

The Dynamics of Life After Divorce: Can Women Survive?

Anggaunita Kiranantika, Nikmatul Jazilah

Abstract

A family is a group of people united by blood, marriage, or adoption and living under the same roof. Each member of the family has his or her rights, responsibilities, and roles. In a community, such as in Malang City, Indonesia, many women become heads of the household due to divorce in their marriage. The role of women today is no longer related solely to the role of wives or homemakers who only manage the households, but they also play a role in the public sectors to meet the needs of their families. This research was conducted qualitatively with an existentialism feminist approach. The location of the research was in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia and the research subjects were 13 women who were divorced and had children. The research employed purposive sampling and data reduction as well as resource triangulation. The results of this research were: a) explaining the meaning of divorced Female Heads of Household to their children was a challenging task, especially for women who were unemployed when they were still single or only homemakers when they were still married. b) the Female Heads of Household found it difficult to find a job after being faced with a new role as a head of household and at the same time being a homemaker who manages the households. Consequently, they often choose to owe money and rely on family help to meet their family's needs.

Keywords: Divorce, Women's Life, Existentialism, Malang City, Indonesia

Anggaunita Kiranantika, Nikmatul Jazilah
Department of Sociology, Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

I. Introduction

A family is a group of two or more people united by blood, marriage, or adoption and living under the same roof. In family life, each family member has his or her rights, responsibilities, and roles. In Indonesian Javanese families, although the role of a father is not the one who gives birth to a child, the role of a father in a child's development is certainly necessary. Moreover, a father as the head of the family is fully responsible for the state of his family and he must meet the needs of his wife and children such as clothing, food, shelter, and the welfare of his family.

Furthermore, the role of a mother in the family is undoubtedly crucial, both for her husband and children. In domestic life, a mother is obliged to serve her husband and children in all aspects of family life. The obligations of a mother are not only in terms of grocery shopping, cooking, washing, dressing up, managing finances, giving birth, and caring for the children, but also a mother has a more dominant role in the life of a family than the role of the husband. In addition, the role of women today is no longer associated with their nature as a woman, namely a wife or homemaker who only takes care of the household. However, their roles have developed in such a way so that women nowadays have participated in every aspect of life, especially in the public sectors, thus women become one of the contributors in the household economy.

Moreover, the Indonesia's Marriage Law No. 1/1974 article 31 paragraph 3 states that "The husband is the head of the family and the wife is the homemaker". However, in fact, many mothers become the heads of household. This is motivated by various factors, one of which is chaos in the household such as death and divorce. This chaos will bring a major change to the family system since it brings new values and adjustment in the family.

Data from Malang City Religious Court (KUA), Indonesia in November 2018 stated that the number of divorce lawsuits was 1,309 cases. This means that since November 2018, the number of divorcees has been huge. This also affects the increase of Female Heads of Household in Malang City (<https://radarmalang.id/-janda-baru-bertebaran-di-kabupaten-malang/>). Besides, the data obtained in 2019 showed that the divorce rate in Indonesia was 419,200 cases, which significantly contributed to the increase in divorce cases occurred in Malang City totalling 2,109 cases. Most of these divorce cases were due to continuous disputes in households with a total of 1,218 cases. While other influential factors are the result of one person leaving unilaterally as many as 401 cases and economic factors as many as 394 cases.

(<https://rri.co.id/malang/kabar-malang-roya/649028/setahun-2-ribu-lebih-warga-kota-malang-bercerai>).

Further, the latest data obtained from the Office of Women and Child Protection in Malang City record that there are 597 women in 2020, consisting of divorced women or widows, who become heads of household. A previous study stated that Female Heads of Household are women who have the sole obligation to support their families as the main breadwinners and as actors in meeting the needs of all family members (Ernawati, 2013). The jobs performed by these women are diverse, for examples, civil servants, professionals, employees who work in the formal sectors as well as in the informal sectors such as tailors, onion peelers, sequin (beads of the wedding dress) installers, and owners of food or beverage business.

