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**The Impact of Fatherless on Depression Levels among Adolescent Girls: An Analysis  
Using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Depression is a common mental disorder among adolescent girls, particularly in situations involving fatherlessness. The absence of a father's role—whether physical, emotional, or psychological—can trigger various psychological problems, including depression. **Object:** This study aimed to examine the influence of fatherlessness on the risk of depression among adolescent girls using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) at a senior high school in Glenmore District. **Method:** Two main variables were observed in this study: (1) fatherlessness, measured through the Fatherless Questionnaire covering physical, emotional, and social dimensions (Cronbach's alpha = 0.910), and (2) depression risk, measured using the PHQ-9, which has previously demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.936). A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, involving 73 purposively selected female students who met the inclusion criteria. **Results:** The findings indicated that the majority of respondents experienced low levels of fatherlessness (45%) and moderate levels of depression risk (42%). Spearman's rank correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between fatherlessness and depression risk ( $p = 0.000$ ), with a correlation coefficient of 0.404, indicating a moderate association. **Conclusion:** These results highlight the need for preventive measures in schools, including early screening, psychosocial support, and structured group therapy or support groups facilitated by school counselors and mental health professionals, to strengthen coping skills among adolescents experiencing fatherlessness.

**Keywords:** Depression Risk, Fatherless among Adolescent Girls, Screening PHQ-9

**BACKGROUND**

Depression is a complex psychological disorder that involves various risk factors and causes. Risk factors contributing to increased depression include mood changes experienced by adolescents and heightened stress associated with life changes (Axelta & Abidin, 2022). Depression can manifest as sadness, an inability to solve problems, low self-esteem, and negative thoughts, including suicidal ideation (Haswita et al., 2025). One factor that can exacerbate depressive symptoms in adolescent girls is the

absence of a father figure, commonly referred to as fatherlessness. The term "fatherless" describes the lack of a father's role in a child's developmental life, whether through physical, psychological, or emotional absence during childhood (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021).

The prevalence of depression-related problems among adolescents (aged 15–24 years) is 6.2%, increasing with age, reaching a peak of 8.9% in those aged 75 years and older, 8.0% in the 65–74 age group, and 6.5% in the 55–64 age group (Kementrian Kesehatan Republik

Indonesia, 2023). Previous studies have shown that participants have experienced depressive phases severe enough to engage in self-harm and seek assistance from psychologists or psychiatrists to manage their lives (Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023). Participants reported that they were easily reminded of traumatic experiences and had thoughts of suicide. Depression can thus act as a contributing factor to suicidal ideation (Wibiharto, B. M. Y., Setiadi, R., & Widyaningsih, 2021).

Fatherlessness occurs when a child grows up without the presence of a father figure, due to circumstances such as divorce or death (Hidayah et al., 2023). Fatherlessness poses a significant risk to children, as the father's role is crucial. Positive parenting by fathers has been shown to yield beneficial outcomes for children. The absence of a father's role can disrupt mental well-being and increase the risk of depression in adolescents (Putri, Chaizuran, & Mouliansyah, 2023). Indonesia ranks third globally in terms of fatherlessness (Rachmawati & Rahmasari, 2024). This trend has continued over the past five years, with divorce being a major cause of the absence of father figures, leading to emotional disturbances and depression in girls (Rahmadhani et al., 2024).

Sepanjang Village, located in Glenmore District, Banyuwangi Regency, is a community characterized by diverse cultural backgrounds. After conducting academic considerations and coordination with the school, the researchers decided to carry out the survey at a senior high school with direct assistance from the principal and the Bimbingan Konseling (BK; Guidance and Counseling) teachers. Preliminary data indicated that several female students exhibited depressive symptoms associated with family conditions such as parental divorce, the absence of a father figure, or parents who worked outside the region and had not returned for an extended period. One of the proposed solutions is encouraging fathers

