



# Self Esteem and Fear of Intimacy in Emerging Adult with Divorced Parents

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## Highlights

- Based on previous research, it can be seen that self-esteem is the strongest predictor in determining fear of intimacy in individuals. In addition, there is a negative correlation between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in early adult respondents.
- This study uses emerging adult who experience parental divorce respondents aged 18-25 years to determine the relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy.

## Abstract

Fear of intimacy is a barrier that prevents emerging adults from having intimate relationships, especially with the opposite sex. This study aims to obtain information and determine the relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adult with divorced parents. The number of participants in this study was 74 emerging adults who experienced parental divorce with an age range of 18-25 years. This study uses a quantitative research design (correlational). The scale measuring instrument used in this study is the Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) developed by Descutner and Thelen (1991) and the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Rosenberg (1979). The results of this study state that there is a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adults with divorced parents. The correlation coefficient value obtained was  $r = -0.808$  and  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < .05$ ). According to the results of the research that has been done, it can be concluded that the research hypothesis is accepted. Intercorrelation analysis data between aspects, different test, and demographic correlation test (gender and age of parental divorce) will be discussed further.

Keywords: Self-esteem; Fear of Intimacy; Emerging Adults with Divorced Parents

## INTRODUCTION

Fear of intimacy is an obstacle that prevents emerging adults from establishing intimate relationships, specifically with the opposite sex. According to Descutner and Thelen, 1991, it prevents individuals from developing closeness with important people, thereby making it challenging to convey thoughts and emotions. Based on a review Doi and Thelen, 1993 stated that this fear is anxiety experienced by individuals in establishing intimate and committed relationships. This is also emphasized by a previous study Sobral and Costa, 2015, where fear of intimacy limits the ability of individuals to exchange thoughts, feelings, and dependence with people who are valued because of anxiety.

Recent study suggested that the level of fear of intimacy in Indonesia is moderate. (Descutner & Thelen, 1991) on 262 respondents aged between 20-39 years old showed a moderate level of the obstacle. Similarly, Yunita (2021) found that out of 344 respondents between 18-68 years old, 175 displayed moderate levels, while 1 had a high level. This is indicated by 50.90% and .30% of respondents having a moderate and high level of fear of intimacy (Yunita, 2021).

This condition presents a contradiction to the expected state of emerging adults presumed to have entered the transitional stage of adulthood. Arnett (Hioeliani et al., 2015) asserted that the developmental task of these adults revolves around exploration, particularly in the realms of love and work. However, this process of self-exploration is not always accompanied by pleasure since it can lead to confusion and encounters with rejection from the surrounding environment. Failing to establish a sense of self-identity can result in role confusion within the individual. This will be difficult for individuals who have fear of intimacy in resolving the conflict. Individuals with fear of intimacy tend to avoid social contact and reject other people (Ratnawulan, 2018).

According to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (Annur, 2023), divorce cases in Indonesia reached 516,334 in 2022. This figure increased by 15.31% compared to 2021, which reached 447,743 cases. The number of divorce cases in 2002 was the highest in the last six years, which was expected to increase yearly.

Parental divorce can lead to a lack of support, attachment, and quality romantic relationships within the family. This can have a negative effect on children, specifically in the domains of trust, self-esteem, self-control, and self-adjustment, leading to high levels of fear of intimacy (Hood, 2013). This effect can be felt even in emerging adulthood, where children may have difficulty forming intimate and building romantic relationships. Children who experience parental divorce in childhood have a higher risk of experiencing marital problems in the future (Auersperg et al., 2019). According to Odenberg's study (as cited in Ottaway, 2010), it was also determined that the earlier children experience parental divorce, the greater the difficulties they are likely to encounter in their future intimate relationships.

The study obtained supporting data for a high fear of intimacy through interviews conducted with two emerging adult participants who had experienced parental divorce. The first and second participants, identified as BA and HF at ages 23 and 22 exhibited behaviors indicative of a high fear of intimacy, according to the criteria outlined by Descutner and Thelen (1991). This is also evidenced by the fulfillment of three aspects and indicators of the condition described below. First, the subjects feel reluctant to share personal information with others. Second, the subjects feel uncomfortable when they have an emotional attachment to other people. Third, many individuals experience reluctance when it comes to disclosing embarrassing information or behaviors that may threaten their sense of self or personal identity.