In the occurred divorce cases, two-thirds of cases faced by religious courts or district courts in Indonesia are usually filed by the wives (Akhmadi, A. *et.al*, 2011). Consequently, with the divorced status, women will face various problems in their lives after the divorce, for example, the family's economic problems especially to meet the needs of their families. In addition to this, the Female Heads of Household also need to take care of the house chores, family, and the environment. Other problems are the lack of firmness and attention in educating children since the Female Heads of Household also have to do their works and the difficulty of dividing time to socialize in the community (Chant, 1997; Ernawati, 2013).

As a result, to overcome these problems, the strategies undertaken by the Female Heads of Household include buying cheaper food and medicines, changing food distribution patterns, choosing cheaper treatment places if they or their families get sick or even suspending the treatment if it is not necessary, and reducing purchases of clothing and home furniture (Kabbaro, H., Hartoyo, H., & Yuliati, L. N, 2014). Another way taken by the Female Heads of Household is by finding a job. By working, they can indirectly improve the socio-economic condition of the family, namely the fulfilment of family needs and also the educational needs of children (Andrés Villarreal & Heeju Shin, 2008; Amato, PR, Patterson, S., & Beattie, B, 2015). The strategies performed by this Female Heads of Household show their existence in maintaining their families.

The importance of this research is to find out the meaning of Female Heads of Household in Malang city, Indonesia. In addition, the research is conducted to identify and analyze the existence of Female Heads of Household in Malang, Indonesia in meeting the various needs of their families after the divorce.

II. Literature Review

The dynamics owned by women related to post-marital life have many dimensions, namely the women's mental readiness, mental readiness of other family members, readiness to continue living, the fulfilment of post-divorce life needs, and social risk such as being a rumour by the community that determines social interactions selected by women who become the heads of families.

A divorce is often seen as a taboo, as happened in Malang City, Indonesia. However, apart from this, divorce also presents happiness for individuals who feel delighted with particular processes (Julianto, V & Cahyani, 2018).

In the concept of feminism, this phenomenon can be based on existentialist feminism which emphasizes concepts such as freedom, interpersonal relations, and life experiences as a human body. One of the most prominent figures in the existentialist feminist idea is Simone de Beauvoir who expresses the idea of the concept of *entre-pour-les autres* or being for others. Based on this concept, Beauvoir corrects three existing arguments about male and female differences, namely biology, psychology, and economics. Furthermore, she also offers ontologism arguments based on 'being there'. She sees that the existence of women is as an identity defined by men. From the men's view, the existence of other people is considered as a threat. Accordingly, to keep men in control, it is necessary to create myths of men against women. What needs to be underlined in this myth are first, what men want from women is money that cannot be earned by men and second, women are "silent" just like nature (Hadi, Mulyo: 2017: 317-318).

In reality, Beauvoir sees that women have a duty of sacrificing themselves to a man. Even though women are aware of this bad image, they cannot free themselves because men have power over them. In addition, Beauvoir also emphasizes that social construction is the main reason why oneself or subject controls women (as "others" or objects) and the stereotypical roles of a female as passive and feminine are accepted and passed on by women to the next generation (Beauvoir, Simone de, 2007).

In terms of feminism, women are always seen as objects especially in this very patriarchal world, thus Beauvoir said that the world of women will always be included in the world of men as evidence of men's domination over women. As an example according to Beauvoir is the institution of marriage which takes the freedom of women in the concept of subjects and objects between men and women as human relations (Arivia, G. 2003).

Furthermore, in dealing with changes in social conditions after divorce, the orientation of values possessed by women will usually change, whether it is in terms of the possibility of remarriage, affection and feelings of comfort, conflicts that must be faced again, or the process of adaptation for women who have children from the previous marriages (Rosnati, R., Barni, D., & Uglia, D, 2014). Accordingly, this needs to be re-examined in the scope of Beauvoir's thinking which persuades women to be able to determine their future autonomously without any pressure, encouragement or direction from others. Women have the same rights as men so that their existence in various aspects deserves the same recognition and appreciation as men (Mutiara Prameswari, N., Nugroho, W., & Sastri Mahadewi, N. 2019).

Freedom in existentialism feminism initiated by Beauvoir is a form of subjectivity (Handayani, C. S., Arivia, G., Haryatmoko, H., & Robet, R. 2013). Therefore, freedom of opinion and determining the future for women is an important part that illustrates the struggle of women to avoid themselves from the oppression they experienced.

