

## **RESILIENCE OF A CHILD FROM BROKEN HOME FAMILY: PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

A parental divorce is a stressful event for children. Several studies show that children from broken homes have complex problems. However, some children from broken homes are found to be able to have a good achievement and able to grow to be positive. They are able to build resilience in facing their family problems. This study aimed to understand how a child from broken homes builds resilience. A phenomenological study was used as the method in this study. Interviews and observations were used to collect data.

The participant in this study was a 25-year-old female graduate student. Her parents divorced when she was 4 years old. Her mother got married four times. The subject had a traumatic experience during her mother's second marriage according to the domestic violence of her step father to her mother. At school, she was bullied by her friends. She also broke up with her boyfriend because he could not accept her family condition. In order to understand how the participant becomes resilience, the resilience framework which focuses on socio ecological context was used. In this case, the resilience process begins when the participant realized that something was wrong with her. After had therapy, she realized that the problem was that she had terrible anger management. It was revealed that such problem arose because she always repressed her feelings related to her family conflicts. Then she had the initiative to open and talked to her mother. She started to tell her mother about her boyfriend. After that, her mother also started to be open and strengthen her when facing problems. Although her mother was someone who caused the stressful situation to her, her mother was also the person who strengthened her the most. There are four factors that support the subject in building resilience: (1) the participant's acceptance that she has problems, (2) social supports, (2) religiosity, and (4) concern for someone around her.

**Keywords:** resilience, parental divorce, broken home

## **1 BACKGROUND**

A parental divorce can cause a negative impact on children. Teenagers who experienced parental divorce will be vulnerable to have depression symptoms, low self-esteem, aggression, alcoholic and drugs use, and criminal behavior (Rodgers & Rose, 2002). The impact of parental divorce is diverse and complex (Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011). A divorced parent is a psychologically stressful event. The children from broken home family usually are low in achievement and have a higher risk to involve troubles. Divorce also

increases the risk of adjustment problems in children (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

However, not all children with divorced parents are at risk. Some children with divorced parents are found to be achievers and to be positive despite the stress and conflict due to the parental divorce. Linley dan Joseph (2004) mentioned that children in extreme and non-conductive environments had a positive development, despite an unpleasant experience.

The success or failure of a child in dealing with parental divorce conflicts depends on the child's endurance of parental divorce. Resilience is the capacity of individuals to adapt the problems (Chen, 2005; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). It is interesting to examine how a child faces the parent's divorce as a stressful event and build resilience. How the participant achieved resilience, and the other not, is an interesting point to explore. In this study, although the participant of this study experienced the parental divorce and family conflict, she is good in study. Even though she took the double department in the different university, her GPA is always good.

## 2 RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK

Resilience refers to the successful adaptation to risk and adversity (Kumpfer, 2002). More specifically, resilience is broadly defined as the process, capacity, or outcome of the successful adaptation of challenging and threatening conditions. Resilience is the positive outcome when individual faced risky condition, under pressure, and can heal from trauma (Masten et al., 1990).

Resilience is divided into seven aspects: (1) emotional control, (2) control of impulses, (3) optimism, (4) ability to analyze problems, (5) empathy, (6) self-efficacy, and (7) attainment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Liu, Reed, and Girard, (2017) found that the dynamics of the resilience process are individual interactions with social and ecological context. Masten (2001) also said that resilience involves a caring family or community, an individual's ability that includes cognitive ability, regulation of emotion, positive views of self, and motivation from the environment. Then Bronfenbrenner dan Crouter (1983; in Kumpfer, 2002) recommended the use of social ecological models or person process context models to study contextual risk relationships and protective factors, intervening processes, and individual characteristics

In this study, resilience will be discussed using the resilience framework of Kumpfer (2002). There is six main constants defined as the main predictor of resilience: (1) stressor or challenge, (2) environmental context, (3) person-environment interactional process, (4) internal self-characteristics, (5) resilience processes, 6) positive outcomes.

### 2.1 The Acute Stressor or Challenge

The stressor which faced by the individual activates the resilience process and creates an imbalance in the individual. The level of stress perceived by individuals depends on perception, cognitive judgment, and interpretation of the stressor as an unpleasant threat. If individual success in facing the event, the individual will achieve resilience. The presence of challenges or problems helps the individual face the another stress and grows due to experience (Kumpfer, 2002).

