience factors in children of divorced parents. Studies by Richards & al. (2021) and Khaleque (2018) demonstrated that consistent and supportive parenting is essential in mitigating the adverse effects of divorce on children's psychological and social development. However, despite these findings, there remains a clear gap in research specifically focusing on the application of positive psychology interventions in children of divorced parents, especially in rural settings with inconsistent parenting styles.

While many studies have examined the effects of parental divorce on children, there is a lack of research specifically investigating the effectiveness of positive psychology interventions for children of divorced parents in Indonesia, particularly in rural settings with inconsistent parenting. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the application of positive psychology interventions with a male adolescent facing a combination of permissive and authoritarian parenting. This research will provide new insights into how positive psychology interventions can enhance resilience in children from complex family backgrounds.

This study aims to examine the impact of positive psychology interventions in enhancing resilience in children of divorced parents, specifically in the areas of emotional regulation, optimism, self-efficacy, and social relationships. The hypothesis of this study is that positive psychology interventions can strengthen resilience in children by improving emotional regulation, optimism, and better social relationships, ultimately supporting the psychological development of children from divorced families.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design with a positive psychology intervention approach. The case study method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's subjective experiences and the changes in resilience that occurred during the intervention process (Creswell, 2018). This approach enables the researcher to explore psychological dynamics in real-life contexts, particularly for adolescent children of divorced parents with complex parenting backgrounds. Case studies are particularly effective for exploring individual experiences and understanding how specific interventions impact personal development and resilience (Yin, 2018). This method is appropriate for investigating the emotional and psychological journey of an individual in a complex family environment, allowing for detailed exploration of changes over time.

Participants

The participant is a 13-year-old male, a seventh-grade student, who has experienced parental divorce since early childhood. Following the divorce, the participant initially lived with his father and older brother until third grade. During this period, he experienced permissive parenting, where his father focused primarily on providing financially and gave

the child significant freedom, including unrestricted use of gadgets. This permissive approach resulted in minimal emotional attention and educational guidance from his father. Since fourth grade, the participant has lived with his mother, who has implemented an authoritarian parenting style characterized by strict control and harsh reprimands, particularly related to excessive screen time. This difference in parenting styles has caused tension within the child, as he faces ambivalence between the freedom given by his father and the stringent demands from his mother.

The participant was selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) aged 12-15 years, (2) experienced parental divorce at an early age, (3) resides with one parent after the divorce, and (4) exhibits signs of emotional adaptation difficulties, such as irritability, social withdrawal, and low self-esteem.

The participant's unique characteristics strengthen the rationale for a single case study. He comes from a rural area, where his parents' divorce was triggered by the inappropriate use of social media. Furthermore, both parents have low educational levels, limiting their ability to provide optimal emotional regulation and parenting literacy. The complexity of these factors makes the participant's case highly relevant as a representation of contemporary issues in rural families affected by divorce, thus supporting the justification for using a single-case study to deeply explore his experiences.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in a rural village in North Bengkulu Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. This location was chosen because it represents a rural setting with distinct socio-economic characteristics, such as limited access to formal education, low parental digital literacy, and strong local cultural influences on child-rearing practices. These conditions reinforce the complexity of the participant's experience, as he faces not only the psychological impacts of parental divorce but also structural challenges such as a lack of educational support, poor quality of parenting due to family resource constraints, and exposure to digital media without parental control. The choice of this location is also relevant to the research aim of understanding how positive psychology interventions can enhance resilience in children in psychosocially vulnerable conditions. Focusing on rural areas highlights that the issue of children of divorced parents is not limited to urban areas but also occurs in regions with limited resources.

Intervention Procedure

The intervention utilized a multi-component positive psychology approach, which included gratitude journaling, hope building, positive self-affirmation, and positive social relationship exercises. The details of the sessions are as follows:

1. Session 1: Building Rapport & Psychoeducation

The researcher explains the purpose of the intervention, builds trust with the participant, and introduces the concepts of positive emotions and resilience

2. Session 2: Gratitude Journaling

The participant is asked to write three positive things every day. The goal is to increase awareness of positive experiences and reduce the focus on feelings of rejection.

3. Session 3: Hope Building

The participant sets short-term goals (e.g., improving performance in a specific subject) and outlines the steps to achieve these goals.

4. Session 4: Positive Self-Affirmation

The participant engages in exercises involving positive self-statements, such as "I am capable of facing challenges." The goal is to enhance self-efficacy and self-confidence.

5. Session 5: Positive Social Relationships

The participant practices peer interactions, discusses assertive communication strategies, and reflects on their social interactions at school.

6. Session 6: Reflection & Evaluation

The participant reflects on the changes they have experienced, discusses the challenges faced during the process, and formulates strategies for maintaining positive habits in the future.

Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

Data were collected through:

1. Direct Observation during the intervention sessions to assess the participant's behavior, emotional responses, and engagement with the intervention activities.
2. Semi-structured Interviews conducted with the participant before and after the intervention to gather qualitative data on their emotional experiences, perceptions of the intervention, and changes in resilience.
3. Reflection Notes written by the participant regarding their experiences during the intervention. These notes were analyzed to provide further insight into the participant's emotional and cognitive responses to the intervention.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis process involved transcribing the interview data, coding the data for key themes, identifying patterns in the responses, and interpreting the findings. Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for qualitative research as it allows for the identification of themes across data sets, facilitating the interpretation of complex emotional and psychological experiences. The study adhered to ethical principles, with informed consent obtained from the participant's mother. The participant's identity was kept confidential through the use of a code. All intervention procedures followed the ethical principles of beneficence, respect for autonomy, and non-maleficence (Association, 2017).

Result and Discussion

Initial Condition of the Participant

The participant is a 13-year-old male, currently in the 7th grade, who has experienced parental divorce since early childhood. The divorce was triggered by marital conflict due to the parents' improper use of social media, which deteriorated communication and trust between them. From kindergarten to third grade, the participant lived with his father, who employed a permissive parenting style. His father focused primarily on providing financially, while essential parenting needs, such as education, study guidance, and emotional attention, were almost entirely neglected. The father only provided pocket money and unlimited access to gadgets. The participant stated: *"My father never asked me if I went to school, as long as I got money and could play on my phone as much as I wanted."*

This lack of control had a negative impact on his academic and social development. The participant often skipped school, rarely completed assignments, and almost failed to pass to the next grade. He even relied on neighbors for transportation to school, as his father never took him there.

On the other hand, the relationship with his mother was strained. While working out of town, his mother could only call to inquire about his school progress. However, communication was mostly limited to harsh reprimands as the information received from his teachers indicated frequent absenteeism. The participant interpreted this as his mother not caring for him: *"When my mom calls, she's always angry. It feels like she only knows how to yell, never says she loves me."*

Since fourth grade, the participant has lived with his mother. While his mother's parenting provided more control over his education, her style was authoritarian. She often scolded him for excessive screen time or neglecting his schoolwork. The participant viewed this situation as evidence of his mother's lack of love. His class teacher described him as bright but lazy, easily upset, and prone to isolation.

The parenting experiences of the participant, characterized by his father's permissive approach and his mother's authoritarian style, reflect an imbalance that can impact emotional and social development. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), instability in parenting can lead to disruptions in forming secure emotional attachments. The permissive parenting of the father and the authoritarian approach of the mother create conflicting expectations that contribute to the child's emotional confusion and vulnerability, aligning with the findings of Khaleque (2018) and Hetherington & Elmore (2019).

Life Journey Dynamics

Analysis of the interview and observation data reveals that the permissive parenting from the father during early childhood instilled harmful habits, such as unrestricted screen time, poor self-regulation, and low academic motivation. The participant himself stated: *"Back then, my father didn't care if I studied or not, as long as I was happy. So, I got used to playing on my phone all the time."*

When he moved to live with his mother, he was faced with an authoritarian parenting style. The frequent scolding and intense anger made him feel pressured rather than motivated. As a result, he found himself in an ambivalent situation: accustomed to living freely without rules, but now forced to face strict control.

This tension was evident in his daily life: he often resisted his mother's scolding, preferred playing games over doing homework, and was reluctant to engage in social activities. His class teacher commented: *"He's actually smart, quick to respond when he wants to. But he often chooses to stay silent, sit alone, even during group discussions. He gets easily offended when reprimanded."*

Furthermore, the rural environment and low educational level of the parents worsened the situation. The lack of understanding regarding healthy parenting meant that neither parent had the skills to support the child's psychological development. In this condition, the participant showed vulnerability in emotional regulation, self-confidence, and socialization abilities.

This ambivalent situation highlights the imbalance in parenting that could hinder resilience development in the child. According to resilience theory (Masten, 2021), individuals facing challenges in parenting can still develop resilience if provided with supportive interventions to develop emotional regulation and coping skills. The conflicting parenting styles experienced by the participant hindered his ability to develop resilience, but positive psychology interventions could help improve his ability to adapt and manage emotions.

Positive Psychology Intervention Results

The positive psychology intervention was conducted over several sessions, including gratitude journaling, hope building, positive self-affirmation, strength spotting, and improving social relationships. Thematic analysis of the data revealed significant changes, although these changes were not yet fully stable.

