




The Meaning of Love for Students from Broken Homes

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Article Information:

Received Oct 15, 2025

Revised Oct 30, 2025

Accepted Des 09, 2025

Keywords: Love, Broken Home, College Student

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the meaning of love for students from broken homes by examining how their parents' divorce experiences influence their views, attitudes, and behaviors toward love. This study applies a qualitative method using descriptive research, with the aim of systematically and accurately investigating circumstances, facts, events, conditions, and specific matters, and is designed to describe the perspectives of students from broken homes at the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and observations, then analyzed descriptively to find patterns and meanings contained in the subjects' experiences. The results of the study show that students from broken homes tend to experience emotional gaps in interpreting love, where most view love with doubt, fear of loss, and difficulty in building trust, although there are also those who use this experience as motivation to build a healthier and more responsible love. In conclusion, the experience of a broken home shapes a complex, ambivalent, and dynamic understanding of love, which ultimately influences how students navigate interpersonal relationships and plan their future family life.

INTRODUCTION

Love is one of the fundamental aspects of human life that is not only viewed as an emotional feeling, but also as a force that can influence the way individuals think, behave, and act in their daily lives. According to Sternberg (1986), love is a complex entity consisting of three main components, namely intimacy, passion, and commitment. The complexity of love makes this concept interesting to study, especially when placed in the context of individuals who have experienced traumatic experiences such as parental divorce. In this case, students from broken homes are important subjects to study because they are in the early adult development phase, which is full of the dynamics of identity search, value formation, and the need to establish healthy relationships (Papalia, 2008).

The phenomenon of broken homes is an issue that is increasingly prevalent in modern society. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (2023) shows that the divorce rate in Indonesia continues to increase from year to year, which has a direct impact on the psychological well-being of children. Previous studies show that children from broken homes tend to experience

E-ISSN: 2798-3250

Published by: UIN Datokarama Palu

emotional problems, decreased self-confidence, and difficulties in building stable interpersonal relationships (Santrock, 2016). Students from broken homes face a double challenge: on the one hand, they are required to achieve academic success and plan for the future, while on the other hand, they must manage the psychological impact of family breakdown. In this context, the meaning of love for students from broken homes is very important to study, because love is not only related to romantic relationships, but also as a form of expression of affection, trust, and emotional stability (Erikson, 1994).

The purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of love for students who have experienced broken homes. The focus of the research is directed at identifying how the experience of parental divorce shapes students' views of love, both in interpersonal relationships and in the framework of the family life they imagine in the future. This study seeks to explore the subjective experiences of broken home students in interpreting love, so that a deeper understanding of their psychosocial dynamics can be obtained (Creswell, 2013). Theoretically, this study is based on Sternberg's theory of love, which emphasizes intimacy, passion, and commitment as the three main components in building healthy relationships (Sternberg, 1986). This theory is relevant because it can explain the variations in the attitudes of students from broken homes in expressing love, whether they tend to be full of doubt or use it as motivation to build a harmonious family. In addition, this study is also supported by the concept of family function as stated in Government Regulation No. 87 of 2014 concerning the function of love in the family. This regulation emphasizes that love is the foundation for creating a harmonious family, which, if not fulfilled, has the potential to cause conflict, divorce, and even have a negative impact on child development.

A number of previous studies provide an important foundation for this study. For example, a study conducted by Amato (2001) shows that individuals from broken homes are more prone to romantic relationship problems, including difficulty trusting partners, fear of commitment, and a tendency to avoid long-term relationships. Other studies have found that although many children from broken homes experience difficulties, some of them are able to develop high resilience and use their bitter experiences as lessons to build better relationships in the future (Werner & Smith, 1992). These findings reinforce the importance of research on the meaning of love for students from broken homes as a group that is both vulnerable and has the potential for growth.

The variables studied in this research cover three main aspects, namely the experience of a broken home as a background variable, the meaning of love as a core variable, and its impact on students' interpersonal relationships. The relationship between these variables is expected to provide an overview of how a disharmonious family context affects an individual's psychosocial and affective development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, this study contributes not only to the study of developmental psychology and family sociology but also to the field of higher education related to student welfare.

The benefits of this study can be seen from two perspectives, namely theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on the relationship between broken homes and the meaning of love, especially among university students as the younger generation who are preparing to build a family life (Papalia, 2008). Practically, the results of this study can contribute to educational institutions, counselors, and other related parties in designing more targeted guidance and counseling programs for students who have experienced broken homes (Prayitno, 2012). In addition, this study can also be a reference for parents and the wider community in understanding the importance of the family's role as the main basis for teaching love and affection (Santrock, 2016).