to allocate time to interact with their children, even through simple conversations. The absence of a father figure during adolescence may negatively impact concentration, learning processes, and psychological well-being (Putri, Chaizuran, & Mouliansyah, 2023). Therefore, an essential preventive measure to reduce the risk of depression among adolescent girls is early screening to identify potential contributing factors (Kartini et al., 2023). This study aims to examine the influence of fatherlessness on the risk of depression among adolescent girls.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional approach, conducted to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables at a specific point in time. This design was chosen because it is appropriate for measuring the influence of fatherlessness on the risk of depression among adolescent girls using the PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9) instrument. The respondents were selected from a population of 117 female students at SMA PGRI 10 Glenmore. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria consisting of female students who had experienced a lack of a father figure (due to death, living separately, divorce, or working away from home) for more than six months and who were able to understand and complete the questionnaire. The exclusion criteria included a history of diagnosed psychotic disorders and refusal to provide informed consent. A total of 73 female students met the criteria and were included as respondents. The study was conducted between May and June 2025.

Respondents who agreed to participate signed a written informed consent form and were then instructed to independently complete the Fatherless Questionnaire and the PHQ-9 in a designated classroom. The Fatherless

Questionnaire measured the extent of father figure absence across three dimensions—physical, emotional, and social. It consisted of 40 items, of which 35 were validated in previous research (87.5%) (Nelisah, 2024). Scores obtained from this instrument were classified into four categories: very low, low, moderate, and high levels of fatherlessness.

The PHQ-9 (Patient Health Questionnaire-9) was used to assess the respondents' levels of depression. This instrument consists of nine items rated on a scale of 0–3, reflecting the frequency of depressive symptoms during the previous two weeks. Total scores were categorized into five depression levels: no symptoms (0–4), mild (5–9), moderate (10–14), moderately severe (15–19), and severe (20–27). Prior research has established the validity and reliability of the PHQ-9 (American Psychological Association (APA), 2005), with Cronbach's alpha consistently above 0.7. In this study, the Fatherless Questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.910 ( $>0.374$ ), and the PHQ-9 showed a reliability coefficient of 0.936, indicating excellent internal consistency for both instruments.

### Fatherless

The questionnaire completion required approximately 20 minutes, and the researcher was present to ensure data completeness. The collected data were analyzed descriptively using frequency distributions and inferentially using the Spearman Rho statistical test to examine the relationship between the two variables. The data analysis in this study was conducted in three stages: univariate analysis, which described the characteristics of respondents and the frequency distribution of variables; bivariate analysis, using the Spearman Rank test to determine the relationship between fatherlessness and the risk of depression; and ethical review. This study received ethical approval under decree No: 219/03/KEPK-STIKESBWI/II/2024-2025. Written consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all participants, and the study adhered to ethical standards for research involving underage respondents, including confidentiality and voluntary participation

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.**

Distribution of Fatherlessness Levels in Adolescent Girls

Fatherlessness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Low	13	18%
Low	33	45%
Moderate	18	25%
High	9	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on Table 1 above, it can be seen that the majority of respondents had low levels of fatherlessness, totaling 33 respondents (45%). Others were in the moderate

category, with 18 respondents (25%), and very low, with 13 respondents (18%). Meanwhile, only 9 respondents (12%) fell into the high category

## Depression Risk

**Table 2.**

Distribution of Depression Risk Levels in Adolescent Girls According to PHQ-9

Depression Risk	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No Symptoms	7	10%
Mild	15	20%
Moderate	31	42%
Moderately Severe	13	18%
Severe	7	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100%</b>

Based on the table above, the majority of adolescent girls fell into the moderate depression category, with 31 respondents (42%). Others were in the mild category (20%) and moderately severe category (18%), while 10% of respondents showed no depressive symptoms, and another 10% experienced severe depression. These results indicate

that more than half of the adolescent girls (approximately 70%) exhibited depressive symptoms ranging from moderate to severe, suggesting a psychological condition that requires attention and support from both family and their social environment.

