

The Role of Family Functioning in Shaping Meaning in Life Among Children of Divorced Parents

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Abstract. Life after parental divorce is interpreted differently by each child depending on the quality of family functioning. This research aims to explore how family functioning influences the meaning of life for children of divorced parents. The study involved a sample of 176 participants, selected through purposive sampling based on the criterion that they had divorced parents. A non-experimental quantitative regression analysis was employed as the research method, utilizing the Family Assessment Device ($\alpha=0.828$) and the Meaning in Life Scale ($\alpha=0.720$). The results indicate that family functioning significantly impacts children's sense of meaning in life, with an R^2 value of 34.3%. These findings suggest that children's perceptions of parental interactions particularly affection, social support, and communication contribute to their sense of life's meaning after divorce.

Keywords: Children of Divorced Parents, Family Functioning, Meaning in Life

1 Introduction

Marriage is a significant and sacred stage in human life that establishes a binding connection between individuals. It unites not only a man and a woman as husband and wife, but also their families. According to Burgess and Locke, several criteria can measure the success of a marriage, including the longevity of the union, the happiness of both partners, marital satisfaction, sexual adjustment, marital adjustment, and the overall unity of the couple [1]. Differences in background, age, and education should not serve as barriers, provided both individuals are willing to accept and adapt to the dynamics of domestic life. This adaptability is crucial for building a strong and quality family [2].

According to Indonesia's Law No. 1 of 1974, marriage is defined as an inner bond between a man and a woman, within the context of husband and wife. The law defines marriage as a means to build a happy, lasting family grounded in spiritual values. Marriage also provides emotional closeness and access to economic and social resources. Additionally, marriage offers emotional and physical closeness as well as access to various economic resources. According to Shahabdi and Montazeri, marriage is an important event in a person's development [3], this is because marriage can help individuals in terms of emotional maturity, especially in terms of self-control and how to express emotions. So that this emotional maturity can help married couples to adapt during marriage. While many people perceive marriage as a sacred bond meant to endure for a lifetime, the reality of married life often does not align with these expectations. Many couples face various challenges that can lead to the breakdown of their relationship. Common factors

contributing to divorce include economic stress, infidelity, and incompatibility between partners [4]. This highlights that a healthy marriage requires effort and commitment from both individuals.

Divorce is the result of a court ruling that ends the marital bond at the request of one of the parties in the relationship. Etymologically, the "divorce" derives from the Latin word meaning "to separate." In a legal context, divorce refers to the formal termination of marriage. According to Law Number 7 of 1989 concerning Religious Courts and the Compilation of Islamic Law, there are two forms of divorce: talaq divorce and contested divorce. Talaq divorce occurs when the husband submits a petition to the Religious Court to divorce his wife. In contrast, contested divorce happens when the wife files a lawsuit in court to end the marriage [5].

In Indonesia, divorce has become a pressing social issue in recent years. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the divorce cases in Indonesia reached 408,347 in 2023, marking an 8.88% decrease compared to 2022, when there were 448,126 cases. In 2024, divorce registrations fell by another 2.06%, with West Java recording the highest number of cases 88,985 [6]. Most divorces stem from ongoing disputes and quarrels, which remain a significant factor behind divorce in 2024. This trend raises concerns about family resilience in Indonesia, as dissatisfaction in marriage can also motivate couples to divorce even in the absence of conflict [1].

The impact of divorce extends beyond the couple; it also profoundly affects their children. Just as married couples often dream of a harmonious family life, children hope for a stable family environment where they receive the love and attention they need from their parents. A harmonious family environment is crucial for a child's emotional well-being [7]. Moreover, changes in family structure and the dynamics of family interactions can significantly impact children when their parents divorce. According to Kisworowati, when a family transitions to a single-parent household, that parent must adapt to their new responsibilities as the family leader [8]. Therefore, both mothers and fathers need to foster healthy communication with their children after a divorce. Through effective communication, children can feel loved and supported, even in the wake of their parents' separation. This interaction is what, in a functioning family, is often referred to as positive interaction.