The negative effect of high fear of intimacy is related to the exploration conflict (Santrock, 2013) and the ability to establish intimate relationships with others (Erikson; Papalia,

Olds & Feldman; Devirianty et al., 2014). They will probably encounter feelings of exclusion, leading them to isolate themselves from friendships, love, and even society when individuals are unable to fulfill these crucial developmental tasks. As a result of this isolation, negative emotions may be developed as a coping mechanism for perceived loneliness (Doi & Thelen, 1993). This failure can affect later stages of development (Erikson; Papalia, Olds & Feldman; Devirianty et al., 2014) and lead to depression (Ingersoll et al., 2012). In addition, fear of intimacy can also affect relationship quality and individual psychological adjustment (Rozelle, 2005).

Some of the causes of fear of intimacy are summarized in the following description. Demographic groups that affect the condition are gender (Sifry, 1994), while internal groups affecting the condition include self-esteem (Fatah & Hartini, 2022), basic trust, and mental health stigma (Ingersoll et al., 2012). External groups that affect fear of intimacy include family and friend support (Ingersoll et al., 2012), attachment (Thorberg & Lyvers ; Lloyd, 2011), trauma, childhood violence both physically, sexually, and psychologically (Davis, Petretic-Jackson, & Ting in Lloyd, 2011), as well as the quality of romantic relationships (Szymanski & Hilton, 2013).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's comprehensive evaluation of oneself, encompassing both positive and negative assessments, which are manifested through their behavior. By possessing a strong sense of this variable, meaningful connections, and rapport can be effortlessly formed with others. Furthermore, self-esteem denotes an individual's outlook on their merits, encompassing both positive and negative evaluations (Rosenberg; Emler, 2001). Mruk (2006) viewed the variable as a series of individual attitudes based on perceived feelings, such as worthiness and satisfaction with themselves. In addition, Heatherton & Polivy (1991) stated that self-esteem is a personal assessment of worthiness expressed in behavior shown to oneself.

Obeid et al, Devirianty et al. (2014) found a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy summarized in the following description. Obeid et al. (2020) discussed the topic with the title Factors associated with fear of intimacy among a representative sample of the Lebanese population: The role of depression, social phobia, self-esteem, intimate partner violence, attachment, and maladaptive schema. In line with this study, Devirianty et al. (2014) examined the topic titled The Relationship Between Self -Esteem and Fear of Intimacy in Young Adults.

Different studies have explored the correlation between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in young adults. However, they have examined the relationship between the variables in emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce. The present study investigates the association between self-esteem and fear of intimacy specifically in emerging adults with divorced parents.

## **METHOD**

### *Study design*

In this study, a quantitative approach was employed, specifically correlational analysis. The data collection method used was the self-esteem and the fear of intimacy scales, which were distributed to the study participants through a Google Form with a one-time filing restriction per account. The scale distributed was self-reported, meaning that respondents provided information about their experiences and perceptions.

### *Participant*

This study has collected 74 participants. The sampling techniques employed in this study encompassed purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling involved specifically targeting samples with specific attributes, thereby limiting the equal opportunity for

all populations to be included as study participants. The selection of sample members was based on predetermined criteria, namely emerging adults aged between 18 and 25 years in a heterosexual relationship and had divorced parents residing in their households.

Furthermore, the snowball sampling technique was used to increase the sample size based on the development of data using a network of connections (Kumar, 2005). The ability to identify emerging adults with divorced parents was limited. Consequently, the respondents were requested to provide information regarding acquaintances who might meet the eligibility criteria for participation in the study. This involved requesting WhatsApp and email contacts from the respondents who had completed the questionnaire, to inquire when they knew individuals who could serve as potential participants.

### *Instruments*

The fear of intimacy scale used was Descutner and Thelen (1991) Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS), which consisted of 35 items and had been adapted into Indonesian. One of the items that describes the fear of intimacy is item (5. I might be afraid to confide my innermost feeling to that person). Furthermore, the reliability of this scale was shown through a Cronbach alpha value of 0.927 and was unidimensional (Fachmi et al., 2022). The FIS uses 5-point Likert-type scale (1= not at all characteristics of me, 2= slightly characteristic of me, 3= moderately characteristic of me, 4= very characteristic of me, and 5 = extremely characteristic of me).

The self-esteem scale was the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSES) by Rosenberg (1979) which consisted of 10 items and had been adapted into Indonesian. One of the items that describes the self-esteem is item (1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself). The construct reliability was shown through a Cronbach alpha value of 0.899 and was unidimensional but has aspects of self-liking and self-competence (Alwi & Razak, 2022). The RSES uses 4-point Guttman-type scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree and 4= strongly agree).