## Correlation of Fatherlessness with Depression Risk in Female Adolescents

**Table 3.**

Cross-Tabulated Results of Fatherlessness and Depression Risk in Adolescent Girls

		Depression Risk					Total
		No Symptoms	Mild	Moderate	Moderately Severe	Severe	
Fatherlessness	Very Low	1	5	7	0	0	13 (18%)
	Low	4	9	13	6	1	33 (45%)
	Moderate	2	1	7	4	4	18 (25%)
	High	0	0	4	3	2	9 (12%)
<b>TOTAL</b>		7 (10%)	15 (20%)	31 (42%)	13 (18%)	7 (10%)	73 (100%)

Based on the cross-tabulation results between fatherlessness levels and depression risk among adolescent girls using the PHQ-9 questionnaire, as shown in Table 3 above, the distribution indicates that the majority of respondents fell into the low fatherlessness category, with 33 individuals (45%). The moderate fatherlessness category included 18 respondents (25%), the very low category included 13 respondents (18%), and the high category included 9 respondents

(12%). In terms of depression risk levels, most adolescents exhibited moderate depressive symptoms, totaling 31 respondents (42%), followed by mild depression with 15 respondents (20%), moderately severe depression with 13 respondents (18%), no depressive symptoms with 7 respondents (10%), and severe depression with 7 respondents (10%).

**Table 4.**

Correlation Analysis of Fatherlessness and Depression Risk in Female Adolescents

	<b>Depression Risk</b>
Fatherlessness - Pearson Correlation	0,404
Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000
N	73

Based on the Spearman correlation test results, the correlation coefficient was found to be  $\rho = 0.404$  with a significance value of  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates a significant positive relationship of moderate strength between fatherlessness levels and depression risk among adolescent girls. Thus, the higher the level of fatherlessness experienced by adolescent girls, the higher the risk of depression identified through the PHQ-9 measurement.

## **Discussion**

### **Fatherlessness**

This study involving 73 adolescent girls found that the majority of respondents fell into the low fatherlessness category, indicating that nearly half of the participants still experienced a relatively adequate level of paternal presence or involvement in their daily lives. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which also reported that although many adolescents maintain some degree of contact or interaction with their fathers, emotional fatherlessness may still occur

and influence their psychosocial development (Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023), (Putri, Chaizuran, & Rahmad, 2023). Furthermore, Rahmadhani et al. (2024) highlighted that the loss or absence of a father's role can significantly impact children's emotional development and coping capacity, reinforcing the importance of addressing the psychological consequences experienced by adolescents with limited paternal involvement (Rahmadhani et al., 2024).

Fatherlessness in a child occurs when the father is still alive but lacks a significant emotional relationship with the child (Riska et al., 2025). The absence of a father in a child's life can have a substantial impact, particularly on the development of the child's emotional, mental, and behavioral aspects (Rahmadhani et al., 2024). Within family relationships, when a family member—especially the father—prefers to engage with their smartphone rather than interact with the child, it reflects a habitual use of social media that weakens communication and diminishes emotional warmth between

father and child (Litha et al., 2025). In late adolescence, adolescents experience new cognitive developments, require social interactions, and begin to exhibit a high degree of independence (Hamidah & Rizal, 2022).

The study also showed that most respondents still had fathers who were alive and/or living in the same household. Nevertheless, this condition does not always guarantee a strong emotional bond between father and child. The low level of fatherlessness observed among most respondents may be influenced by the quality of interactions, particularly regarding communication and emotional warmth between father and child (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Haswita et al., 2025; Hidayah et al., 2023). From a psychosocial perspective, a father's physical presence does not necessarily correspond to emotional presence. Previous studies have reported that fatherlessness can be emotional even when the father is physically present at home, especially if the relationship involves minimal communication, limited intimacy, and restricted affective support (Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023; Rahmadhani et al., 2024; Wibiharto, B. M. Y., Setiadi, R., & Widyaningsih, 2021).