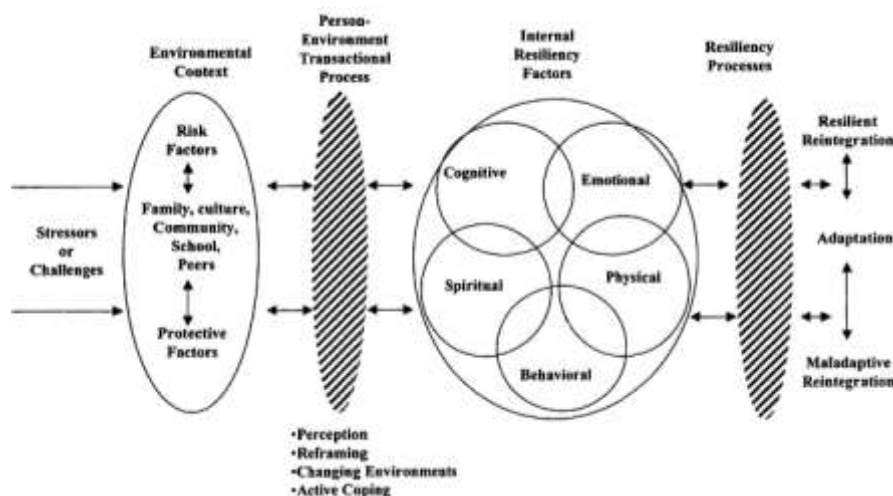


Fig. 1. Resilience Framework (Adapted from "Factors and processes contributing to Resilience: The Resilience framework," by Kumpfer, K.L. 2002)

## **2.2 The External Environmental Risk and Protective Factors**

The environmental context in which individuals live is the most influencing factor of risk and the process of attaining resilience. Families, neighbors, schools, and peers are the context where the socialization process takes place. When an acute stressor occurs, the environment can be a buffer of negative impact. High-risk environments such as children from dysfunctional families (Kumpfer, 2002). Snyder and Lopez (2002) describe four protective factors for psychosocial resilience in children and adolescents (1) within the child, (2) within the family, (3) within the family or other relationship, and (4) within the community. Within child factors include problem-solving skills, positive perceptions and self-efficacy, beliefs and life meaning, seeing that there are positive things in the world, good self-regulation, a sense of humor, and an interesting side.

The Within Family factors include of having close family relationships, having supportive families, parental education, parental involvement in children's education, and socioeconomic conditions. Factors Within Family or the other Relationship includes the support of people around and relationships with peers. The Within Community factors include the school environment, organization, community life, public security, and health services.

## **2.3 Person-Environmental Interactional Processes**

The person-environmental interactional process includes both conscious and unconscious understanding to modify the environment or selectively accept environmental influences. External resilience is closely related to the ecological social context in which resilience is then developed over time (Liu et al., 2017). Some interactional processes that help the youth transform a high-risk environment become more protective environments include: (1) selective perception, (2) cognitive reframing, (3) planning and dreaming, (4) identification and attachment with prosocial people, (5) active environmental modification, and (6) active coping.

## **2.4 Internal Self Characteristics**

The internal self-characteristics which are the main factors in order to achieve successful adaptation in facing the negative stressor consist of (1) spiritual or motivational characteristics, (2) cognitive competencies, (3) behavioral or social competencies, (4) emotional stability and emotional management, (5) physical well being and physical competencies. The internal self-characteristics are needed by the individual to adapt to the different task, different culture, and different environment.

## **2.5 Resilience Process**

Resilience processes include both short-term and long-term resilience that individuals learn through exposure to stressors that help individuals be able to bounce back. This process includes of the interaction between individual characteristics and final outcomes. It is not enough to simply identify the protective factors in the environment, but also need to know how to create resilience factors by designing and studying the process of resilience formation.

## **2.6 Positive Outcome or Successful Life Adaptation**

Positive outcomes or successful adaptations in specific developmental tasks, support positive adaptation to subsequent developmental tasks which then support the formation of a resilient individual. This outcome is a dynamic model so that positive outcomes today predict the outcomes that will be achieved when the individual experiences stress later in life.

