

Examining father absence among school students by educational level

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Abstract: *This study aims to identify the profile of fatherless in students based on the level of father involvement in parenting. This study used a quantitative approach with a descriptive design. The sample consisted of 103 junior high and high school students in Makassar City, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was conducted using the Father Involvement and Father Role in Parenting Scale. Data analysis was conducted descriptively using frequency distributions and percentages to illustrate the level of fatherless among students. The results showed that the majority of students, 77 students (74,75%), fell into the moderate category of fatherless, indicating that father involvement is still present but not optimal. Fourteen students (13,59%) were in the low category, indicating good father involvement, while 12 students (11,65%) were in the high category, indicating low father involvement in parenting. These findings indicate that fatherless among students is at a moderate level, necessitating intervention efforts through guidance and counseling services focused on strengthening family roles, particularly father involvement. This study emphasizes the importance of developing service programs that are responsive to students' family circumstances to support optimal adolescent development in the school environment.*

Keywords: *fatherless; teenagers; needs assessment.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi profil ketiadaan ayah pada siswa berdasarkan tingkat keterlibatan ayah dalam pengasuhan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 103 siswa SMP dan SMA di Kota Makassar yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan Skala Keterlibatan Ayah dan Peran Ayah dalam Pengasuhan, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif melalui distribusi frekuensi dan persentase. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa berada pada kategori ketiadaan ayah moderat, yaitu sebanyak 77 siswa (74,75%), yang menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan ayah masih ada namun belum optimal. Sebanyak 14 siswa (13,59%) berada pada kategori rendah yang menunjukkan keterlibatan ayah yang baik, sedangkan 12 siswa (11,65%) berada pada kategori tinggi yang menunjukkan rendahnya keterlibatan ayah dalam pengasuhan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa ketiadaan ayah berada pada tingkat moderat sehingga diperlukan intervensi melalui layanan bimbingan dan konseling yang berfokus pada penguatan peran keluarga, khususnya keterlibatan ayah, guna mendukung perkembangan remaja yang optimal di lingkungan sekolah.

Kata kunci: fatherless; remaja; analisis kebutuhan.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of children growing up without the presence of a father, either physically or psychologically, commonly referred to as fatherlessness, has become a widely discussed issue. Fatherlessness, also known as father absence, father loss, or father hunger, refers to the absence of a father figure in the parenting process (Ashari, 2018). The Global Fatherhood Index Report 2021 placed Indonesia third among countries with a high prevalence of fatherlessness, reflecting weak father involvement in childrearing (Aulia et al., 2024). The 2021 National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) found that of 30,83 million early-childhood children in Indonesia, 2,67% (approximately 826.875) did not live with both biological parents, while 7,04% (approximately 2.170.702) lived only with their biological mothers. This means that approximately 2.999.577 children in Indonesia in early childhood did not live with their fathers (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021).

Hidayah et al., (2023) stated that children in Indonesia experience fatherlessness because their fathers have passed away or because fathers are physically present but psychologically absent; in this case, fathers spend limited time with their children due to work demands. This is consistent with the results of the 2015 KPAI survey, which found that 47.1% of fathers spent an average of only 1 hour per day communicating with their children (KPAI, 2017). Other reasons include patriarchal cultural factors, long-distance relationships, divorce, death, or domestic violence (Saputra et al., 2024).

Research by Kompas Research and Development revealed that of the 79,4 million children under 18 in Indonesia in 2024, 15,9 million were at risk of growing up without paternal care. This means that approximately 20,1%, or one in five Indonesian children, lacked a father's role in their lives (Christi, 2025). Data from the Ministry of Population and Family Development in 2025 showed that families headed by unemployed household heads had a higher rate of fatherlessness (63%) than families headed by employed household heads (24,1%) (Kemendukbangga, 2025).

In the context of family caregiving, the father's role is important and irreplaceable. Fathers play an essential role in providing support, affection, appreciation, and models for

both boys and girls (Frazier & Cowan, 2020). Muslyanti et al., (2025) further explained that father figures play an important role in providing children with emotional support, guidance, and motivation. When this role is absent or not performed optimally, this condition has a significant impact on children's psychological functioning, particularly as they enter adolescence. A father's contribution is critical and influential in children's development and well-being as well as in the transition to adolescence (Cabrera et al., 2000).

Jatiningtyas et al., (2024) found that 28,2% of the 41,2% of respondents classified as high risk were adolescent students aged 17-20 years. Fatherlessness affects adolescents through lower self-esteem, anger, and feelings of shame because they do not experience togetherness with a father as experienced by their peers (Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023). Adolescents who experience fatherlessness tend to have lower self-esteem and achievement (Iskandar et al., 2023). The absence of the father's role affects individuals' psychological condition, including a tendency toward low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, susceptibility to social environmental influences, difficulty understanding positive social behavior and managing conflict, vulnerability to deviant sexual behavior, and declining academic achievement (Saputra et al., 2024; Susanti & Ariyati, 2024).