Both scales were subjected to face and content validity tests. The face validity was demonstrated through initial testing with two participants to ensure that all scale items were comprehensible. Meanwhile, the content validity was established by subjecting all scale items to expert judgment to ensure an alignment with the theory of the variables measured.

### *Procedure*

The participants were selected online using questionnaires designed with Google Forms. The data collected with the questionnaire include: 1) Participants consisting of email, name, age, and telephone number, 2) Open-ended questions to ascertain whether potential participants meet the required criteria, and 3) willingness to be contacted further for study purposes. The links, which referred to the questionnaire, were distributed via social media platforms, such as Instagram, Whatsapp, and Twitter, as well as to various other social media groups, such as organizational groups, friendships, or private messages in the form of posts. Prospective participants who met the criteria were asked to indicate their willingness to fill in some questions related to fear of intimacy in emerging adult with divorce parents on Google Form. Suppose potential participants have something related to the study that they do not understand, they can ask questions through the mediums, such as Email and WhatsApp, included in the study poster.

After the participants filled out the questionnaires, purposive sampling method was deliberately used to collect the sample data with the quality of the answers serving as the metric for selection. In other words, the study decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide information based on knowledge or experience.

Furthermore, the snowball sampling technique was used to increase the sample size based on the development of data using a network of connections (Kumar, 2005). The ability to identify emerging adults with divorced parents was limited. Consequently, the respondents were requested to provide information regarding acquaintances who might meet the eligibility criteria for participation in the study. This involved requesting WhatsApp and email contacts from the respondents who had completed the questionnaire, to inquire when they knew individuals who could serve as potential participants.

All participants involved in this study agreed to fill out the questionnaire. To comply with the code of ethics, researchers also allow if participants want to stop at any time in this study. Rewards for lucky participants are randomly drawn.

### Data Analysis

This study hypothesized a negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adults with divorced parents. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 25.0.0 for Windows software and the hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Correlation parametric data processing test. For further analysis, the Pearson Correlation correlation test, as well as the Independent Sample T-test and One Way Anova difference test, were also used.

## RESULT

### Participant's characteristics

In this study, the subjects used were young adults who had divorced parents with an age range of 18-25 years for both men and women. The number of subjects collected in this study were 74 respondents. The following is a reference table for research subjects regarding demographic criteria:

**Table 1.**  
*Description of Research Subjects*

Demographic Aspect	Kategori	n	%
Gender	Men	22	29.7%
	Women	54	70.3%
Total		74	100%
Age	18	4	5.4%
	19	6	8.1%
	20	11	14.9%
	21	15	20.3%
	22	13	17.6%
	23	8	10.8%
	24	10	13.5%
Total	25	7	9.5%
Age of Parental Divorce	0-2 years	12	16.2%
	2-4 years	8	10.8%
	4-6 years	19	25.7%
	6-8 years	8	10.8%
	8-10 years	5	6.8%
	> 10 years	22	29.7%
Total		74	100%

The table 1 displays the description of the subjects with the highest number of subjects based on demographic criteria are female subjects at 70.3%, 21 years of age at 20.3%, and subjects whose parents were divorced for more than 10 years at 29.7%.

### *Data analysis*

The normality test was conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk analysis technique. Data distribution was considered normal when the significance value (p-value) was greater than 0.05. Conversely, when the p-value was less than 0.05, the data distribution was deemed non-normal. In cases where the data distribution was normal, decision-making could be generalized to the entire population, otherwise, the data distribution was non-normal.

**Table 2.**

*Normality Test Results of Fear of Intimacy and Self-esteem Variables*

Variable	Significance Coefficient Value (p)	Description
Fear of Intimacy	.246	Normal
Self-esteem	.540	Normal

The table of normality test results on the fear of intimacy and self-esteem variables produced significant coefficients of .246 and .540 with ( $p > .05$ ). These results indicated that both variables were normally distributed.

Linearity was tested in this study using the Compare Means technique. A linear relationship between the two variables was considered present when the linearity value yielded a significance coefficient (p-value) of less than 0.05. Conversely, when the p-value exceeded 0.05, it indicated a lack of a linear relationship.

**Tabel 3.**

*Linearity Test Results*

Variable	Linearity	F	P	Description
Fear of Intimacy	Linearity	151.024	.000	Linear
Self Esteem	Deviation of Linearity	1.460	.142	Does not deviate from the linear line

The table of linearity test results produced a linearity F value = 151.024 with a significance value of  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) and a deviation of linearity F = 1.460 with a value of  $p = 0.142$ . These results indicated that the fear of intimacy and self-esteem variables proved the existence of a linear relationship and did not deviate from the linear line.