## **3 RESILIENCE IN BROKEN HOME FAMILY**

Research on parental divorce had been done by Cui, Fincham, dan Durtschi (2011). The findings found that parental divorce had an impact on the romantic relationship of teenagers and adults whose parents divorced. However, the perceived impact depends on how the subject assesses the divorce of both parents. The perception of young adults against parental divorce depends on how the conflict or parental issues before the divorce. Research on resilience in Javanese adolescents showed that the ability of resilience in adolescents was influenced by resilience in Javanese families, peers, Javanese cultural values. It included of *rila* (willingness), *nrima* (acceptance), patience, religiosity, and social environment. Teens who experience conflict in the family was found able to get out of the pressure and rise from the bad events of the past. Resilience attitudes shown include the ability of teenagers to solved stressful events (Ruswahyuningsih & Afiatin, 2015).

## 4 METHOD

The Phenomenology study describes the essence or subject of individual experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). In this study, qualitative phenomenology studies were used to understand how the subject interpreted the phenomena that occur in her life (parental divorce) then reaches resilience. The resilience of subject is explored through the resilience framework that consists of six predictors of resilience: (1) the environmental risk factors, (2) the environmental protective factors, (3) person-environment interactional processes, (4) the internal self-characteristics, (5) the resilience process, and (6) the positive outcome.

Participant in this research is a child from the broken home family. Participant is a 25-year-old woman who experienced parental divorce and family conflicts. Participant's educational background is a master student. Data collection techniques used in this study were in-depth- interviews and audio recordings. In-depth-interviews were conducted at the location and time chosen by the participants. The researcher ensured that the location of the interview met the requirements regarding the privacy and confidentiality of the participants so the interviews can proceed smoothly.

Besides the interviews and audio recordings as the main technique, this study also used direct observation techniques. In order to improve credibility, qualitative research uses various strategies to ensure that the issues studied are not only seen from one lens so that a phenomenon can be understood comprehensively (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Each data obtained is a puzzle that contributes to achieving an understanding of the overall phenomena encountered by the subject of research

During the first meeting, the participant was asked to fill out the informed consent and be informed of the objectives, risks, and benefits of the research. After signing informed consent, the participant was asked to fill out a demographic form. The interviews were based on questions that have been prepared based on research objectives. Interview questions which based on resilience framework are presented in Table1.

Table 1. Interview questions

Aspect	Main Question
Stressor	1. History of parental divorce 2. Feeling after knowing divorced parents 3. Impact of parental divorce
The External Environmental Risk and Protective Factors	1. The way parents tell about their divorce 2. The relationship between participant and family 3. The relationship between participant and friends 4. The role of people around the participant
Person-Environment Interactional Processes	1. How the participant interact with her environment
Internal Self Characteristic	1. The way participant face the effects of parental divorce 2. How the participant solves the stressful condition 3. Participant's achievement 4. The way participants interpret the problems
Resilience Process	1. The way participants are aware of the problem and resilience
Positive outcome	1. Positive changes of participant

To ensure the validity or credibility of the research, the researcher ensures that: (1) Research questions were arranged according to the research objectives, (2) Research designs in accordance with the research question, (3) The use of purposive sampling technique (4) Data were collected and organized systematically, and (5) data were analyzed correctly. After the interview was completed, the researcher made the transcript of the interview. The researcher then identified the themes that arose from the interview and organized them systematically to make them easier to understand. Researchers also conducted member checking by sharing the interview transcript to the participant. Participants were requested to review and gave the feedback. If there were an appropriate transcript or the transcript did not reflect what the participant submitted during the interview, the participant can make the clarification. Member checking is the source of validity checking in Phenomenology research (Meisenbach, 2010).

Triangulation as a major analytical technique was employed to ensure that the phenomenon was explored from multiple perspectives. Triangulation of data sources was done by doing an interview with the significant people. The significant person is a friend of participant since in Junior High Scholl who know the dynamics of

the participants' lives. Triangulation also was done by rechecking the subject responses during the interview.

## 5 RESULT

There is six focuses in this article are (1) Environmental Risk Factors as Stressor, (2) Environmental Protective Factors, (3) Person-Environment Interactional Process, (4) Internal Self Characteristics, (5) Resilience Process, and (6) Positive Outcome.

### 5.1 Environmental Risk Factors as Stressor

Environmental risk factors explained by family dysfunction, family conflict, and a problem with the peer.

#### 5.1.1 Family Dysfunction

I met Nia, a graduate student from Aceh, in her board located in Yogyakarta. Nia experienced problems related to her family condition that was a broken home. Family dysfunction can be seen from her parent's divorce and lack of open communication between her with her mother. Her mother and father divorced when she started enrolling at a kindergarten when she was 4 years old. After that, her mother got married in 1996. She then gave birth to two children yet divorced again in 2003. In 2005, her mother got married once again but went into a divorce in 2008. Lastly, her mother married in 2009 and divorced in 2013. Nia's two brothers went to other cities since junior high school while Nia lived with her half sisters since childhood.