Several studies show that fatherlessness is associated with various adolescent problems. Alfasma et al., (2022) found a relationship between loneliness and aggressive behavior among fatherless adolescents. In addition, Anas et al., (2024) showed that fatherlessness is associated with juvenile delinquency. Arbiyana & Kholil (2024) also revealed that although positive impacts may emerge, such as motivation for self-development, the negative impacts of fatherlessness are more dominant, including emotional instability, difficulty opening up, and a tendency toward self-harming behavior.

These findings indicate that fatherlessness is a complex phenomenon that affects various aspects of adolescent development, particularly among junior and senior high school students who are in a vulnerable developmental phase. However, most previous studies have focused on testing relationships between variables, whereas studies that specifically describe fatherlessness among students in school settings to inform the

development of guidance and counseling services and programs remain limited. In addition, research mapping the actual state of father involvement among adolescents in educational contexts remains scarce.

Therefore, research is needed to provide an empirical picture of fatherlessness among junior and senior high school students as part of a needs assessment in guidance and counseling services. This study aims to describe the prevalence of fatherlessness among students as an initial basis for developing a needs assessment for guidance and counseling services, and to offer practical contributions to school counselors for identifying student needs and designing appropriate services aligned with students' lived experiences.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive design to obtain an overview of students' levels of fatherlessness as a basis for developing a needs assessment for guidance and counseling services. The population comprised junior and senior high school students in Makassar City. The sample consisted of 103 students, including 25 males and 78 females, selected through purposive sampling in accordance with the study's characteristics.

The research variable was father involvement, namely, the extent to which fathers

are involved in various aspects of children's lives, as defined by Finley & Schwartz (2004). The instrument used in this study was the Father Involvement and Nurturant Fathering Scales, developed by Finley & Schwartz (2004), consisting of 49 items, which were translated into Indonesian by a professional translator.

Before use, the research instrument was first tested for validity and reliability. Validity testing was conducted using Pearson correlation, with assistance from JASP software for Windows. Validity indicates the extent to which an instrument can measure accurately and appropriately according to its intended function (Creswell, 2012). The testing criterion was that if the Sig. value was $< 0,05$, the item was declared valid, whereas if the Sig. value was $> 0,05$, the item was declared invalid. Based on the validity test results, all items had Sig. values $< 0,05$; therefore, all items in the instrument were declared valid.

Reliability testing was conducted to assess the instrument's consistency in producing relatively similar scores across different time points. The reliability test results showed a McDonald's omega value of 0,981 and a Cronbach's alpha value of 0,981. These values indicate that the instrument had a very high level of reliability and was dependable because the McDonald's omega and Cronbach's alpha values were $> 0,60$ (Ghozali, 2016).

Table 1. Frequentist Scale Reliability Statistics

Estimate	McDonald's ω	Cronbach's α
Point estimate	0,981	0,981
95% CI lower bound	0,975	0,974
95% CI upper bound	0,986	0,986

The categorization of fatherlessness levels was based on the empirical score distribution using three categories: low, moderate, and high. Category cut-offs were determined based on the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), namely low ($X < M - 1SD$), moderate ($M - 1SD \leq X < M + 1SD$), and high ($X \geq M + 1SD$) (Azwar, 2018). Based on the calculation, the score ranges were low ($X < 138$), moderate ($138 \leq X < 226$), and high ($X \geq 226$). This categorization was used to describe the distribution of respondents'

levels of fatherlessness in the study

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected by distributing the instrument to junior and senior high school students to determine the prevalence of fatherlessness. A total of 103 participants were involved, consisting of 25 male and 78 female students. A general overview of fatherlessness levels across the two educational levels, namely junior and senior high school, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. General Overview of Students' Fatherlessness Levels

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$X < 138$	Low	14	13,52%
$138 \leq X < 226$	Moderate	77	74,75%
$226 \leq X$	High	12	11,65%
Total		103	100%

Based on Table 2, the majority of students were in the moderate fatherlessness category, namely 77 students (74,75%), indicating that father involvement was still present but not yet optimal. Fourteen students (13,59%) were in the low category, indicating good father

involvement, while 12 students (11,65%) were in the high category, indicating low father involvement in parenting. Overall, students' fatherlessness was at a moderate level, thereby requiring attention in the development of guidance and counseling services in schools.

