

The Reality of Angkola Batak Women as Divorce Single Parents in Padangsidempuan

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ABSTRACT

Divorce in North Padangsidempuan District has continued to increase over the past five years, amidst the patrilineal and religious Batak Angkola society. Divorced young women bear the dual burden of being breadwinners and caregivers, while also facing moral judgment regarding their status. This study specifically examines the meaning and social acceptance of young single-parent Batak Angkola women, a topic that has not been widely explored in previous studies. The purpose of this study is to analyze the meaning and societal acceptance of divorced young single-parent Batak Angkola women. The method used is qualitative, located in North Padangsidempuan District. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, then analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and data analysis using Berger and Luckmann's social construction theory (externalization, objectivation, internalization). The results show that divorce among young Batak Angkola women is generally caused by domestic violence, prolonged disputes, and economic instability due to the lack of responsibility of the husband. Objectivation is seen in the limitations of roles in customs, moral judgments based on family honor, and the existence of three patterns of attitudes: neutral, sympathetic, and suspicious, which make divorce status normalized but still monitored with heavier control over women. Social acceptance is seen through support for job opportunities, involvement in social and religious activities, and moral and material support from family, neighbors, and local institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Divorce is not simply understood as the breaking of a marriage bond, but rather as an event that touches many layers of social life. The city of Padangsidempuan, dominated by the Batak Angkola community with its strong kinship social character, makes divorce an issue that involves not only the couple, but also the clan, extended family, traditional leaders, and the surrounding community. Batak Angkola traditional values, which uphold family honor, a patrilineal kinship structure, and idealized views of women's roles in the household, influence how society views young women who divorce. The patrilineal kinship system and the idealization of women's roles as good wives and mothers make divorce a disgrace that tarnishes the dignity of the family and clan.

In its social life, the Angkola community is shaped by two systems: customary law and religion. The majority of Padangsidempuan's population is Muslim, a religion that developed during the colonial period when the Padri troops spread Islamic teachings in the region (Padangsidempuan, 2021). In the Batak Angkola community, custom and religion do not exist as mutually exclusive systems. Instead, they coexist, as reflected in the motto "Hombar do adat rap ibadat." This combination creates a unique framework of social evaluation.

Divorced women are judged not only based on customary values but also on prevailing religious interpretations within the community. This makes the social evaluation of single-parent women even more complex, as they face two dominant social systems and structures. At the same time, modernization has brought significant changes to family structure and forms. Single-parent families have become an increasingly prominent phenomenon. Interestingly, this change is also evident in Padangsidempuan City. Divorce is one of the causes of changes in family forms within the community. Society's view of divorced young women is inextricably linked to the influence of custom and religion. In some cases, divorce is still considered a form of social deviance that diminishes the family's honor.

Batak Angkola culture recognizes two categories of divorced women: *marando* (divorced after life) and *mabalu* (divorced after death), each of which has distinct social consequences. Divorced women often face greater social pressure because they are perceived as failing to fulfill their roles according to cultural expectations. In the patrilineal customary system, inheritance, property ownership, and primary kinship ties are drawn from the male side or the husband's family. Consequently, when a divorce, the death of a husband, or conflict occurs, women often lack strong rights to the husband's family's support, property, or childcare, leaving them more vulnerable socially and economically.

Women as single parents face greater challenges, particularly being the head of the household and managing it, compared to men who are single parents or widowers. In addition to changing roles, single women are also burdened with negative labels (Munthe et al., 2020). As a result of this societal stigma, divorced single parents are often prevented from becoming fully developed individuals. For example, the assumption among divorced women that they married their

husbands solely to pursue inheritance stems from masculine dominance and symbolic violence (Salsabila & Budhi, 2024).