III. Research Methods

This research employed descriptive qualitative research that intended to understand the phenomena about what was experienced by research subjects such as behaviour, perception, motivation, action, and so on (Moleong, 1989: 6). The approach used in this research was an existentialism approach on a gender perspective.

The subjects in this research were the Female Heads of Household in Malang City who were divorced. The selection of research subjects was taken by using a purposive sampling technique. Informants in this research were 13 Female Heads of Household who were divorced, especially those who had children who were still in school or would enroll in school in Kedungkandang Sub-district, Malang City.

Kedungkandang Sub-district was chosen as the research area since this Sub-district was the widest in Malang City. Besides, according to records obtained from the Woman Crisis Center in Malang City, Kedungkandang Sub-district had a number of divorcees which was greater than the other Sub-districts, totalling 113 divorcees from December 2018 to December 2019. Moreover, to complete the data, supporting informants such as children of the Female Heads of Household and also non-profit organizations (NGO's) that handle the protection of children and women in Malang are needed.

Data analysis utilized data reduction, data presentation, and concluding techniques. To check the validity of the data, researchers used perseverance/constancy of observation and source triangulation.

IV. Research Result

Life between husband and wife plays an important role in fostering shared prosperity, whether in terms of physically, materially, or spiritually, as well as in enhancing the position of the family in society. Efforts to improve the position of the family in the community include establishing good relations with all relatives and the environment (one's own relatives, relatives who come from the wife or husband side, neighbours, and work environment), participating in community organizations, organizing household members so that each participates in organizing a harmonious life together (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2018: 59).

However, in its practice, problems in the married life often occur so that a divorce is seen as a shortcut to resolve the problems. Following the applicable law in Indonesia, in Article 39 (2) of Law Number 1 of 1974 concerning Marriage that is also included in Article 19 of Government Regulation Number 9 of 1975 which stated that a divorce can also be carried out due to sharp and continuous disputes between husband and wife.

In marriages that bind women to men in the household, the role of head of the household is given to men with the task of being the main breadwinner. Meanwhile, women as wives have the main duty to manage the household.

The woman's social status can experience a shift from the wife's status to the head of the household if the husband dies or a divorce happens. When a divorce takes place, women are forced to become heads of household whereas women are never prepared from the beginning to be the heads of household. The notion that the head of the household is the main breadwinner has been attached to marriage without going through deliberations, the status is still carried out by the husband regardless whether the husband has a source of income or in a state of not having a source of income (Sajogyo, 2002: 94).

As experienced by the Female Heads of Household in Malang who were the informants in this research, they encountered various cases after their husbands left due to divorce. The various reasons for the divorce are explained in the table below.

Table 1. Divorce Identification of Women in Malang City

No.	Reason for divorce	Marriage Period	Number of Children
1.	Infidelity	3-14 Years	2-5 Children
2.	Sexual Abuse	2-10 Years	3-6 Children
3.	Physical Abuse	1-12 Years	1-4 Children
4.	Debt	1-6 Years	1-4 Children
5.	Family Intervention	2-15 Years	2-5 Children

Source: Primary Data, analyzed, 2020

In the case of the Female Heads of Household in Malang, some of them had difficulty in giving an understanding of the meaning of Female Heads of Household to their children because their children still could not accept the departure of their father. Nonetheless, providing insight into the meaning of a female head of the household was not always seen as a burden because when the children were left behind by their father

due to death or divorce, they were still relatively small. Consequently, they did not comprehend the meaning of a Female Heads of Household.

Further, for children who were left by their fathers, they felt devastated at their father's departure so that some children expressed their feelings of unacceptability by doing unusual behaviours such as lazing around, becoming indifferent person, getting drunk and others. However, this case did not last long since the children finally realized and learned to let go of their father's departure. In addition, there were also issues of unobtrusive divorce because the mother could convey well why she and their father could not be reunited. The mother was able to explain to their children that divorce did not cause a separation of the father-son or daughter relationship and the father's role could run properly even though their parents have decided to divorce.

