CASE STUDY: SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN ADOLESCENTS WITH DIVORCED PARENTS

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Abstract: This research was carried out to obtain the psychological dynamics of subjective well-being of adolescents whose parents were divorced. This study used qualitative case study method. Data was collected through interviews and observation. The subjects of this study were three children between 18 and 21 years old whose parents were divorced and two informants as 'significant others'. The guideline of the interview was designed based on subjective well-being theory developed by Diener (2005). The result of the study showed that there were three subjective well-being conditions of the children with divorced parents. The first condition was a condition prior to parental divorce while the second and third conditions were conditions post-divorce. The condition prior to parental divorce described that the subjects had low subjective well-being before their parents divorced. This was due to domestic conflict between parents and low intensity of interaction between family members. In the second condition, the subjective well-being of the children were still low triggered by the divorce itself, the absence of openness of their parents regarding their divorce, and the lack of interaction and intimacy of their parents after divorcing. In the third condition the subjective well-being level was higher than ever before due to the eventual acceptance of the divorce of their parents by the children. This self-acceptance had caused the children to feel more positive and satisfied toward their lives.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, the child with divorced parents

I. INTRODUCTION

Building a family is one of the developmental tasks that each individual must pass through in life. The family is confirmed in a marriage bond between man and woman to achieve the purpose of marriage, that is to obtain a family in which there is a sense of love, affection, calmness and composure. But there are some couples who cannot achieve the purpose of marriage that they have built because they are not able to solve problems in their family and decide not to continue their married life.

In the last few decades, Indonesia is the country with the highest divorce rate in Asia-Pacific. Based on data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs the divorce rate in Indonesia has increased from 2010 to 2013. Data shows that in 2010 divorce rate increased three percent from the previous year which amounted to 285,184 events. In 2011, there were 158,119 divorce events and in 2012 the number of divorce increased to 372,577 events, then in 2013 the number of marriage events decreased but the divorce event increased to 324,527 compared to 2010 (Sasongko, 2014).

The destruction of a marriage certainly not only leaves a wound to a married couple, but also to a child. According to news reported by Metrotvnews.com (2015) a report published by the Office of National Statistics observed an emotional disturbance of children whose parents were divorced who then can cause affliction and social annoyance to their schoolmates in school. It is also seen that the marriage failure could lead to psychological disorders that result in aggressive behavior, violence, and antisocial attitudes. Typical emotional problems that arise in adolescents are feelings of shock and disbelief if they do not know that their parents are in conflict.

The above description shows that the impact of parental divorce lead to many problems, turbulence, or shock experienced by children, especially adolescents. Emotional reactions that arise due to parental divorce indicate the low level of subjective well-being in the adolescent. A person is said to have a high subjective well-being if they are satisfied with their living conditions, often feeling positive emotions and rarely feeling negative emotions (Eddington, 2005).

Amato's (2000) study indicated that children coming from divorced families on average experience more problems and have lower levels of well-being than children of intact families. According to McFarlane (Van Der Aa, Boomsma, Rebollo-Messa, Hudziak & Bartels, 2010), if a teenager has a family which negatively functioned, such as a family that is not mutually supportive and has multiple conflicts, he can have a low quality of well-being.

According to Sharon & Hamama (2012) subjective well-being (SWB) is an overall assessment of the quality of human internal experience and basic aspects of life such as social contact, family contact, daily activities, thoughts, self-esteem, patterns in dealing with stress and health, at Spectrum from positive to negative. While the definition of subjective well-being according to (Karalam & Joseph, 2009) is designed to measure the good or bad feelings experienced by an individual or group of individuals, in various issues of daily life. The term

subjective well-being is also defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluation of his life which includes an emotional assessment of the various events experienced which are in line with the cognitive assessment of satisfaction and fulfillment of life. Someone is said to have a high subjective well being if they are satisfied with their living conditions, often feeling positive emotions and rarelyfeeling negative emotions (Eddington, 2005). Diener (2005) defines SWB as an individual's personal judgment of his life, not based on expert judgment, including life satisfaction (both in general and in specific aspects), pleasant feelings (positive) and low levels of unpleasant feelings (negative). Those feelings are then used by Diener as specific components to determine the level of a person's SWB. Factors that influence subjective well-being according to Diener (2005) are genetic, personality, demographic, health, religion, social support, social relations, cognitive processes, and cultural influences.

II. METHOD

The method used in this study was a case study that aimed to obtain a picture of the psychological dynamics of subjective well-being in adolescents whose parents were divorced. The case study method is an approach to researching social phenomena through an in-depth analysis of individual cases (Kumar, 1999). Characteristics of cases in this study are as follows: a. The final adolescents were aged between 18-21 years old because they had more mature formal operational thinking so they could organize their experience better**;** b. Teens whose parents divorced as teenagers are in the elementary school age range; c. The number of subjects in this study were two research subjects and two informants as significant others.