The daily behavior and interactions between young single-parent women and the community are indicators of societal assessment. As explained in research by Salsabila and Budhi (2024), society is open to the divorced status of single-parent women living in their communities and does not focus on the stigma and negative labels circulating in their judgments. Socioeconomic factors significantly influence the financial well-being of young single-parent women. The interruption of financial flow from their husbands makes meeting household needs challenging. Young single-parent women remain undaunted in their struggles for their families.

This research explains their habitus as resilient and independent single parents, rooted in cultural and religious values. The negative image of divorced women is transformed into a positive one: resilient, courageous, and independent. (Munthe, Daulay, and Napsiah, 2020). In the workplace, divorced single parents do not experience different opportunities. This is confirmed by research by Siregar & Malau (2021), who found that widowed women in West Java have the same opportunities as other women in the job market.

The stigma that pervades society is not easily eradicated. Siregar & Fatmariza (2021) explain that divorced women face more challenging challenges because they are often ostracized in their social circles, and some of their friends may become less involved in the ostracization. With changing societal thinking and judgment, stigma is no longer a benchmark, as was the case in North Padangsidempuan District. In Batak Angkola culture, women's existence is often linked to their position within the household structure and their husband's lineage. After divorce, women's ties with their husband's extended family are often severed, leaving them without access to previously available social support.

Women can also return to their families of origin, but this is not always ideal, as families may face economic constraints or perceive the divorce as a social burden. This situation places divorced women in a vulnerable position, often forced to adapt alone to rebuild their lives. Young, single-parent, divorced Batak Angkola women are part of Padangsidempuan City society. In the interactions between young, single-parent divorced Batak Angkola women in North Padangsidempuan District, society does not consider their status and interacts as usual, for example, they receive equal job opportunities and can participate in community events and activities.

Various previous studies have examined societal views and stigmas regarding divorced single-parent women. These studies have not specifically addressed the meaning and forms of social acceptance of divorced young single-parent Batak Angkola women. This gap indicates the need for more in-depth analysis. This is why this study, which examines the meaning and social acceptance of divorced young single-parent Batak Angkola women in North Padangsidempuan District, is urgent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social construction emphasizes knowledge about the world and reality, which is shaped by social interactions and communication processes between individuals. According to construction theory, reality does not pre-exist but is born through social processes between individuals involving perception, interpretation, and meaning-making (Pulungan et al., 2025). The idea of social construction is that knowledge is the result of symbolic interactions between specific groups within society. Reality is created by the social environment, a product of the cultural world and group life (Haikal & Latipun, 2020) "The Social Construction of Reality" (McQuail, 2010). Their task is to understand reality. This social reality is created and interpreted by actors (humans) (Kahfi, 2025).

Externalization is the effort to adapt to the surrounding socio-cultural conditions, both mentally and physically, with the goal of becoming a human product. Social life is continuously constructed, so it is imperative for humans to devote themselves to their surroundings. This is a human expression of self and a fundamental characteristic of finding oneself within one's environment (Mohammad & Manan, 2008)

The process of externalizing social reality is drawn out by the individual. At this stage, social reality, in the form of conformity to sacred texts, laws, religious consensus, norms, values, and other aspects, exists outside the individual. The externalization process occurs in patterns of societal interaction that adapt to the reality of divorced women, thus forming a social construct (Mingkase & Rohmaniyah, 2022).

The externalization process involves moments in which individuals adapt or adjust between the text and their sociocultural world. Adaptation can occur through language, actions, and interpretations of texts or dogmas (Saodah, 2022). Externalization creates negative and positive societal views of divorced single women. Externalization, objectification, and internalization occur simultaneously. There is a process of externalization, making the object appear external (objective), and then a process of retraction (internalization), making the previously external object appear internal or subjective (Mahfudah & Habibah, 2022).

The objectification of society encompasses several elements, such as institutions, roles, and identities. One example of an objective institution is the family, which demands certain patterns from individuals living within its environment. A role possesses a similar objectivity, thus becoming the foundation for individual behavior (Ngangi, 2011). Internalization is the reabsorption of the objective world into one's own consciousness, influenced by the structure of the social world. Through the process of internalization, humans become products of society. Through this process, society can understand that reality is subjective (Yudonista, 2020).