Family functioning, according to the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF), occurs when each family member fulfills their basic responsibilities effectively. With the support of normative values, communication, and social support, this can create a positive environment for every family member [9]. However, children respond differently to their parents' separation. Those who initially felt loved and appreciated due to their parents' roles may experience new feelings when faced with the decision to live with one parent after a divorce. Each child interprets life after their parents' separation in unique ways, a process known as finding meaning in life. Finding meaning in life refers to how a child interprets and appreciates the painful events they have experienced, such as their parents' divorce. This concept encompasses the child's ability to respond to the divorce and changes in family dynamics, their efforts to achieve meaningful life goals, and their ability to think positively and adaptively after encountering difficulties stemming from their parents' divorce.

Children experiencing their parents' divorce often feel as though they are carrying emotional burdens that are not their responsibility. They need to learn to let go of guilt and reassure themselves that their situation will improve over time. Research by Afdall et al. indicated that some teenagers were able to find gratitude in these challenging experiences, which helped them

stay motivated and discover new meaning in life [10]. However, not all children respond positively to divorce. Research by Musifuddin and Aturrohman shows that parental divorce can lead children to feel a loss of meaning in life, emptiness, and a lack of direction [11]. Children in this situation tend to be more sensitive, irritable, and struggle with emotional regulation. Therefore, the process of restoring meaning in life after a divorce often requires significant time and strong emotional support from the surrounding environment.

Given these observations, researchers are interested in exploring how family functioning influences the meaning of life for children with divorced parents. This study is important because, despite numerous discussions on these two variables, there has not yet been specific research focusing on the impact of family functioning on the meaning of life for children of divorced parents. This research aims to provide deeper insight into how the external environment after a divorce can affect children's search for meaning in life. Thus, this study hypothesizes that family functioning significantly influences the meaning in life among children of divorced parents.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Family functioning

Family functioning according to The McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) is a condition where the mother, father, and child can effectively perform their basic roles and responsibilities. These basic tasks are such as the role of the father as the breadwinner and protector of the family, the role of the mother in caring for and guiding the child, and the child's duty to respect and obey their parents. With the help of normative values and communication and social support obtained, it can create a positive life for each family member [9].

From here, it can be concluded that family functioning is an important factor that must be possessed by a family, this is because it can affect individual development. This influence often manifests in the transmission of cultural, religious, and ethical values that come from different environments that can help individuals adapt in society. According to Bell, Dubas & Petersen, these instilled values are expected to have a long-term influence on individuals, especially during emerging adulthood [12].

2.2 Aspects of family functioning

Based on The McMaster of Family Functioning theory family functioning consists of six dimensions and one General Functioning scale that assesses the overall level of family functioning [13]. The 7 main dimensions of family functioning are;

- a. **Problem Solving.** Refers to a family's ability to resolve problems (those that threaten its integrity and functional capacity) at a level that maintains effective family functioning. In this context, how children resolve problems after their parents' divorce will influence their relationship with their parents.
- b. **Communication.** Communication serves as a solution to problems faced. Communication serves as a way to convey attitudes and feelings to family members. The willingness of both parents to communicate with their children, such as speaking honestly with them and listening to their concerns, can influence how children communicate with others, whether peers or extended family.