Table 3. Overview of Students' Fatherlessness by Educational Level

Level of Education	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Junior High School	Low	14	15,38%
	Moderate	66	72,52%
	High	11	12,08%
	Total	91	100%
Senior High School	Low	0	0,00%
	Moderate	11	91,66%
	High	1	8,33%
	Total	12	100%

Based on Table 3, the majority of junior and senior high school students were in the moderate fatherlessness category. Among junior high school students, 66 (72,52%) were in the moderate category, 14 (15,38%) in the low category, and 11 (12,08%) in the high category. Meanwhile, among senior high school students, 11 students (91,66%) were in the moderate

category, 1 student (8,33%) in the high category, and none in the low category. These findings indicate that fatherlessness at both educational levels generally falls within the moderate category, with a higher proportion of moderate fatherlessness among senior high school students than among junior high school students.

Table 4. Overview of Students' Fatherlessness by Gender

Gender	Category	Jumlah Siswa	Persentase
Male	Low	3	12,00%
	Moderate	19	88,00%
	High	3	12,00%
	Total	25	100%
Female	Low	11	14,10%
	Moderate	58	74,35%
	High	9	11,53%
	Total	12	100%

Based on Table 4, when viewed by gender, both male and female students were dominated by the moderate fatherlessness category. Among male students, 19 (76%) were in the moderate category, while the low and high categories each accounted for 12%. Meanwhile, among female students, 58 (74,35%) were in the

moderate category, 14,10% in the low category, and 11,53% in the high category. These results indicate that the pattern of fatherlessness is relatively similar between male and female students and is dominated by a level of father involvement that is not yet optimal. Although there were slight differences in percentages,

these did not indicate a significant difference between the two groups. This suggests that fatherlessness is experienced similarly by students, regardless of gender.

The results show that most students were in the moderate fatherlessness category, indicating that father involvement was still present in adolescents' lives but not yet optimal. This condition is characterized by limited interaction, low communication intensity, and insufficient psychological presence of fathers in children's lives (Jatiningtyas et al., 2024). The quality of father involvement is determined not only by physical presence but also by emotional closeness and the support provided to children (Astrellita & Abidin, 2024). This is reinforced by Rizha et al., (2025), who stated that closeness plays an important role in adolescents' emotional development, self-confidence, and social relationships; therefore, less than optimal involvement may hinder the fulfillment of adolescents' developmental needs.

Hidayah et al., (2023) revealed that fatherlessness can have negative effects on psychological development, such as stress, particularly when individuals do not have adaptive coping strategies. In addition, each individual has different coping abilities in dealing with this condition; thus, the experience of fatherlessness does not always have the same impact on every adolescent. This is consistent with the findings of Sia & Aneesh (2024), which showed that resilience and emotional regulation ability contribute significantly to psychological well-being among adolescents from single-parent families. Adolescents who possess strong psychological resources tend to be better able to adapt to various family-related pressures and maintain their psychological well-being despite limited parental support. Rahmasari et al., (2024) also found that social support is an important coping mechanism for adolescents experiencing fatherlessness, as it helps them develop more adaptive strategies for dealing with the emotional effects of father absence. Thus, the impact of fatherlessness on adolescents is influenced by their ability to manage stress and the availability of support that strengthens their adaptation.

The dominance of the moderate category among junior and senior high school students indicates that fatherlessness is a relatively common phenomenon during adolescence. At

this stage, adolescents need father figures as sources of emotional support, for identity formation, to strengthen self-confidence, and as models for decision-making (Nurmalasari et al., 2024). Although both groups were dominated by the moderate category, fatherlessness among senior high school students was more concentrated there.ay be explained by the fact that older adolescents have a better ability to reflect on and evaluate their relationships with their fathers (Nurmalasari et al., 2024; Rajab et al., 2025). Perceptions of father involvement are also more strongly influenced by the quality of the relationship, such as emotional support, communication, psychological closeness, and involvement in decision making, than by physical presence alone (Gebresilase et al., 2025; Kalele & Rkiyati, 2026).

These findings demonstrate the importance of needs-based guidance and counseling services. School counselors need to identify the level of father involvement to design appropriate interventions. Among junior high school students, limitations in the father's role may affect emotion regulation, social behavior, and sense of security (Laia et al., 2022). Meanwhile, among senior high school students, the father's role remains important as a source of support and guidance in the processes of self-development and decision-making (Hidayah et al., 2023). Therefore, guidance and counseling services need to be tailored to students' developmental stages, both through strengthening emotional and social aspects and through promoting independence and future planning (Laia et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of the study show that fatherlessness among junior and senior high school students was dominated by the moderate category, indicating that father involvement was still present but not yet optimal, both physically and psychologically. By gender, there was no significant difference between male and female students, indicating that fatherlessness occurs broadly. These findings affirm that fatherlessness is a continuum, ranging from optimal to minimal father involvement, each with distinct implications for adolescent development.

The implications of this study indicate that guidance and counseling services should be designed using a needs-based approach that

considers the level of father involvement and the developmental characteristics of students at each educational level. The services provided need to be differentiated, adaptive, and contextual so they can respond appropriately to students' needs and support their optimal development across diverse family contexts.

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