Thus, research on the meaning of love for students from broken homes is relevant because, in addition to having a strong theoretical basis, it also has practical urgency in responding to increasingly complex social challenges. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of how

students from broken homes interpret love is expected to make a positive contribution to efforts to build a resilient, empowered generation capable of creating healthier relationships in the future.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method includes data collection techniques, sample selection techniques, subject characteristics, research location, data analysis techniques, and limitations of the research method. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore in depth the perspectives of students from broken homes at the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu (Creswell, 2013). This design was chosen so that the researcher could understand the meaning constructed by the subjects based on their life experiences in a systematic and naturalistic manner (Moleong, 2018). The research location was determined to be the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu, Jalan Diponegoro No. 23, Kelurahan Lere, Kecamatan Palu Barat, Kota Palu, Provinsi Sulawesi Tengah. The location was chosen based on the relevance of the religious and social context of students at the State Islamic University (UIN), which is synonymous with religiosity, as well as having a population that matches the focus of the research (Sugiyono, 2019).

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which is selected deliberately based on certain criteria (Patton, 2002). The main informants were five students who came from broken homes. The characteristics of the subjects included: (1) active students of the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu, (2) experiencing a broken home background, and (3) willing to be informants by providing data openly. Data collection techniques were carried out using three methods: (1) participatory observation, in which the researcher directly observed the interactions and expressions of informants in their daily lives (Spradley, 1980:54); (2) in-depth interviews, using structured and semi-structured approaches so that the researcher could obtain rich and in-depth data (Kvale, 1996); and (3) documentation, in the form of notes, photos, and relevant written documents as supporting data (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted interactively through three stages: (1) data reduction, which is simplifying and focusing on relevant information from the field; (2) data presentation, through narratives accompanied by supporting tables or matrices; and (3) drawing conclusions, which is interpreting the meaning based on all verified data (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). To ensure data validity, this study used source and technique triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from various informants, while technique triangulation used a comparison of observation, interview, and documentation results (Denzin, 1978).

The limitation of this study lies in the relatively small number of subjects, so that the results cannot be generalized broadly (Patton, 2002). In addition, the researcher's subjectivity also has the potential to influence the data interpretation process, even though this has been anticipated by applying triangulation (Moleong, 2018). Thus, this research method is expected to produce a valid and in-depth description of the experiences of students from broken homes in interpreting love in the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu.

DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study involved five students from the Faculty of Ushuluddin Adab and Dakwah (FUAD) who came from broken homes at the State Islamic University (UIN) Datokarama Palu. The willingness of the students to be interviewed was proven by the existence of informed consent as an agreement between the researcher and the informants. The informants' profiles are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Research Informant Profiles

Subject	Gender	Age	Mayor
Informan B	Male	22 years old	Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam (KPI)
Informan A	Male	22 years old	Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam (BKI)
Informan P	Female	21 years old	Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam (PMI)
Informan Z	Female	22 years old	Ilmu Perpustakaan dan Informasi Islam (IPII)
Informan J	Female	24 years old	Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir (IAT)

Robert J. Sternberg, in his triangular theory of love, argues that love consists of three main components, namely intimacy, passion, and commitment. Based on the results of research on the meaning of love for students from broken homes in terms of intimacy (closeness), the relationships that students have with their parents are relatively strong, although the intensity varies from person to person. All students expressed the same desire to improve their relationship with their beloved parents, feel happy, and appreciate their parents' presence. One student even placed their parents in a position of very high esteem. In addition, most students were able to build emotional closeness through intense communication, sharing happiness, and providing mutual support. Meanwhile, three out of five students felt they could rely on their parents when needed, and two of them felt a sense of mutual benefit in the relationship between children and parents. These findings show that the aspect of intimacy, which includes emotional closeness, a sense of belonging, trust, and appreciation, is present in the students' relationships with their parents, albeit in varying degrees and forms. This can be seen based on the results of an interview with one of the students, informant Z, who stated the following:

"Emm... Oh! When we were still together, we could eat together, so... love is togetherness or... a sense of security, I think it fits because... if we have someone who is our hope, who fulfills our needs in life, so I think that is also a form... a form of love, because it's like... giving gifts, that's the term for it, yes, a sense of security."