After carrying out the normality and linearity test, it was found that the data results on the variables were normally distributed and linear. Subsequently, the hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Correlation parametric test technique, as shown in the following Table.

**Tabel 4.**

*Correlation Test Results of Fear of Intimacy with Self Esteem*

Variable	r	r <sup>2</sup>	p	Description
Fear of Intimacy				
Self Esteem	-.808	.653	.000	Significant

The results showed that the correlation coefficient between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adults was  $r = -.808$  and  $p = .000$  ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, there was a significant negative relationship between the variables, and the hypothesis was accepted. The coefficient of

determination ( $r^2$ ) and the effective contribution of self-esteem to career maturity were .653 and 65.3%, respectively.

Additional analysis was conducted to test the correlation of the variables in terms of demographics as well as different levels of fear of intimacy based on gender and age of parental divorce. The following are the results of the analysis test conducted:

### Intercorrelation of Self-Esteem Aspects with Fear of Intimacy

**Table 5.**

*Intercorrelation Results of Self-Esteem Aspects with Fear of Intimacy*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>1. Fear of Intimacy</b>	1	.759**	.978**	.867**	-.808**	-.721**	-.702**
2. Content	.759**	1	.719**	.505**	-.566**	-.550**	-.467**
3. Emotional valence	.978**	.719**	1	.767**	-.773**	-.663**	-.686**
4. Vulnerability	.867**	.505**	.767**	1	-.761**	-.714**	-.642**
<b>5. Self-Esteem</b>	-.808**	-.566**	-.773**	-.761**	1	.762**	.938**
6. Self-competence	-.721**	-.550**	-.663**	-.714**	.762**	1	.490**
7. Self-liking	-.702**	-.467**	-.686**	-.642**	.938**	.490**	1

\* $p < 0.05$

\*\* $p < 0.01$

The results prove that there were differences in correlations between each aspect of the variables in emerging adults with divorced parents. According to the intercorrelation table, the strongest significant correlation was the aspect of emotional valence, with a value of  $r = .978^{**}$  ( $p < .01$ ), followed by the self-liking with self-esteem  $r = .938^{**}$  ( $p < .01$ ), and finally the aspect of vulnerability with fear of intimacy  $r = .867^{**}$  ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table 6.**

*Fear of Intimacy Test Results Based on Gender*

Variable	p	Mean	
Gender and Fear of Intimacy	0.012	Male	124.09
		Female	109.81

The t-test showed a significance value of  $p = 0.012$  ( $p < .05$ ), indicating a significant difference between fear of intimacy in emerging adult males and females with divorced parents. This can be seen from the difference in the mean value of fear of intimacy in the male and female categories of 124.09 and 109.81. Male emerging adults have a higher level of fear of intimacy than females with divorced parents when viewed from the mean.

**Table 7.**

*Results of Test of Variance Based on Age of Parental Divorce*

Variable	p	Mean	
Age of Parental Divorce	0.271	0-2 years	107.08
		2-4 years	115.88
		4-6 years	108.63
		6-8 years	128.38
		8-10 years	109.00
		>10 years	117.82

The One-Way Anova test results prove a significant value of  $p = 0.271$  ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy in emerging adults based on the

age of parental divorce. This can also be seen from the acquisition of the mean value of the condition in the 6-8 years parental divorce age category of 128.38.

## DISCUSSION

This study aims to obtain information and determine the relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adult with divorced parents. Based on the results of data processing, there is a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adults with divorced parents, as indicated by the correlation coefficient value  $r = -0.808$  and  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis of this study is accepted and the correlation coefficient value shows a very strong relationship between 0.80-1.00. The variables also obtained a coefficient of determination value of  $r^2 = 0.653$ , hence self-esteem and other untested factors can make an effective contribution to fear of intimacy by 65.3% and 34.7%, respectively.

Previous studies have shown a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and fear of intimacy, which is indicated by a strong relationship strength. Obeid et al. (2020) found a correlation of  $r = -0.163$  ( $p < .001$ ), while Devirianty et al. (2014) reported a correlation of  $r = -0.368$  with  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the self-esteem of individuals is directly proportional to the fear of intimacy experienced. Individuals who desire a sense of closeness and connection with others tend to possess a positive self-perception (Coutts, 1973; O'Neill and O'Neill in Sifry, 1994).