Internalization is the phase in which a person identifies themselves within a social institution when they become part of that group. In this phase, individuals absorb the objective world into their consciousness, so that their subjective views are influenced by the existing structure of the social world (Yulfa et al., 2022). According to Berger, reality is not scientifically formed or revealed

by God but is shaped and constructed. With this understanding, each person has a unique way of interpreting social reality, each constructing it according to their experiences, preferences, education, and social circles.

According to Harahap et al (2020) social construction can occur through several stages: Formation, which is the process by which social actors construct and develop a concept until it becomes a reality recognized in social life. Based on everyday interactions and experiences, these concepts then acquire meanings that are considered legitimate by society (Cohen & Syme, 2004). Social maintenance requires active community involvement to ensure the social constructs that have been formed remain intact and function effectively. Without participation and consistency in implementing values or rules, these constructs can weaken or change (Assalsabila, 2022). Reconstruction improvement is necessary when a social structure changes over time. Society often adjusts or updates existing constructs to remain relevant to current conditions and needs. These changes can occur when individuals or groups reconstruct their existing ideas.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that social construction is a dynamic process involving the formation, maintenance, adjustment, and change of meaning in social life. Individuals, as social actors, not only create reality through their actions and interactions but also maintain and refine it according to evolving social needs.

Over time, changes in meaning and social practices can occur through the reconstruction of ideas by individuals and groups, ultimately influencing the mindsets and behaviors of subsequent generations. Social construction is a continuous process that shapes and is shaped by society in the context of inevitable social change. Berger and Luckmann's social construction not only explains the meanings associated with divorced young Batak Angkola single-parent women, but also provides a space to examine how these meanings influence how society accepts or rejects their existence.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to describe the social realities experienced by divorced young Batak Angkola single-parent women in North Padangsidimpuan District. The approach used is qualitative because this research focuses on natural reality, social construction processes, and the close relationship between the study and the participants in a real-life situational context. The research will be conducted in North Padangsidimpuan District, Padangsidimpuan City. The location was chosen because the divorce rate in this district has been the highest among other districts over the past five years and this place is the city center where the research subjects are urban residents. This reasoning is supported by the diverse conditions and situations of divorced young single-parent women. This study involved 16 informants: 7 primary informants: divorced young Batak Angkola single-parent women aged 20-40; 4 key informants: neighborhood heads, Batak Angkola traditional leaders, religious leaders, and the North Padangsidimpuan District Head; 5 additional informants: family members, neighbors, and coworkers. The number of informants in this study was deemed sufficient

because the data obtained had reached data saturation. In the final interview stage with primary and secondary informants, key themes such as factors of divorce, forms of community interpretation, and patterns of social acceptance were mentioned repeatedly without presenting significant new information. In this study, informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the primary informant being selected based on specific criteria: young single-parent women of productive age (20-40 years), of the Angkola Batak ethnic group, and single parents due to divorce in North Padangsidempuan District. Additional informants included people living and settling in the same neighborhood and those who interact directly with the divorced young single-parent Angkola Batak women, including family, friends, and neighbors. Key informants included the neighborhood head, the North Padangsidempuan District Head, Angkola Batak traditional leaders, and Islamic religious leaders.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research reveals that three main factors contribute to divorce among young women: domestic violence, ongoing disputes, and economic instability due to a husband's lack of responsibility. Domestic violence emerged as the most dominant factor, especially when triggered by drug use, emotional traits, and aggressive behavior that make the household unsafe for both the wife and children.