In daily life, the Female Heads of Household did not only perform their obligation as a mother, but they also had to earn a living to meet their family needs. They had to work hard for their children and to meet family and home needs. They did various jobs, even though the earning of their work was not much, they still felt grateful for the income they earned. If this income was not enough to meet the needs of their family, the Female Heads of Household would not hesitate to owe money from other people. Besides, the help from relatives was also crucial to ease the burden borne by the Female Heads of Household.

In addition to earning a living to meet the needs of the family, the Female heads of Household also had other obligations, namely to take care of the house. Many of them were assisted by their children and families to do the house chores. Generally, the Female Heads of Household deliberately shared house duties with their children or families to ease their burden. However, due to their bustle in the public sector, one Female Head of Household made use of a service from a household assistant to do the house chores since she had to leave early to teach at one of the schools in Malang and the distance between the school and her house was fairly far. Consequently, this Female Head of Household did not have time to do the house chores first.

Furthermore, there were different opinions from the Female Heads of Household regarding the desire to remarry. Several Female Heads of Households expressed their desires to remarry, yet their children disagreed with their mother's wish to remarry. This was because their children assumed that their father was irreplaceable. This statement was conveyed by the children whose father has passed away. On the other hand, there were also Female Heads of Households who wanted to maintain their divorced status and focus on their children due to the traumatic experiences of domestic violence they have experienced during the marriage.

Based on the results of the interview, the children of the Female Heads of Household supported their mother if their mother later wanted to remarry since it might ease their mother's burden as a Female Head of Household. However, these children emphasized more on the happiness of their mother in living the status as a divorcee and carrying out the mother's role as well as the father's role in her life after the divorce. They did not want the terrible things happened during the marriage would be repeated in the future. This underlay the social support of children to their mother, as well as a form of affection for respect and love as a family unit.

Furthermore, based on the results of the research, several informants stated that when the Female Heads of Household heads had not divorced yet, some of them were prohibited from working and had to focus on doing the house chores (domestic sector). The women's focus was only to serve their husband and children on the ground that the salary earned by the wife was not as high as the salary of the husband, therefore the

husband forbade their wife to work. In addition, in the bond of marriage, the informants conveyed that as a wife, they were willing to give up their freedom, which had been their right since they were born, to the institution of marriage and family. This is contrary to human rights which states that freedom of work is an individual's freedom regardless of gender and other social backgrounds. However, not all informants experienced the same thing, several informants worked to increase their family income. Similarly, in the patriarchal culture attached to Javanese women, women are born to be good wives and homemakers who raise children at home, without having to work outside the home, and they only need to focus entirely on the domestic sector.

During the married life, several informants claimed that expressing their opinions and acting as individuals were restricted by the rules associated with femininity, thus the informants could only hold back their desires and emotions which were later released to other people such as their parents or children by crying, scolding the children or recounting the sad events. Conflicts and differences in mindset and personality traits often led to the physical and sexual abuse experienced by women.

Initially, when they first decided to get married, the informants stated that some of them had joined the workforce (public sector), however, eventually, most of them decided to become homemakers after marriage. Although the salary they received while working was not great, the decision to become a homemaker was the hardest decision they had ever made since they relied solely on the husband's salary.

Moreover, most of the educational backgrounds of the Female Heads of Household were not too high, namely junior high school to Diploma 3 (D-3). As a result, when they became the Female Heads of Household after a divorce, this created difficulties in meeting the economic needs especially for those with lower educational backgrounds. This was because the qualifications required to obtain a job did not match their degree.

V. Discussion and Scientific Contribution

A. Female Heads of Household (KRTP) in Malang City, Indonesia

Changes in society are common things and certainly happen whether or not they are consciously wanted by humans. Likewise, a change in household roles can occur where the head of the household shifts to the woman (wife) from the man (husband). For society considering this change is a violation or “taboo”, they also find it a violation when women do not work in the domestic sector but in the public domain and men work in the domestic sector.

The term used for a female head of household is *women-headed* (led by female) or *women maintained* (guarded by female), that is the woman who bears the sole responsibility for supporting her family. In addition, the meaning of the head of the household itself is a person who has an economic or social responsibility towards his or her family (Mosse, J.C., 2007). The household headed by a female is a terminology that avoids women from the stigma emphasizing that the primary responsibility in the family can only be held by men and it is also a reflection of gender identity in the family that men are not always superior to women.