The results of the study on the meaning of love for students from broken homes in terms of passion show that in relationships, love is present in various forms for most students. Of the five students, two explicitly showed physical attraction to their partner or future partner, which is one of the main indicators of romantic passion. Three of the students stated that there was a strong emotional urge to continue being with their partner, enjoying romantic moments and the need to be cared for and pampered, reflecting the intensity of affective attachment in the

relationship. In addition, the other three students also showed deep concern for their partner's feelings and a willingness to make sacrifices, indicating intense and deep emotional involvement. Overall, the aspect of passion in the students' relationships was evident through physical attraction, emotional attachment, and the urge to maintain closeness with their partners. This can be seen based on the interview results of one of the female students, informant J, who stated the following:

"He's handsome... handsome, hahaha... He is 100% religious, gentle... I'm serious! Gentle, if... hahaha... if... gentle, if he gets angry, he's not rude. He doesn't like to get angry. I'm not traumatized by my dad... no! Because I don't like that... being yelled at, what? But, no trauma. Just don't want to. Don't be stingy! That's the main thing. Hahaha..."

The results of the study on the meaning of love for broken home students in terms of commitment among five students indicate that all students showed commitment in the form of short-term decisions, namely choosing to love someone as the first step in a relationship. This reflects a conscious intention and personal desire to form an emotional relationship. Three of the five students also expressed long-term commitment, namely the determination to stay with someone until the end. In addition, three other students also showed deep concern for their partner's feelings and a willingness to make sacrifices, indicating intense and deep emotional involvement. Overall, the aspect of passion in the students' relationships was evident through physical attraction, emotional attachment, and the desire to maintain closeness with their partners. This can be seen based on the results of an interview with one of the female students, informant J, who stated the following:

"He's handsome... handsome, hahaha... 100% religious, gentle... I'm serious! Gentle, if... hahaha... if... gentle, if he gets angry, he's not rude. He doesn't like to get angry. I don't have trauma with my dad... no! Because I don't like that... being yelled at, what? ... but I don't have trauma. I just don't want to. Don't be stingy! That's the main thing. Hahaha..."

The results of research on the meaning of love for students from broken homes in terms of commitment among five students stated that all students showed commitment in the form of short-term decisions, namely choosing to love someone as the first step in a relationship. This reflects a conscious intention and personal desire to form an emotional relationship. Three of the five students also expressed long-term commitment, namely the determination to stay with someone until the end. These findings show that the aspect of commitment in a relationship is not limited to momentary feelings, but also includes the readiness to always be together in various conditions, thus indicating deep feelings and stability in interpersonal relationships. This can be seen based on the results of an interview with one of the students, informant A, who stated the following:

"Ee... As for the criteria... Well, of course we learn from our parents, right? We look at our parents first, so automatically we look at our own mother, our own mom. The first criterion is definitely patience. Patience in all trials, in all trials within the household, she is patient... she perseveres, so she... whatever it is, she is patient. That's the criterion I like the most, she... she prays, prays five times a day, that's what I like the most. Yes, that's right! If there is a problem, solve it, don't involve a third party. Yes, what I mean is... we have our own household, so we should find a solution for... find a solution with other people, we have to solve it! Children should not interfere in household matters like that. So, it is the husband and wife who have the right to solve it. That's how it is. If my boyfriend follows my mother's ways. Yes, there are. We should try the first approach, which is to resolve it at that moment. If there's no solution, we mean... we should each find our own way out first. Like, we

should... take a break first, because if... because men and women have different ways of solving problems, right? When a man is solving a problem, don't keep asking him about it... just let him be, give him time to figure it out. Because he also needs time to think. Sometimes, sometimes he doesn't... sometimes he doesn't think about it, I often explain... I often remind him, that when a man has a problem with... with you, I mean... give him a chance to think first. Don't keep pushing him to solve it that day, because he may not be able to solve it that day. Yes, he will definitely be angry, because... because I am careless with time. If we don't chat anymore, then... we don't chat anymore! We are the same age, born in the same year, just different months, I was born first... only one month difference. I'm the older sibling, he's the younger one. I'm September, he's... November. One month apart. Yes, sometimes he accepts it, sometimes he doesn't. As for a wife, I'll just stay here for now, because I haven't found the right criteria yet. But if he... if he lets go, I mean... if he finds someone better than me, then that's it. If it's meant to be, we'll stay together. If it's not meant to be, no matter how hard we try to hold on, if it's not meant to be, we'll let go anyway. The main criterion my mom has is that he's patient and devout in his prayers."