Emotional Regulation

Before the intervention, the participant tended to express negative emotions destructively, such as throwing his phone, shouting, or withdrawing. He stated: *"When I'm scolded, my head feels hot. I can't stand it, so I throw things."* Through gratitude journaling, he learned to express emotions through writing rather than actions. Initially, he found it difficult because he felt writing was "boring." However, after being encouraged to write three things he was grateful for every day, he began to feel relief after expressing his emotions.

"Now, when I'm angry or sad, I write it down first. I don't get angry right away. After writing, I feel a bit better."

The participant's mother observed a noticeable change: *"Before, when he was angry, he would throw his phone. Now, when he's upset, he grabs his book. I see, his emotions calm down faster."*

This change occurred because the participant found a safe way to channel his emotions, something neither parent had taught him. However, observations also revealed that old habits occasionally resurfaced, especially when he faced harsh scolding from his mother.

This change in emotional regulation aligns with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory (2001), which suggests that positive emotions can broaden thinking and enhance self-regulation abilities. Gratitude journaling has been shown to reduce destructive behaviors by shifting attention from negative emotions to positive experiences (Dickens, 2022).

Optimism and Hope

The participant initially exhibited a pessimistic attitude toward school, often thinking he "could never be smart." He said: *"I thought learning was useless, I can't be like my friends."*

Through hope-building sessions, he was encouraged to set small, realistic goals, such as completing homework before playing games. These small targets helped him feel more confident.

"Now I try to do my homework first, then play. If I can submit it on time, I feel so happy, like I can actually do it."

The class teacher confirmed the change in behavior: *"He's starting to make an effort. Though he's still sometimes late, he's showing more frequent submission of assignments. That's a big improvement for him."*

Optimism grew as the participant realized he could achieve small goals. However, he still needed external encouragement, such as praise from his teacher or mother, to remain consistent. This indicates that the optimism developed is still in its early stages. These findings support hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which posits that clear goals with well-defined paths can enhance motivation and academic perseverance. The participant began to develop hope and self-confidence through small achievements, although external support was still needed to maintain this optimism.

Self-Efficacy

Negative self-image was a major issue before the intervention. He often referred to himself as "stupid" and "lazy." Through positive self-affirmation exercises, the participant learned to replace negative self-talk with positive statements. Initially, he felt strange and unsure, but over time he began to accept these positive affirmations.

"Before, I often called myself stupid. But now I try saying, 'I can change, I can be better.' Sometimes I still doubt it, but it makes me feel more motivated."

Additionally, through strength spotting, the participant discovered that he had a talent for drawing. This discovery gave him new motivation: *"Turns out I can draw well. So when school gets hard, I remember I have other things I can do."*

The teacher also noted an increase in his self-confidence: *"Now he's more willing to go to the board, though he still stutters. Before, he always refused."*

This intervention successfully improved his self-efficacy by replacing negative narratives and identifying his strengths. However, he still felt insecure when faced with failure, indicating that continued support was necessary (Smith & al., 2018).

These findings align with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), which asserts that self-efficacy is strengthened through small successes and verbal encouragement. Positive

self-affirmation and strength spotting help foster self-efficacy by shifting the participant’s self-narrative to a more positive view of himself.

Positive Social Relationships

Before the intervention, the participant often isolated himself, sat alone during breaks, and avoided joining groups. He admitted: *“I’m lazy to talk, afraid of being laughed at. It’s better to just play on my phone.”*

Through the social relationship intervention sessions, he learned basic skills, such as starting conversations with greetings or initiating small talk with peers. Initially, it felt awkward, but later he felt more comfortable.

“Now I try greeting first. Turns out my friends respond well. It’s not as bad as I thought.”

The teacher added: *“He’s starting to join small group discussions. Although he’s still quiet, he no longer refuses. That’s a positive development.”*

This change indicates that simple interventions can lower social barriers for the participant. However, he still struggled to engage in larger group settings, indicating that the process of strengthening social relationships needs to continue. This change in social relationships is consistent with psychological well-being theory (Ryff, 2014), which emphasizes that positive relationships are an essential dimension of psychological well-being. Social relationship interventions strengthen interpersonal skills and improve social interactions, which, in turn, enhance resilience (Umemura & al., 2022).