In several countries, the consequences that the female heads of household must face after a divorce are shaped by several dimensions, namely poverty, difficulties in a dual role as mother and father, inappropriate parenting patterns, and psychological and social burdens faced by a family (Burns, A., Scott, C., & Scott, C. 2013).

Meanwhile, reviewing the law in Indonesia, namely Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage and Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI) in Indonesia, the head of the

household is identical to the breadwinner and the one who meets all the needs of his or her family members. Therefore, the female head of household in this context is the woman who bears the sole responsibility of providing life for her family, so that she is the main breadwinner and must also meet all the needs of her family members.

Although the female heads of household in Malang City, Indonesia do not always come from poor families and have low education, however, from this research, those who hold the position of the Female Heads of Households mostly worked in the informal sectors such as household assistants, factory workers, small traders, and other jobs that do not require expertise (skills). This shows the reality that poor women indeed experience miserization, where she is the one who suffers the most because of poverty in her family (Pineda, J. 2000).

Based on the results of observations, the female heads of household in Malang, Indonesia were in the productive age range with various professional backgrounds. The background of the women to become heads of the household varied greatly, all of which began with conflicts over gender identity between husband and wife and also the lack of freedom that the women had in the family.

The emergence of the female heads of household in Malang, Indonesia tears the reality that a family must be strengthened by social relation that has a hierarchical nature that is determined by the intersection between the class structure and gender in society in general, which in turn determines the social relations between men and women in the family (Chambers, D. 2012).

B. Existentialism for Female Heads of Household in Malang City, Indonesia

As mentioned previously, humans are born free and have the right to determine the direction of their lives, and this certainly includes women. According to Beauvoir, women must be given the same freedom as the freedom given to men to determine their own lives. As a result, for Beauvoir, the institution of marriage is an institution that takes away the women's freedom, where the women voluntarily exchange their freedom with calmness, stability, and satisfaction in marriage.

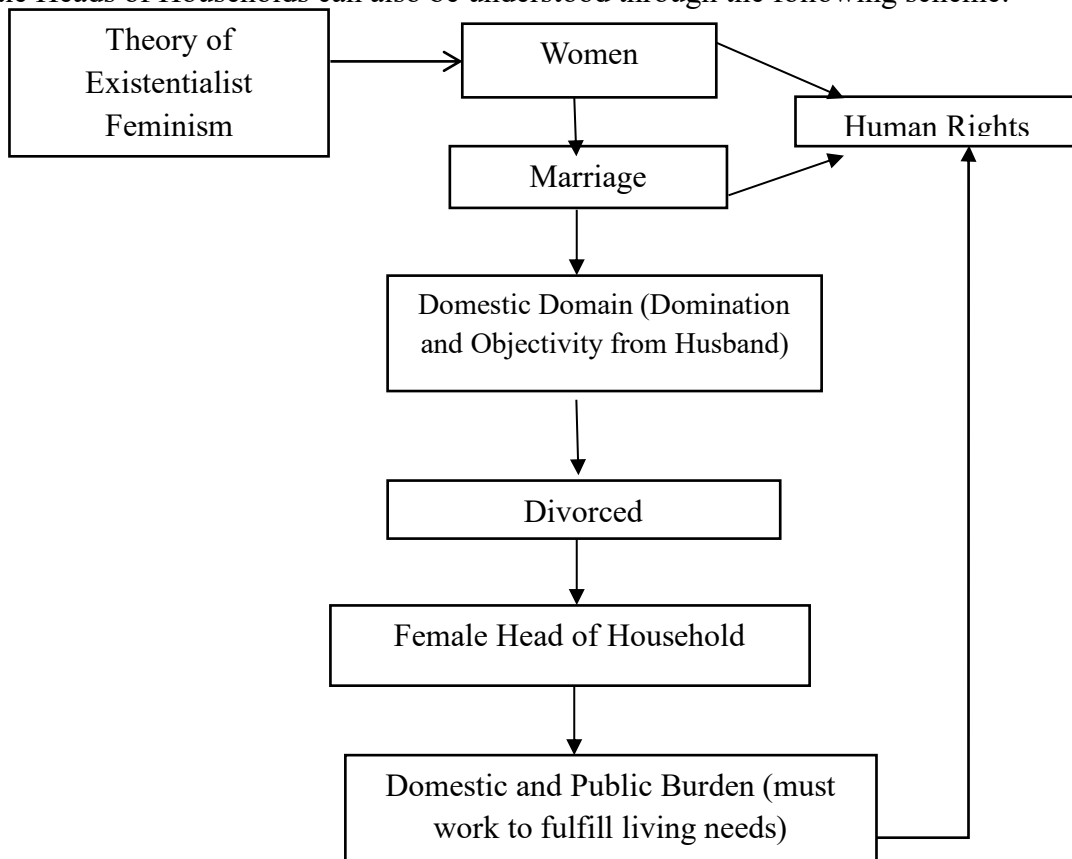
Accordingly, in examining the issue of the meaning and survival strategies of the Female Heads of households, existentialist feminism theory is the theory which focuses more on how women not only play a role in the public sector in Malang, Indonesia but also as the heads of household. Further, women also have an additional role that should not be their responsibility as a woman.