Based on the results of research on the meaning of love for broken home students in the aspect of intimacy (closeness-feeling), the relationship students have with their parents is relatively strong, although the intensity varies from individual to individual. All students show the same desire to increase togetherness with the parents they love, feel happy and appreciate the existence of their parents. One of the female students even placed her parents in a very high position of appreciation. Most students are also able to build emotional closeness through intense communication, sharing happiness and being able to provide mutual support. Three out of five students feel they can rely on their parents when needed, and two of them feel a feeling of mutual benefit in the relationship between children and parents.

This can be seen based on the results of an interview from one of the female students, namely informant Z, who stated:

"Um.. Oh! when we're still together, we can eat together, that's how ee.. love is togetherness or.. a sense of security, I think it's in because right.. If it's like we have something to hope for, it's us, which is to fulfill our living needs, so I think it's also a form.. a form of love, because it's like.. giving gifts, that's the term ee.. yes, a sense of security."

Apart from that, informant P also said:

"I always try to keep a good relationship with Mama, even though I'm not at home. Sometimes it's just by telephone, but it feels very close if you can tell everything."

Meanwhile, informant B added:

"You have been separated for a long time, but I still respect him. Sometimes we chat about small things, that's enough to make me feel like I still have a family."

These findings show that aspects of intimacy that include emotional closeness, mutual belonging, trust, and appreciation are present in students' relationships with their parents, although in different forms.

Aspects of Passion (Passion). The results of research on the meaning of love for broken home students in the passion aspect show that love is present in various forms in most students. Of the five students, two explicitly showed physical attraction to their future partner or potential partner, a key indicator of romantic arousal. Three other students emphasized a strong emotional urge to stay with your partner, enjoy romantic moments, and the need to be cared for and pampered.

Informant J stated:

"Handsome ee.. handsome, hahaha.. His religion is 100%, gentle.. I'm serious about this ee! gentle, if.. hahaha.. if.. gentle, if he is angry, not rude. Doesn't like getting angry. I'm traumatized by my papa, no.. because I don't like that.. in so-and-so.. like being shouted at..."

Meanwhile, informant P added another perspective:

"If I like someone it's not because of their physique, but because they are caring and patient. I need someone who can calm me down."

Meanwhile, informant A emphasized that passion in the relationship for him is not just a matter of physical attraction, but a passion for maintaining the relationship:

"Love must be fought for, not just because you like it or like it. There must be effort to stay equally comfortable."

These findings show that the passion aspect reflects the intensity of affective attachment and deep concern for the partner, both in physical and emotional form. Commitment Aspects (Commitments). The results of research on the meaning of love for broken home students in the commitment aspect show that all students have a commitment in the form of a short-term decision to love someone as the first step in a relationship. Three out of five students also expressed a long-term commitment, namely the determination to survive until the end. This can be seen from informant A's statement which stated:

"Ee.. As for the criteria.. Well, surely we might, of course we will learn from our parents anyway, we saw from our parents first.. [your long quote is still maintained here]."

Apart from that, informant B said:

"If I believe, love must be maintained. You can't just share your feelings. I learn from my parents, if there is no commitment, I end up separating too."

Meanwhile, informant Z revealed something more reflective:

"I used to be afraid of having a serious relationship, but now I think, if you want to be happy, you have to be ready to take responsibility."

These findings strengthen that the commitment to love for broken home students is a form of emotional maturity and a reflection of previous family experiences.

Discussion

Sternberg's theory of love, which views love as a combination of three main components, namely intimacy (intimacy), passion (passion), and commitment (commitment), is an important framework in analyzing this phenomenon (Sternberg, 1986). In Islam, love is seen as a gift from Allah SWT. which must be managed with the values of purity, compassion (rahmah), and moral responsibility (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Therefore, understanding love in a broken home student can be seen as the result of interactions between empirical experiences and believed spiritual values. Parental divorce is often the most lasting emotional event in a child's life. Research shows that these experiences influence the formation of emotional attachment and adult relationship patterns (Amato & Keith, 1991). Students who experience this condition tend to face significant psychological impacts, such as emotional instability, fear of rejection, and difficulty trusting their partner (Riggio, 2004). This influences how they understand love, interpersonal relationships, and the meaning of commitment. In contrast to students from harmonious families, they often have a more complex, even pessimistic perception of the meaning of true love (Kalmijn, 2013). In the perspective of Sternberg's theory of love, broken home students often show inequality in the components of love. They may be able to feel intimacy and passion, but experience obstacles in building commitment due to past trauma (Acevedo & Aron, 2009). In Islam, commitment to love is seen as a form of moral responsibility and worship. Therefore, students affected by parental divorce need to receive spiritual and emotional guidance in order to be able to balance these three aspects of love within an Islamic framework. Research by Syafira and Rahmawati (2021) also shows that religiosity can act as a protective factor against emotional instability in romantic relationships.