In this study, nearly half of the respondents were in the low fatherlessness category, which may also be attributed to their being in late adolescence. Adolescents at this stage are less focused on the family environment and more oriented toward peers, social interactions, and communities that align with their developing sense of identity (Dwi Putri Wahyuni et al., 2022; Pfeifer & Allen, 2022). Additionally, research has suggested that emotional support from peers or significant others can partially compensate for limited paternal involvement during late adolescence (Dwi Putri Wahyuni et al., 2022; Rachmawati & Rahmasari, 2024).

### **Depression Risk**

This study involving 73 adolescent girls found that the majority of respondents fell into the low fatherlessness category, indicating that nearly half of the participants still experienced a relatively adequate level of paternal presence or involvement in their lives. These findings are in line with previous studies, which similarly reported that although many adolescents continue to have some degree of interaction with their fathers, emotional fatherlessness may still occur and affect their social and psychological adjustment (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021). The identification of a smaller subgroup with high to very high levels of fatherlessness is also consistent with earlier research, which found that adolescents who experience greater paternal absence tend to show more pronounced psychological vulnerabilities—including emotional difficulties and early signs of depression.

These findings align with adolescent development theory, which states that puberty triggers a series of biological (hormonal and brain development), social (peer relationships and social perception), and psychological changes that collectively increase the risk of internal emotional problems, such as depression and anxiety, in adolescents. These changes are transactional in nature and contribute to emotional vulnerability (Pfeifer & Allen, 2022). Limited emotional support from family can exacerbate adolescents' psychological conditions, causing depressive symptoms to increase even when clinical signs are not severe.

Depression in adolescent girls can also result from parental academic demands, such as the expectation to achieve high grades, graduate according to parental wishes, and frequent comparisons with peers or siblings, which may cause anxiety about failure (Dwi Putri Wahyuni et al., 2022). Adolescent girls tend to internalize and ruminate on problems, particularly when there is no father figure

to listen to their stories or complaints, leading to feelings of loneliness due to insufficient family support, especially from fathers (L. N. Abbasi et al., 2024). Depression is characterized by irritability, feelings of being down, fear, lack of motivation, sadness, and conflicts with friends or family (Djohan et al., 2022).

In this study, the majority of adolescents exhibited a moderate risk of depression, largely attributed to the high social and academic pressures typical of late adolescence, a transitional period toward adulthood (E. Abbasi, 2025; Pfeifer & Allen, 2022), (L. N. Abbasi et al., 2024). During this stage, adolescents particularly require strong emotional support from parental figures, especially fathers, to foster a sense of security, motivation, and resilience (Axelta & Abidin, 2022), (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021), (Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023). The absence of such support—commonly referred to as “fatherless”—can create an emotional deficit that, while often invisible, significantly impacts daily functioning (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Putri, Chaizuran, & Mouliansyah, 2023; Rahmadhani et al., 2024). Adolescents experiencing limited warm communication at home are prone to ruminative thinking rather than problem-solving, as there is no one to provide guidance or encouragement (Axelta & Abidin, 2022; Haswita et al., 2025; Kartini et al., 2023). This situation can increase vulnerability to anxiety, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms. Moreover, studies have demonstrated that fatherless adolescents are more likely to struggle with coping mechanisms and social adjustment, further exacerbating mental health risks during this critical developmental phase (Nelisah, 2024; Rachmawati & Rahmasari, 2024).

### **Correlation of Fatherlessness with Depression Risk in Female Adolescents**

The Spearman Rank correlation test results in Table 4 showed a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.404$  with a significance value of  $p = 0.000$ . Since the significance value is less than 0.05, this indicates that fatherlessness has a significant effect on depression risk among adolescent girls.

correlation test (Table 4) revealed a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.404$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between fatherlessness and depression risk in adolescent girls. This finding suggests that the absence of a father figure is meaningfully associated with increased depressive symptoms, which aligns with previous studies reporting similar patterns of psychological vulnerability in fatherless adolescents (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Putri, Chaizuran, & Mouliansyah, 2023; Rahmadhani et al., 2024). These results are consistent with Dasalinda and Karneli (2021), who found that fatherless adolescents experience challenges in social adjustment, potentially contributing to heightened emotional distress, and with Putri et al. (2023), who observed a significant association between fatherlessness and depression levels among teenage girls. The correlation test results in Table 4 showed a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.404$  with a significance value of  $p = 0.000$ . Since the significance value is less than 0.05, this indicates that fatherlessness has a significant effect on depression risk among adolescent girls.