- c. **Roles.** Family roles refer to the behavioral patterns established by family members to fulfill family functions. Each family member has clear roles and responsibilities within the family, including the child. A healthy family is one with a clear and appropriate process for distributing and implementing responsibilities. This means that the willingness of the father and mother to fulfill their roles, such as loving, providing for, and accepting the child, will influence the child's relationship with their parents.
- d. **Affective Responsiveness.** Effective families are able to freely express and demonstrate their emotions. One example is the ability of parents to respond appropriately to various stimuli and feelings expressed by children after their parents' separation, whether they respond appropriately or not. A well-functioning family means that all family members have the ability to express a variety of emotions, and the emotions displayed are appropriate to the context of the situation.
- e. **Affective Involvement.** Affective involvement refers to the level of attention and concern family members have for various activities and other matters between them. Affective involvement among family members is the extent to which parents show interest and appreciation for their children's activities and interests after their parents' divorce. It focuses on how much and in what ways parents demonstrate their interest.
- f. **Behavior Control.** Behavioral control refers to the various ways in which behavior is controlled in different family situations. This behavior focuses on standards and values within the family, regarding patterns or habits for handling the behavior of family members in the following three areas, namely, physically dangerous situations where the family needs to maintain and control the behavior of its members, situations that include educating psychological needs and drives such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, and the last situation that involves the interpersonal socialization behavior of family members and with others. In this case, it means that both parents must provide extra supervision to their children even though they live in different places, this is done so that children do not do bad things that may be caused by the child's emotional desires after the separation of their parents.
- g. **General Functioning.** Refers to how children assess the overall health conditions or problems in their family after their parents' divorce.

2.3 Meaning in life

King et.al explains that meaning is a condition where an individual views his life as having a purpose and meaning that is not trivial or momentary [14]. Meaning in Life according to Viktor Frankl is a condition where an individual shows attitudes and behaviors that reflect how he can understand and accept the painful conditions that have been experienced according to his personal perspective [15]. When individuals have difficulty finding the meaning of life, it is usually associated with emptiness and apathy [16] Furthermore, Schnell explains that meaning in life is a search for goals that must be carried out by individuals, so that it can give rise to subjective assessments of the presence or absence of meaning in life that the individual has [17].

2.4 Aspects of meaning in life

Meaning In Life according to Frankl has three dimensions [18], namely :

- a. **The Freedom of Will.** The child's ability to take a stand against divorce situations and changes in family dynamics. This attitude reflects the child's freedom of will in determining emotional and social responses to these changes.

- b. The Will to Meaning. Children's efforts to achieve meaningful life goals, despite facing difficulties. They seek meaning in the experience of divorce and maintain hope for the future. With this effort, children will find meaning after their parents' divorce.
- c. The Meaning of Life. Children's ability to show the meaning of their lives through positive and adaptive thinking in managing emotions and building healthy relationships after facing various difficulties in their parents' divorce.

3 Method

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative design. This study aims to examine the influence of family functioning on the meaning in life among children of divorced parents. The sample in this study amounted to 176 people who were obtained using a purposive sampling technique with the criteria being that participants were aged 15 to 46 years and were individuals whose parents had legally divorced. The data obtained were then analyzed using a simple linear regression test.

The family functioning variable in this study was measured using the Family Assessment Device Scale developed [13]. This scale consists of 35 items presented in a 4-point Likert scale format, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). The validity test was carried out using the Corrected Item-Total Correlation technique, with the results of the validity coefficient ranging from 0.153 to 0.588, which indicates that all items are declared valid. Furthermore, the reliability test was carried out using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and obtained a value of ($\alpha = 0.828$) which indicates that this measuring instrument has good reliability. This scale consists of 22 favorable items (for example: "We can handle all family problems well") and 13 unfavorable items (for example: "Our family finds it difficult to plan an activity because there are always misunderstandings between us").

For the meaning in life variable, the researcher developed an instrument based on Viktor Frankl's Meaning in Life theory, by following the scale construction stages according to Azwar. First, the researcher decreased from the conceptual definition to the operational definition of each aspect of Meaning in Life. Furthermore, from each aspect, the researcher developed two indicators. After obtaining 6 indicators, the researcher then formulated six question items for each indicator, consisting of three positive items (favorable) and three negative items (unfavorable). Thus, the total items generated were 36.