Nia began to understand her parents' divorce when she was in the third grade of elementary school. Although divorced, Nia's father often visited her at school and brought something that she liked. She then started to ask her father why he did not return home, instead, another man was at home. After understanding her family condition, she began to feel inferior and uncomfortable when visiting a friend's house and saw her friend's both parents.

Nia's communication with her mother was not open. Her mother never explained to her regarding her divorce. She also never asked her children when she was about to get married again. She seemed to position herself in two different roles: as a mother and as a woman. She did not allow her children to interfere or forbid her to get married. On the other hand, she also did not allow her husband to interfere in raising their children. Such un-open communication with her mother had made the participant never share her problems with her mother. She explained that at that time, her mother had fluctuating emotions and she could explode into anger.

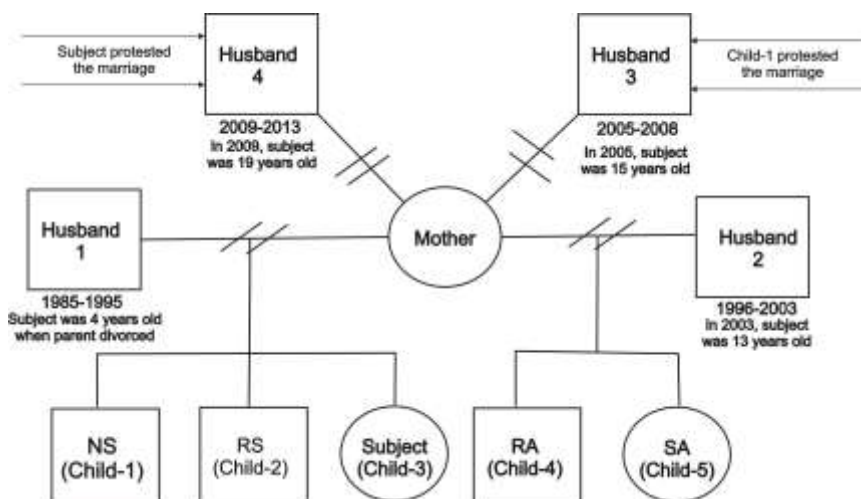


Fig. 2. The Genogram of Subject (Nia's mother married four times and Nia's father was the first husband)

#### 5.1.2 Family Conflict

The family conflict experienced by Nia was frequent quarrels between her biological father and mother when she was little. When quarreling, she was usually brought into a room by her mother, then her father would bang at the door from the outside. Such parental quarrels occurring when she was little had caused fears on her. Nia has a fear of entering a lift or door that she has never encountered previously. When entering a new

room, she usually checks how the door is opened and closed.

In addition, the most traumatic conflict that is hard to forget is the second marriage of her mother. Her stepfather was a drug and alcohol addict. She often saw quarrels between her stepfather and her mother. At that time, her stepfather exploded into anger at home and made her mother's face bruised, she even felt hard to open her mouth. Sadly, Nia could not do anything instead of only pulling her mother's hands. Such incident had made Nia terribly sad and angry. However, despite her bruised face, her mother still went to work since she was a secretary of a company. The quarrel had caused fear to Nia when she sees a person who is angry and raises the voice. Worse, she also has anxiety regarding her husband in the future.

At her mother's third marriage, the participant's brother began to protest her mother's marriage. This then caused a conflict between her brother and mother. After her mother divorced with her third husband, the participant began to forbid her mother to remarry. At the fourth marriage, her mother quietly got married, but then the participant found out about it. This caused depression on her because she was always faced with continuous family problems. The Nia's family conflict was expressed in the following examples.

My emotional problems began to emerge since my mother's second marriage, the divorce was due to domestic violence. I was 13 years old back then, in 2003. I witnessed how they quarreled; I witnessed how my mom could not open her mouth when eating. I was sad because I was helpless; I could not be a place for her to share her sorrows. She was a career woman, she went to an office, she was a secretary. With that face and working as a secretary, many people would notice... it made me angry.

I could not forget, so if there is a man talking in a loud voice, or a man hitting a girl, I would immediately tremble. My anxiety is regarding whether the man I'm close with will be willing to accept my family, whether he is rude or not.