In-depth interview was the main method used in this study and supported by the observation methods undertaken during the interview. Interviews were conducted based on previous interview guidelines in accordance to Diener's theory (2005). The data examination technique used in this research was data triangulation method (using different data source), and triangulation method (using several different method), peer checking and repetitive checking on the subject to reveal credibility, organize data well (dependability). Data obtained from this research was then analyzed through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding allowed researchers to identify the categories, properties and dimensions of the data obtained. In axial coding, data was organized by developing relationships between categories, or between categories with subcategories under it, whereas selective coding was the process of selecting core categories, linking core categories to other categories systematically, legitimizing relationships, changing categories which needed to be improved and further developed.

III. RESULTS

The presentation of the results of the study on each subject is described based on the pre, post 1 and post 2 condition sequences (Chart I.). In pre or before parental divorce, the subjective well-being of both subjects tended to be low. It was characterized by feelings of sadness, disappointment, hate for the divorce of his parents, annoyed, upset and embarrassed to his family and friends. The low of well being was also indicated by the coping strategy used in both subjects by confining themselves in the room and went for hunger strike. Such emotions were also wreaked by spending a lot of time playing with friends and even playing truant from additional school classes. In addition, the children also felt the discomfort in the family which showed that the two subjects were not satisfied with the state of their family.

Post 1 condition is subject's condition after parental divorce which showed that the subjective well being of both subjects tended to still be low. It was characterized by the perceived negative feelings of the subjects. The first subject felt angry at the parents, blamed the mother as an outlet of his anger and hated the father. On the second subject, similarly, negative negative feelings exposed were anger, upset feeling, disappointment about the event of divorce of his parents, and feeling that the parents did not understand the feelings of his son. The coping strategy used by both subjects in post-parental divorce was almost the same as pre condition (before divorce) ie. confining themselves in their room and went for hunger strike for longer period. One of the factors that triggered negative feelings in the children was because the parents did not try to give understanding to the children as to why the divorce should happen. Subject 1 knew that his parents had divorced two years after the divorce, while subject two accidentally knew that her parents had divorced after finding an official letter of divorce from a religious court on her parents' bedroom table. The lack of understanding and explanation from the parents to the children had made the subjects felt enormous anger and psychologically shaken. Both subjects also felt the fear and worrisome of their own future life especially married life after learning from the experience of their parents.

In post 2 or second condition after parental divorce, the subjective well being of both subjects tended to increase. In this condition both subjects were able to control his emotions over their divorced parents. This was demonstrated by the coping strategy they used. The first subject chose to occupy himself with positive activities such as joining several organizations and social activities while the second subject chose to be intensive in her dancing hobby. These things were done by the subjects to divert the

negative emotions they felt towards positive things. The subjects' statement related to this was in accordance with the statement of the significant others as their close friends. Significant others said that the attitude of the subjects rarely showed negative emotions, because the subjects were more preoccupied with their organizational and social activities (subject 1) and the dancing hobby (subject 2). The subjects more often showed positive emotions and rarely focused on their parents' divorce. One of the factors that made the children experienced the increase of subjective well-being was the eventual openness between parents and their children so that the children obtained clear understanding of why their parents should separate. In the first subject, the parents eventually provided an acceptable understanding to the child about their divorce and kept a good relationship between each other (mother and father) after they separated. In the case of the second subject the parents interacted better and gave the child better attention and maintained good relationship between them.

These things made the children felt comfortable in the family even though it was no longer intact, understood the circumstances better, took positive lessons from the divorce of their parents, and felt grateful for getting positive support from their environment like their friends and extended family.