Many broken home students show skepticism towards love. The experience of witnessing a parent's failed relationship makes them see love as something fragile and unstable. Research by Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) found that children from divorced families often carry a fear of commitment into adulthood. Within the framework of Sternberg's theory, this results in unbalanced relationships, for example intimacy without commitment, or passion without a strong foundation of trust. The Islamic perspective emphasizes that love should not be built solely on the basis of lust, but should be strengthened by rahmah (compassion), mawaddah (deep love), and tsiqah (belief), as explained in the QS. Ar-Rum verse 21. These values enrich a moral dimension that is not explicitly explained in Western psychological theory. In contrast, students who come from harmonious families generally have a more positive view of love. They grow up in an environment that provides role models of loving relationships, open communication, and long-term commitment. This is in line with research by Cui and Fincham (2010) which shows that parental relationship patterns have a strong influence on the quality of children's romantic relationships in adulthood. In the context of Sternberg's love theory, these students tend to be able to form complete love (consummate love), namely a balance between intimacy, passion and commitment. In the Islamic view, this condition is close to the ideals of the *sakinah* family, where love is a means of achieving peace of mind and happiness that is approved by Allah.

However, not all broken home students have a negative view of love. Some are able to process bitter experiences into valuable lessons. Walsh's (2016) research shows that family resilience and social support can help individuals from broken homes develop higher levels of empathy and emotional responsibility. They learn the importance of communication, honesty, and sincerity in building healthy relationships. This transformation describes an emotional and spiritual learning process that is in line with the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul), namely efforts to improve oneself through introspection and drawing closer to Allah (Nasr, 2007). In Sternberg's theory of love, this suggests the growth of commitment born of

consciousness, rather than merely emotional impulses. Finally, the meaning of love for broken home students is greatly influenced by the way they interpret and process past experiences. Emotional support from friends, family and counselors is an important factor in forming a healthy and balanced perception of love (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Even though students from harmonious families have certain emotional advantages, broken home students still have the potential to form a wise view of love if they go through a good psychological and spiritual healing process. The integration between Sternberg's theory of love and Islamic values shows that love is not only about emotions, but also responsibility and courage to build meaningful relationships. In Islam, true love is love that brings goodness, maturity and closeness to Allah SWT. Thus, the meaning of love for broken home students is the result of a complex interaction between past emotional experiences and the spiritual values held. Although parental divorce can leave psychological scars, social support and spiritual understanding can help individuals internalize the meaning of healthy, mature love. True love in this case is not just a feeling, but a spiritual process that requires commitment, maturity and sincerity in building relationships that are approved by Allah SWT.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the meaning of love for broken home students at the Ushuluddin Adab and Da'wah Faculty (FUAD) of Datokarama Palu State Islamic University (UIN), is significantly influenced by the experience of parental divorce. Love is not only interpreted as an emotional bond, but also as an effort to seek security, stability and long-term commitment. Broken home students interpret love in several dimensions:

1. When parents are still together, love is seen as a symbol of warmth and family togetherness.
2. After divorce, love is interpreted as ambivalence between longing for stability and anxiety about the repetition of conflict.
3. In making peace with oneself, love becomes a means of self-acceptance, the healing process, and the reconstruction of trust in relationships.
4. In choosing a life partner, love is positioned as an instrument of caution, as well as a means of building healthy, stable and morally-spiritual commitment-oriented relationships.

Thus, this research confirms that broken home experiences shape the way students interpret love more complexly, critically and reflectively than students from whole families.

This study has several limitations. First, the number of informants is relatively limited (five students), so it does not fully represent the diversity of broken home student experiences in a broader context. Secondly, the data were obtained through interviews and observations, and were thus strongly influenced by the subjectivity of informants as well as researchers. Third, this research only focuses on one faculty, so the results cannot be generalized to all students at the Datokarama Palu State Islamic University (UIN) or to other universities.

Based on the research findings, several suggestions can be put forward. First, for campuses, there needs to be a psychological mentoring or counseling program that supports broken home students in managing emotions and interpersonal relationships. Second, for subsequent researchers, it is recommended to expand the number of informants, involve students from various faculties and universities, and utilize a mixed methods approach so that research results are richer and more comprehensive. Third, future research can further examine the factors of religiosity, local culture and the role of social support in influencing the meaning of broken home student love.

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