### 5.1.3 Problem with Peer

In addition to stress factor from the family, Nia experienced problems with her friends and boyfriend. Her junior high school friends often mocked and bullied her. Hani, her close friend since the first grade of junior high school, mentioned that Nia did not even want to go to the cafeteria because she was often bullied. During her undergraduate study, her friends often felt annoyed because they were often compared with Nia who took two majors but always got a good GPA. Besides that, the mother of her friend in the boarding house told her friends to not be a friend with her who came from a broken home. As a result, she had no friends in the boarding house. Worse, her boyfriend left her after knowing her family background

## 5.2 The Role of Environmental Protective Factors

Since childhood, the participant's mother imparts value to her children that although they are different fathers, the treatment given to the mother is the same. Anyone who does wrong, are both pinched. Mother of participant always says to her that she must care for her step sister and brother.

The participant was taught the religion since childhood. One person who plays a role in instilling religious values and always invites participants to increase the recitation of the Qur'an (the holy Quran of Moslem) is her late grandmother. Mother is the main support for the participants. Participant's mother often gives advice and motivates the participant in dealing with the problems. One of the advice given by the mother is that participant not needs to be ashamed and covers up the condition of their family. The role of the environment in the participant is expressed from the following quotation.

*Mamak*<sup>1</sup> says, "Although she is a single parent, her children could be more educated, more polite, more civilized than others. So there's no need to cover it. "

*Mamak* is the one who contributes stressor to me. But on the other hand, *Mamak* is a medicine for me, she always cares and strengthens me.

Besides her mother, Nia gets motivation from the therapist, lecturer, and the owner of her board during college. The therapist gives advice and motivations related to the wisdom of the problems Nia faces. Nia also often gets enlightenment from lecturers' advice in class. The owner of her board who often chats with Nia often gives wise advice to her. Advice and motivation that gives Nia enlightenment can be seen from the following interview quotes.

I remember what the lecturers teach in class, "You are learning every day in the real world which is

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<sup>1</sup> *Mamak* means mother, some people in Sumatra usually call mother as *mamak*.

free, but each person is given a different exam, the level of the exam is different. But the more difficult the exam and challenge means he is leveling up. If he leveled up he was prepared for better things.

The owner of her board says, "The more stressful your problems, it means God is preparing you for a great thing."

### **5.3 Person-Environmental Interactional Processes**

Family problems that the participant was continuously dealing with had made her desperate. When studying in a high school, she had absolutely no idea about her future. Then, when enrolling in a university, she even became more desperate because of her mother's fourth marriage. At that time, she started to forbid her mother from remarrying, but her mother quietly got married. She then began to rebel against God. She started to stop taking obligatory prayers. Until one night, she dreamed of meeting his late grandmother which she considered as a reminder because she was the grandchild who was taught religious values the most, yet she no longer did it. In fact, her heart became more anxious because she was far from God and then she realized that she should not turn away from God because God is not wrong. Nia's rebellion against God is expressed in the following quotation.

### **5.4 The Role of Internal Characteristics of Subject**

The subject's internal characteristics that play a role in building resilience are spiritual or motivational characteristic, cognitive competency, social competencies, and physical well being. Spiritual characteristics are seen from the assertion that Nia was taught about religious values since childhood. Her late grandmother took part in teaching the religion. At high school, Nia attended religious studies. She has a dream of making her mother happy and taking care of her younger siblings. Nia wants to be able to redeem her guilt because she used to vent anger to her younger brother.

Nia has a good cognitive ability. It is seen from her GPA which is always good despite the fact that she is enrolled in two different majors. Nia has good comprehension because she can interpret the wisdom advice from the people around her to motivate herself. The awareness of the problem in herself made her to be positive. Her social competencies can be seen from her concern for her mother and step brothers. Although they have different biological fathers, Nia cares for them by trying to not make them feel different from her. She also has good physical competencies. It is evident from the fact that swimming is her hobby. This hobby also becomes a way for her to divert her focus and vent her anger.

### **5.5 Resilience Process**

Resilience process began when Nia began to feel there was a problem inside her until. After that, she decided to take therapy with her lecturer when entering the fifth semester. She previously was not aware of the problems that made her feel uncomfortable. After several sessions of therapy, she began to realize that the problem was that she had bad anger management. She was not able to control her anger and did not know how to share it with the right person. After the domestic violence experienced by her mother, she started to have emotional problems. She once often exploded her anger to his half-brother because he reminded him of his stepfather. For example, when her half-brother was not willing to take a nap, she could be really angry. Then after realizing her mistake, she began to feel sad and guilty. The root of the problem is because she often repressed her feelings of anger and sadness related to her family's problems: her mother divorced and remarried several times. She was also not open with her mother regarding her sadness of not having any friends and feeling inferior about her family condition.