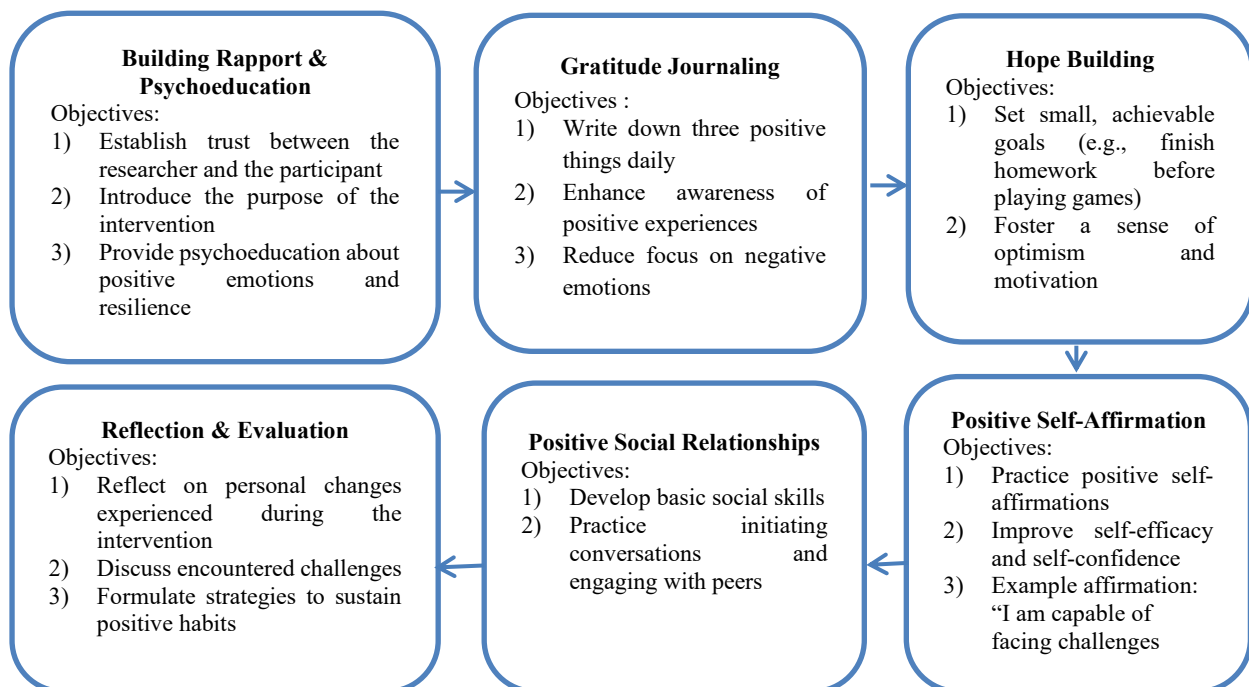


Figure 1. Research Intervention Process

Source: Research Findings, 2025

Explanation of the Figure 1 :

- 1) **Building Rapport & Psychoeducation:** In this session, the researcher introduces the purpose of the intervention, builds trust with the participant, and explains the concepts of positive emotions and resilience.
- 2) **Gratitude Journaling:** The participant writes down three positive things every day to enhance awareness of positive experiences, reducing focus on negative emotions.
- 3) **Hope Building:** The participant sets small, achievable goals (such as completing homework before playing games) to foster optimism.
- 4) **Positive Self-Affirmation:** The participant practices affirming statements like 'I am capable of facing challenges,' aiming to increase self-efficacy.
- 5) **Positive Social Relationships:** The participant learns social skills such as initiating conversations and engaging with peers.
- 6) **Reflection & Evaluation:** The participant reflects on the changes they have experienced, discusses challenges, and formulates strategies for sustaining positive habits.

Research Implications

This study has practical implications for parents, teachers, and psychologists. Parents need to balance control with affection, avoiding extremes of permissiveness and authoritarianism. Schools and educators can implement positive psychology strategies in counseling programs and classroom activities to strengthen resilience, particularly for children from divorced families. Psychologists and educators can also adopt positive psychology interventions as an alternative counseling model for adolescent children of divorced parents.

The study reinforces resilience theory as an adaptive mechanism and positive psychology theories, such as broaden-and-build (Fredrickson, 2001) and hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which emphasize the importance of emotional regulation, optimism, and self-efficacy in enhancing resilience.

This research highlights the need for social policies that prioritize child welfare, especially in promoting mental health and social-emotional development. Educational and social institutions in rural areas should incorporate positive psychology interventions into counseling programs and child welfare services.

Research Limitations

This study is limited by the small sample size, with only one participant, and the relatively short duration of the intervention. Therefore, further studies with larger sample sizes and longer intervention periods are needed to validate and strengthen the findings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that positive psychology interventions effectively enhance resilience in children from divorced families, particularly in emotional regulation, optimism, self-efficacy, and social relationships. Despite inconsistent parenting, children

can still adapt through positive emotional experiences, highlighting the practical value of such interventions in supporting mental health in Indonesia. The findings align with international literature, showing that resilience in children of divorced parents can be fostered by focusing on strengths rather than deficits. For future research, larger and more diverse samples across different cultural contexts are recommended to strengthen the generalizability of findings. Practically, the study suggests integrating positive psychology approaches into school counseling, encouraging parents especially in rural areas to apply strengths-based parenting, and guiding policymakers to design mental health programs tailored to the needs of children from divorced families.

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