Furthermore, these items were tested through expert judgment by experts in the field of psychology to ensure content suitability. After obtaining approval from the experts, the researcher conducted data distribution testing, after obtaining the desired participants the researcher used SPSS to analyze the validity and reliability of the instrument. After testing the data using the corrected item correlation technique, the validity coefficient ranged from 0.186 to 0.461. Based on these results, only 28 items meet the validity criteria and are declared suitable for use in research. The reliability test on the meaning of life scale also uses the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a value of ($\alpha = 0.720$) which consists of 17 favorable items (for example: I always get social support from my extended family) and 11 unfavorable items (for example: I feel hopeless facing my parents' divorce). With these results, it can be concluded that the two measuring instruments in this study meet the valid and reliable criteria that are suitable for data in analyzing the influence between variables, using parametric analysis methods.

This scale consists of 28 items presented in a 5-point Likert scale format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Like the Family Assessment Device Scale, the Meaning in Life Scale has also been tested for validity using the corrected item correlation technique, with validity coefficient results ranging from 0.186 to 0.461, indicating that all items are declared valid. The reliability test on the meaning in life scale also uses the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a value of ($\alpha = 0.720$) consisting of 17 favorable items (for example: I always get social support from my extended family.) and 11 unfavorable items (for example: I feel hopeless in dealing with my parents' divorce.). With these results, it can be concluded that both measuring instruments in this study meet the valid and reliable criteria which are worthy of being used for data in analyzing the influence between variables, using the parametric analysis method.

4 Result

The results of this study involved 176 respondents with the criteria for children who have divorced families. The characteristics of the research respondents were grouped based on gender, age, and duration of their parents' divorce, as shown in the table:

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Category	Subcategory	N	Percentage
Gender	Famale	137	77.8 %
	Male	39	22.2 %
Age	Adolescent	46	26.1 %
	Early Adulthood	129	73.3 %
	Middle Adulthood	1	0.6 %
Length of Parental Separation	0-5 Year	80	45.5 %
	6-10 Year	61	34.7 %
	11-15 Year	18	10.2 %
	16-20 Year	10	5.7 %
	21-25 Year	7	4.0 %

The sample was then subjected to Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test analysis with sig results. 0.083 ($n > 0.05$) so the data obtained by the researcher can be normally distributed. Next, the researcher carried out an analysis to ensure the data was linear, namely by using a simple linear

test analysis. The results of this test obtained a linearity value of sig. 0.00 (< 0.05) therefore the data is declared to be linear, as seen in the following table:

Table 2. Normality Test Results

N	176
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.083

Table 3. Linearity Test Results

Linearity	0.000
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Based on the analysis of this study, a hypothesis test was conducted to determine the effect of Family Functioning on Meaning in Life in children with divorced parents. The F-test results indicated that the regression model used in this study was statistically significant, with a calculated F-value of 90.686, greater than the F-table value of 3.89 at a significance level of 0.05 ($90.686 > 3.89$). Furthermore, the significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 (< 0.05) further strengthens the conclusion that the regression model used is appropriate and can explain the relationship between the two variables.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination (R^2) test results showed a value of 0.343, meaning that 34.3% of the variation in Meaning in Life can be explained by Family Functioning, while the remainder is influenced by other factors outside this study. Referring to Chin criteria, this R^2 value falls into the moderate category because it falls within the range of ≥ 0.33 and ≤ 0.67 [19]. Thus, it can be concluded that Family Functioning has a significant and quite strong influence in providing meaning to life for children with divorced parents.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing

R Square	Sig	F	Sig
0.343	0.000	90.686	0.000

5 Discussion

Based on simple linear regression analysis that examines the relationship between family functioning and the meaningfulness of life of children of divorced parents, there is a significant influence of 34.3%. According to Chin, the R^2 value in this study is included in the moderate category, this is because the R^2 value is in the range ≥ 0.33 and ≤ 0.67 [19]. Meanwhile, the remaining 65.7% can be influenced by other factors such as religiosity, relationships with extended family, and support from peers. With an influence of 34.3%, this finding supports the research hypothesis that family functioning has an impact on the meaningfulness of life of these children. This is in line with research conducted by Ramadhany, Soeharto, and Verasari, which indicated that adolescents' perceptions of family functioning can be influenced by various factors, including the environment, individual characteristics, and personal experiences. When

adolescents perceive their family functioning positively, they are more likely to discuss their problems and work together to find solutions, resulting in more productive ways to overcome challenges without having to argue [20].