Depression can also be caused by fatherlessness; the absence of a father's role may lead adolescent girls to lose direction, become less responsible, struggle to control their emotions, experience excessive anxiety, and even develop depression due to an inability to express their feelings (Damayanti et al., 2023). Although adolescent girls may still have a mother figure, the father's involvement in decision-making, by providing information and alternative options, is considered crucial in helping the child solve problems (Mukhallisa et al., 2023). While grandparents can serve as substitute caregivers, they cannot fully replace the role of both parents, especially the father, often due to age-related limitations, which can affect the relationship between grandparents and young children (grandchildren) (Saodi et al., 2021).

The researcher assumes that the relationship between fatherlessness and depression among adolescent girls is largely driven by unmet emotional expectations. Adolescents generally expect their fathers to be sources of emotional support, attentive listeners, and protectors who provide guidance during stressful or challenging situations (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Hidayah et al., 2023; Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023), (Rahmadhani et al., 2024). When these expectations are not fulfilled, adolescents often experience deep disappointment, which, if repeated over time, can develop into feelings of neglect, loneliness, and a loss of direction, thereby increasing the risk of depression, particularly at moderate levels (Putri, Chaizuran, & Mouliansyah, 2023), (Riska et al., 2025), (Djohan et al., 2022). Furthermore, the absence of a supportive father figure may heighten adolescents' vulnerability to social pressures and academic demands, as they tend to feel less motivated, downcast, and lose interest in daily activities (L. N. Abbasi et al., 2024; Dwi Putri Wahyuni et al., 2022).

Even in cases where adolescents are raised by grandparents, the role of the biological father is not fully replaceable. Grandparental parenting often differs in approach and may not adequately meet the emotional guidance needs of adolescents (Damayanti et al., 2023; Nelisah, 2024; Rachmanulia & Dewi, 2023). Therefore, while some adolescents may live with grandparents, this arrangement does not necessarily mitigate the level of fatherlessness experienced, especially in terms of emotional support. Emotional absence of the father remains a primary factor contributing to the emergence of depressive symptoms in adolescent girls (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Hidayah et al., 2023; Rahmadhani et al., 2024).

The father's emotional involvement is thus crucial for maintaining adolescent mental health. Low-quality father-child interactions can result in

emotional alienation, increasing vulnerability to psychological issues such as depression and low self-esteem (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Kartini et al., 2023; Putri, Chaizuran, & Rahmad, 2023). Even when fathers provide financial support, a lack of emotional engagement—such as not initiating conversations or failing to inquire about the adolescent's daily experiences—creates a significant emotional void (Axelta & Abidin, 2022; Hidayah et al., 2023; Rahmadhani et al., 2024).

This absence is particularly impactful during late adolescence, a period when adolescents are transitioning toward adulthood and strongly rely on paternal guidance for coping with challenges (L. N. Abbasi et al., 2024; Pfeifer & Allen, 2022). Consequently, adolescents without emotional paternal support may experience envy toward peers with intact families and may struggle to navigate even minor difficulties, often feeling overwhelmed or confused due to the lack of guidance and encouragement (Axelta & Abidin, 2022; Rachmawati & Rahmasari, 2024)

## CONCLUSIONS

The study found a significant association between fatherlessness and depression risk among adolescent girls. Even when fatherlessness levels are low, the lack of emotional involvement from fathers increases vulnerability to depression. Adolescence, as a critical transitional stage, involves complex biological and social changes, highlighting the importance of strong parental, especially paternal, emotional support. Fatherly engagement serves as a key protective factor for maintaining mental health and psychological well-being in adolescent girls.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this study. All research processes, data analyses, and manuscript

preparation were conducted independently, without any influence from external parties that could affect the results or interpretation of the study.

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