After realizing the problem and getting more uncomfortable with her family's condition, Nia began to change as she did not want her condition to remain the same. Nia, who was previously closed, sensitive, and irritable person and had lots of repressed feelings, became more open and assertive. She began sharing with her mother about problems with her boyfriend and friends. Afterwards, her mother also started to give advice and share her own story related to her divorce with her ex-husbands. After attending the therapy, Nia had better ability to control her emotions by taking a breath or focusing her self on other things. The following interview quotes illustrate the resilience process.

Several months after the therapy, the problems were getting clear one by one. It seems to be connected in my cognition "this is what you repressed yesterday ... this is problematic." It's like finding the problems that made me angry all this time. What made me angry is because there were questions that I should have asked, but I did not ask ... there was sadness because I had no friends but I could not tell, and feeling embarrassed, inferior because of the family factor but I could not share it with my mom at that time.

Changes after the therapy are, from being a closed, sensitive, irritable person, to be a more open person, dare to talk about what I think and feel. So my thoughts that were once filled with all those repressed feelings became to provide space for me to think of what I want to do, why is this happening to me, why God chooses me.

So my mom started to change and become open because I started to change first. I started to share about my boyfriend. I do not like being lonely; in the fifth semester, I had a thought that I will not do to others what I do not want others to do to me. So I try my best not to bother other people. That's what I believe until now. I do not like to be bullied, so I will not bully others. When I saw my mom, I did not like to leave her alone. It was funny when we live at the same house but we did not talk at all, it's weird, so because I did not like that kind of situation, I started to be open.

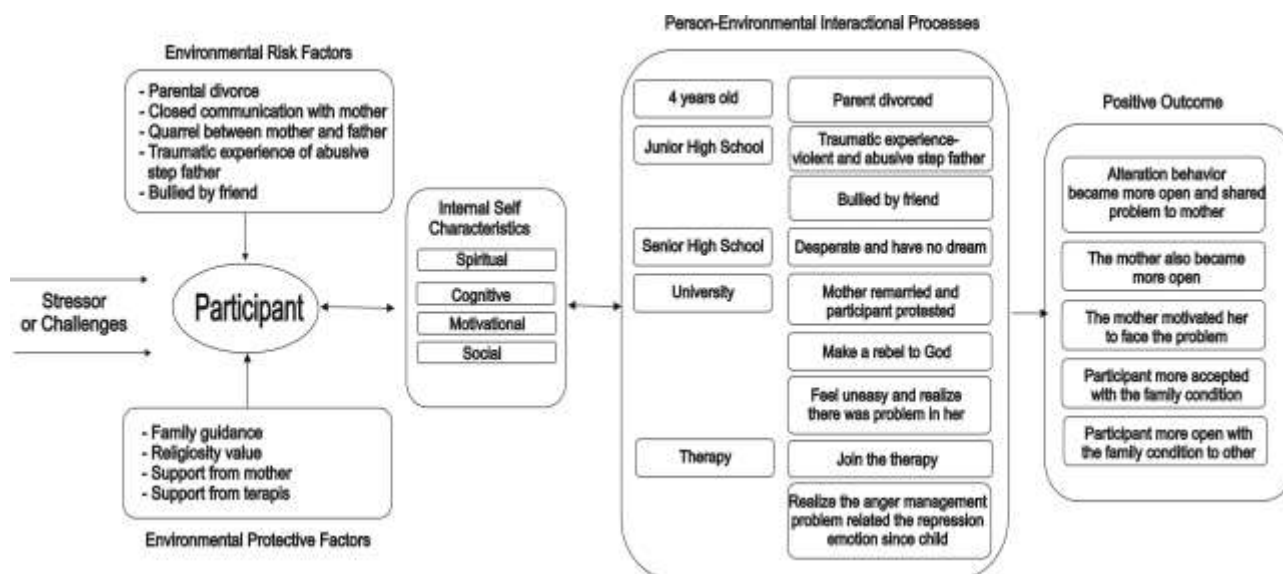


Fig. 3. Resilience Process in The Participant

## 5.6 Positive Outcome

The positive outcome of Nia's change is that she became more open with her mother, so the communication between her mother and her better. Nia also became more accepting of the family and understood the problems that she experienced in the past. Nia realized that everyone has different problems and sometimes people learned something from the problems in the future. Nia is now more open about her family's condition with her friends. She also can manage her emotion.