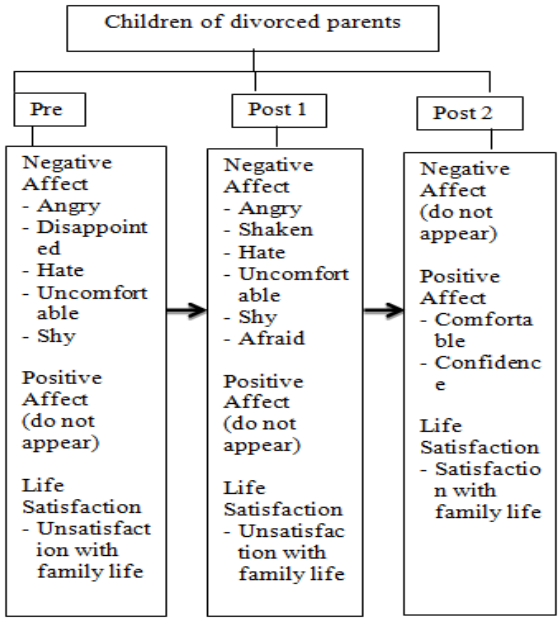

Chart I. Change of subjective well being component from Pre to Post 2

IV. DISCUSSION

In conditions prior to parental divorce the perceived negative feelings, such as uncomfortable and unsatisfied feelings to subjects' own family, tended to be higher and rarely the positive affects are felt. Eddington (2005) stated that a person is said to have a high subjective well-being if they are satisfied with their living conditions, often feeling positive emotions and rarely feeling negative emotions. Based on the statement it could be concluded that the subjective well being of the subjects at this stage was low. It was influenced by several factors, namely the prolonged conflict between parents, the rare interaction between family members, and coping strategy performed by the child in this condition which was emotional focused coping. According to Folkman & Lazarus (Umam, 2006) emotional-focused coping strategy could reduce psychological burden without solving the problem. This coping strategy creates a temporary relief because the problem solving focuses on the emotional side only (by, for example, crying in confinement in the room or avoiding social environment). According to Emery, et al; Amato & Keith (in Stevenson & Black, 1995) conflict that occurs between parents can reduce the quality of subjective well-being of children because in conflicts that occur in the elderly there are various negative emotions that cause children to feel insecure (Davies & Cummings in Papp, Cummings, and Goeke-Morey, 2002).

In the first condition after parental divorce (post 1), the subject felt that his psychiatric condition was shaken up by his parents' divorce, indicating that the subjective well being level was low. Stevenson & Black (1995) stated that the first post-divorce years was the toughest time for children. Various negative feelings which were felt by children when he/she knew that both parents were divorced were

forms of manifestation of stress experienced by the children over divorce. Factor that influenced the coping strategy of the subjects was emotional focused coping (prolonged sadness, self confinement in their room, avoid the environment, and spend a lot of time to play). At the same time, the parents did not provide explanations and understanding to the children and even tended to cover up the divorce that had happened. Meanwhile, the relationship of the parents were getting worse. Wallerstein & Kelly (in Stevenson & Black, 1995) revealed that parents are unaware of the stress experienced by their children after the divorce. This happens because parents think about divorce issues that occur and struggling in their own stress conditions so as to be insensitive to the conditions around him, including the condition of their children.

In the second condition after parental divorce (post 2), the subjects showed a positive attitude of self-acceptance. Subjects were able to take positive lesson of the parental divorce, able to control their emotions by doing more positive coping strategies (shifting focus to positive things like hobby or social activities, more open to parents and the environment when problems occurred). It made the subjects experienced an increasing subjective well being that was influenced by several factors namely, understanding and acceptance of self against parental divorce, psychological support from the surrounding

environment, as well as cognitive and spiritual development.

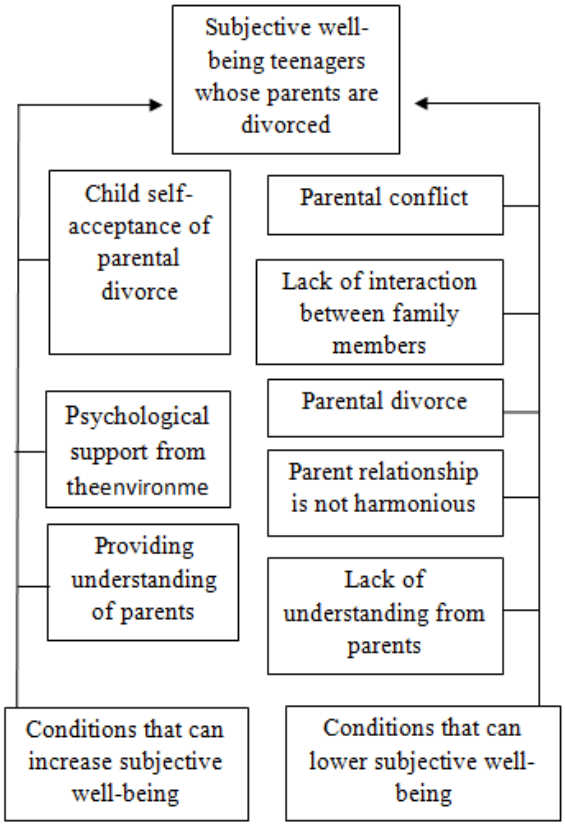

Chart II. Factors affecting the subjective well-being

Limitations and suggestions of the study

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The study bore some limitations, among others that respondents in this study have the same gender, so researchers can not see comparison image of subjective well-being in different gender.As for suggestions in the study, among others, is to conduct research on different subjects, in order to see the comparison of subjective well-being images in different sexes. Then, for the results of this study can be considered to provide support to adolescents whose parents divorced, Providing positive support can help teenagers improve subjective well being after parental divorce.

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