The results of this research on the meaning of the divorced Female Heads of Households for children in Malang were analyzed using existentialist feminism theory, where Beauvoir focuses her thoughts on how women are made as objects in the men's world both historically and destiny and several biological reasons cause this. Furthermore, Beauvoir stated that women cannot be defined only through their bodies but must also be seen through their manifestations, namely their awareness channelled through social activities. Moreover, Beauvoir also said that the world of women would always be included in the world of men as evidence of men's domination of women and Beauvoir gave an example of the institution of marriage which is an institution that seizes the women's freedom (Wibowo, A. 2008).

In facing post-divorce life, women in Malang, Indonesia no longer internalized their bodies for others and could carry out their role as autonomous individuals. Furthermore, the women as heads of the household could also control themselves from the boundaries of femininity that had restrained them with attitudes, actions, and

obligations. Freedom in existentialist feminism initiated by Beauvoir is a form of subjectivity (Handayani, C. S., Arivia, G., Haryatmoko, H., & Robet, R. 2013). Therefore, freedom of opinion and determine the future by deciding to divorce is an important part that illustrates the struggle of women to fight back from the oppression they experienced in the domestic sphere.

Based on the results of the research and by noticing the information obtained about the divorced Female Heads of Households in Malang City, the phenomenon of the Female Heads of Households can also be understood through the following scheme:



Source: Primary Data, analyzed, 2020

The phenomenon of the existence of Female Heads of Household in Malang in continuing their lives is in line with the thought of Beauvoir (2016) which claimed that women who are aware of their freedom, including in determining the inherent rights in themselves, are able to freely determine their ways of life, thus according to Beauvoir, the women can go to work and actualize themselves to the fullest. In addition, they can be intellectual without worrying about their abilities which may be limited due to their biological issues. Most importantly, women must be able to refuse to be an object, or else women can also objectify men.

As what happens to the Female Head of Households' life after a divorce, they work hard and try to actualize themselves in the public sphere. The Female Heads of Households have no other choice when their husband no longer supports them and the children. As a result, role shift in the family occurs where the husband as breadwinner and wife as a housewife now turns into the wife who becomes the backbone of the family and as a homemaker who has to provide for her family's needs, while still having to do the house chores.

VI. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, several findings are discovered as follows:

First, explaining the meaning of a (divorced/widowed) Female Head of Household to her children is indeed a challenging task, especially for women who are unemployed when they are still single or only homemakers when they are still married.

Second, marriage or family institution causes women only to devote themselves to their husbands and children or in other words, they are only engaged in the domestic sphere. This condition added by a low educational background is the reason why Female Heads of Households have difficulty finding jobs after being confronted with a new role as a head of household and at the same time being a homemaker. Accordingly, the decision to find a partner again is not impossible to ease the burden borne by the Female Head of Household.

Third, as women who take on a new role in the family as head of household, the Female Heads of Households work hard to earn a living to meet the needs of their families and at the same time, they also ought to do the house chores as it has become their norm in the family.

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