I am finally accepting ... accepting that this is my family. No matter how bad this is, this is my family. I realize that everyone has different problems. Sometimes we do not know the meaning, lessons, and benefits of an incident, not because we are stupid but because we have not got the understanding. I could only understand all the problems in my past in my current age. Why I was born in such family, experiencing something like this, having those kinds of friends. There must be some lessons I can learn

I think my mother like a wonder-woman, she is incredible. Although she has so many problems, she can strengthen her children, and support her younger siblings

## 6 DISCUSSION

Parental divorce and the family conflict became the main stressor for Nia. This is consistent with Kumpfer (2002) which reveals that high-risk environments, such as children from dysfunctional family create an imbalance in the children. Besides that problems, Nia also experienced problems with friends and her boyfriend. As for the communication between Nia and her mother were not open, because at that time her mother's emotions were unstable. Consequently, Nia endured all anger, confusion, sadness for parental divorce, problems with friends, and problems with her own boyfriend by herself. This is consistent with Linley and Joseph (2004) which reveal that environmental risk factors put the individuals at failure in solving difficult situations.



Although the environment around the subject is at risk, there is family-implanted values and support of those around who become environment protective factors. Nia's mother instilled the same value of love and treatment to their children despite they have different biological father. In addition, the mother always gives advice, motivates, and strengthens Nia. Nia's late grandmother also plays a role in teaching the religion to the participant. This is consistent with Greeff and Van Der Merwe (2004; see also Ruswahyuningsi & Afiatin, 2015) which reveal that intra-family support, support of the extended family, and religion are the factors that increase resilience. Motivation from the therapist and lecturer also gave the enlightenment that the participant was given a stressful experience because she was prepared for a great thing. This is consistent with the findings of Liu et al., (2017) that external resilience is closely related to the ecological social context in which resilience is then developed over the time.

Religious values taught from childhood serve as a guide for the participant. In senior high school, Nia had absolutely no idea about her future. Then when in university, she became desperate and rebelled against God. But after doing that, Nia became more agitated and then realized that getting away from God is wrong. Nia believes that someone will not be given a challenge beyond their ability. This is in harmony with Kumpfer (2002) that belief systems help and motivate individual and provide guidance for the effort that had done. Belief systems were also found positively associated with resilience (Javanmard, 2013). Religiosity is found to be able to provide a source of resilience (Reutter & Bigatti, 2014; Ruswahyuningsi & Afiatin, 2015) and is an important strategy in resilience (Reis & Menezes, 2017).

Other internal characteristics that also support the resilience is Nia's acceptance and the understanding that she had problems. The understanding of the problem then made Nia to follow the therapy. Nia also has a concern for her sister and mother. After realizing the problem, Nia began to feel uncomfortable with her family condition and her own mother who looked lonely. Then Nia took the initiative to open up and talk to mother This is consistent with the findings of Liu et al., (2017) that the achievement of resilience focuses on the relative individual characteristics over time. Internal resilience is closely linked to the psychological resilience, skills, and resources that individuals have of their interpersonal experiences.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The process of resilience began when participant accepted and understood that she has problems. Participants became anxious to stay away from God because she was taught religious values by his family since a child. After that, participant started asking for consultation and followed therapy. After the therapy, the participant became aware that the root of her problem is related to emotional repression since childhood. After that, participant felt uncomfortable with family conditions and did not want her mother to be lonely. The presence of care for the mother then made the participants began to open and to talk to the mother by telling the participant's problems. Participant's mother then also began to open with her divorce conflict and shared it to the participant. The mother is the person who always strengthens the participants. Thus it can be concluded that there are four supporting factors for resilience: (1) the participant's acceptance that she has problems, (2) social supports, (2) religiosity, and (4) concern for someone around her.

## 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research financially supported by LPDP (Indonesian Scholarship). My sincere thanks to my participant and her friend involved in this research who allowed me to come to their experiences. I wish to thank Professor Tina Afiatin and Dr. Budi Andayani, M.A (Department of Psychology, Universitas Gadjah Mada) for the review on this article.

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