While there are no studies that directly examine the impact of family functioning on the meaning of life for children with divorced parents, the results of this study are consistent with established theories. For instance, the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) suggests that a well-functioning family can foster a positive outlook for each of its members [9]. In the context of divorce, strong social support and effective communication are crucial in helping children cope with feelings of loss and confusion following their parents' separation. These elements enable children to discover a positive meaning in life, even in challenging circumstances. Additionally, how parents manage their emotions plays a significant role in shaping their children's emotional experiences. Parents who struggle to process and respond appropriately to emotions be it joy, fear, or frustration may raise children who have difficulty understanding their own emotions. Conversely, the closeness between parents, children, and family members can significantly enhance an individual's ability to understand and express feelings [21].

The family functioning when children with divorced parents receive emotional support, they still feel appreciated and loved, despite their parents' separation. This support can strengthen their ability to find a positive meaning in life, as Frankl discusses in "Meaning in Life." These children can adaptively re-evaluate painful experiences without being trapped by trauma, enabling them to pursue their future life goals. Conversely, low family functioning—such as ongoing conflict, poor communication, or neglect of children's roles—can lead to identity confusion, low self-esteem, and a lack of direction and meaning in life. Research by Musifuddin and Aturrohman (2019) indicates that parental divorce can cause children to feel empty and adrift. Such children may become more sensitive, easily angered, and struggle with emotional regulation. Therefore, restoring meaning in life after divorce often requires substantial emotional support from those around them [11].

Individuals are considered to have a high purpose in life when they have a clear understanding of their goals, can reflect on their past experiences, and possess strong determination [22]. This applies to children of divorced parents, who can realize and accept their painful experiences, transforming them into the foundation for a meaningful life. A desire to live not only signifies an urge to engage in useful activities but also leads these children to experience happiness and a sense of purpose, despite their parents' divorce. However, if this desire remains unfulfilled, feelings of meaninglessness may prevail [23]. According to Frankl, the lives of children with divorced parents can be deemed meaningful when three components are met: first, freedom of will children have the right to set goals and change their life circumstances; second, a desire for a meaningful life this desire drives them to turn painful experiences into challenges that enrich their lives; and third, the meaning of life this provides direction and value for their existence [23].

The results of Afdal et al.'s (2021) study support this study, which shows that some adolescents are able to interpret parental divorce as a turning point for personal growth [10]. They find gratitude, independence, and motivation to improve themselves. This suggests that with sufficient support, even traumatic events can be reframed as experiences that contribute to a more mature character and outlook on life. However, it is important to note that the R^2 value of 34.3% indicates that around 65.7% of other variables outside of family functioning also

influence the meaning of life for these children. This suggests the need for further research to explore additional factors that may contribute to understanding how family dynamics shape the meaning of life for children of divorced parents.

In addition to further research being recommended to explore other factors, future research should also improve the limitations of this study. One of them is the potential for participant bias, considering that all data collection was carried out online, therefore the research was worried that respondents gave inaccurate answers, did not reflect their true conditions and were too hasty in filling out the questionnaires given. Nonetheless, the findings of this study are expected to provide relevant practical implications, for parents, counselors and educational personnel. So that it can help children to rise after the divorce of their parents.

6 Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that family functioning significantly influences the meaning of life for children with divorced parents, accounting for 34.3% of the variance. This finding is in line with other studies showing that adolescents' perceptions of family function can be influenced by various factors, including the environment, individual characteristics, and personal experiences. However, while family functioning does play a role in shaping the meaning of life for these children, other factors also contribute, as evidenced by the R^2 value of 34.3%. Therefore, the author recommends that future research incorporate additional variables to strengthen the findings of this study.

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