The intercorrelation results show different correlations between each aspect of self-esteem and fear of intimacy. According to the analysis, the strongest significant correlation is the aspect of emotional valence concerning fear of intimacy, with a correlation value of  $r = 0.978^{**}$  ( $p < .01$ ). This is followed by the aspect of self-liking and self-esteem with a correlation value of  $r = 0.938^{**}$  ( $p < .01$ ).

Based on the correlation found, the most significant aspect of the fear of intimacy is emotional valence. This is in line with Tolstedt & Stokes (1984) study, where the emotional valence aspect is related to an individual's ability to share feelings with others and plays a major role in achieving intimacy. Losing emotional valence can make it difficult to achieve intimacy. In addition, the aspect of self-liking also has the highest effect on self-esteem, and this is consistent with Rogers' opinion (in Walster, 1965), where individuals with a positive view of themselves tend to have better interpersonal relationships with others.

Furthermore, an analysis was conducted to compare the fear of intimacy between males and females. Based on the Independent Sample T-Test technique, a significant difference was found between the variables. Chodorow (1978) explained that males tend to have a fear of intimacy more than females because they consider themselves as a more closed gender with greater ego boundaries and differentiation than females. Females can also take a more intimate and communal attitude to the world around them than males (Gilligan in Sifry, 1994). Meanwhile, males may perceive intimacy as a potential threat, which can engender a sense of apprehension within them. Consequently, this heightened perception leads to a greater fear of intimacy among males in comparison to females.

This study also analyzed differences in fear of intimacy in emerging adults with various ages of parental divorce. The results show no significant difference in the variables with parental divorce ages of 0-2 years, 2-4 years, 4-6 years, 6-8 years, 8-10 years, and more than 10 years. The analysis uses One Way Anova with a significance value of  $p = 0.271$  ( $p > .05$ ). These results are in line with a previous study by M. Yusuf (2014), where children still need love and education



from their parents despite the divorce. However, divorce can hinder the role and function of parents as an intact family, specifically for elementary school-age children (Saturrosidah et al., 2018). This particular age bracket falls within the industry vs. inferiority stage of development, where children are notably susceptible to the influences of their surroundings and tend to compare themselves. Furthermore, this phase of development is also marked by a heightened fear of loss and emotional instability in response to parental divorce (Kusumawati, 2020).

This study also conducts additional analysis on self-esteem and fear of intimacy based on gender. The results show that males have a stronger correlation than females between self-esteem and fear of intimacy, as shown by the value of  $r = -0.842$  and  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, males have a strong attachment between the variables and this is in line with the study conducted by Sifry (1994).

The correlation between parental divorce age, self-esteem, and fear of intimacy is analyzed in emerging adults. The results show that emerging adults with parental divorce aged between 8-10 years old have a strong attachment between self-esteem and fear of intimacy, with a significant negative correlation value of  $r = -.988$  and  $p = 0.002$  ( $p < .05$ ). This age is often regarded as a challenging phase for children who are coping with parental divorce, primarily because they possess a significant level of emotional awareness but tend to experience anger as the predominant emotion. During this phase, anger tends to emerge as the predominant emotion experienced by children (Santrock, 2013). In addition, a strong attachment to parents can affect future adaptation and life satisfaction (Burke et al., 2009).

After conducting a thorough analysis, it can be deduced that self-esteem serves as a viable solution for addressing the fear of intimacy among emerging adults with divorced parents. This conclusion stems from the observed significant correlation between these two variables, which can be classified as exceptionally strong, as it effectively accounts for 65.3% of the variance in the fear of intimacy. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the remaining 34.7% of factors have not been examined in this study and may also influence the fear of intimacy. The implication of this study to increase self-esteem, so that can decrease fear of intimacy in emerging adult with divorced parents.

This study exhibits certain deficiencies in its implementation, necessitating further improvements. A prominent limitation stems from the assumption that the data distribution process is relatively uneven and less accurate due to its reliance on social media sources. Consequently, direct supervision and control over the data collection process during respondents' completion of the scale become unattainable.

The study fails to account for crucial factors such as the respondent's age at the time of initial exposure to parental divorce. Furthermore, insufficient attention is given to assessing the quality of parental relationships post-divorce. To enhance the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the data, these considerations should be analyzed.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, there is a negative relationship between self-esteem and fear of intimacy in emerging adults with divorced parents. This is indicated by a strong relationship between the variables in emerging adults with divorced parents, hence the hypotheses are accepted.

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