Field findings in this study indicate that the most common cause of divorce experienced by informants is domestic violence (DV). This can be defined as an abuse of power or arbitrary action without boundaries (Mohammad & Manan, 2008). Domestic violence is a serious domestic problem and occurs in all levels of society (Mahfudah & Habibah, 2022)

(Yudonista, n.d.) emphasized that both physical and psychological violence are strong reasons for divorce. Field findings, which revealed several cases of domestic violence, confirm that violence is a form of relationship failure and a threat to the wife's safety. Domestic violence experienced by informants is generally related to economic stress, drug use, or the husband's inability to control his emotions, consistent with the theory of divorce factors explained in previous research.

Economic factors also play a significant role when a husband is unable or unwilling to fulfill his financial obligations and demonstrates immaturity in managing the household. Overall, these findings indicate that divorce is primarily triggered by the husband's failure to fulfill his roles and responsibilities within the family structure. Irresponsible husbands, such as failing to provide for the family and failing to take a stand, align with the theory that a husband's role as provider is crucial for household stability.

When this role is not fulfilled, conflict arises and can lead to divorce. Field findings indicate that most informants feel they must bear the economic and emotional burden alone, making divorce a realistic option. Prolonged economic hardship, financial instability, unemployment, and economic disparities between husband and wife increase tensions within the household, leading to divorce (Pulungan et al., 2025). Another cause of divorce experienced by informants is persistent disputes and disharmony between the wife and her in-laws. Research

by Pulungan et al. (2025) explains that unresolved marital disputes lead to divorce.

Disputes with the husband and conflicts with the in-laws indicate that divorce is also influenced by external family factors. Yudsonista (2020) states that marriage involves not only two individuals, but also relationships with the extended family. Disharmony between a wife and her in-laws exacerbates internal marital conflict and accelerates the decision to divorce. Field findings indicate that interference by the husband's family often worsens communication between the couple and hinders conflict resolution.

Overall, field findings reinforce the theory that divorce is not caused by a single factor, but rather the accumulation of various interrelated issues. Domestic violence, husband's irresponsibility, infidelity, and the influence of the extended family environment are mutually reinforcing factors that ultimately drive women to divorce. This analysis confirms that divorce is the result of a complex interaction between personal, relational, and socio-cultural factors that influence household dynamics.

In Batak Angkola culture, the ideal family is depicted as an intact household with the husband as the head of the family, the holder of the clan, and the central position of women in the Dalihan Na Tolu kinship structure. Women are positioned primarily as wives and mothers tasked with maintaining honor, harmony, and the continuity of the lineage, making divorce easily understood as a disruption to this family ideal.

This aligns with this research, which states that the position or place of each individual in Dalihan Na Tolu is determined by men, while women merely serve as complements or supporters of men's positions. Research conducted by Mangihut Siregar (2017) explains that women are considered a lower group and men a higher group. (Siregar & Fatmariza, 2021)

Traditional leaders also explain that women's position in the traditional structure is largely determined by the position of men, both as fathers and husbands. Therefore, when a woman divorces, she loses her formal position in traditional ceremonies in her husband's family and returns to her family of origin, but she is not fully categorized as "mother" or "daughter."

The majority of the population in North Padangsidimpuan District is Muslim, so religious perspectives play a crucial role in shaping initial understandings of divorce. Interviews with religious leaders emphasized that divorce is permissible in Islam, but strongly disliked by Allah. Islamic jurisprudence scholars, based on the Hadith, assert that divorce is permissible, or permissible, but disliked by Allah (Hakim, 2025). Furthermore, all humans have equal rights and status, so hating someone based on their status is unjustified.

Based on this assertion, divorce is viewed as something that can be done but should be a last resort when serious domestic conflicts such as domestic violence, infidelity, or neglect of alimony cannot be resolved. At the same time, religious teachings emphasize that all humans have equal status, and therefore, hatred should not be tolerated simply because of their divorce.

This externalization of religious discourse is evident in the advice of religious leaders who discourage divorce, but also do not condone the

ostracization of divorced women, especially when the divorce is caused by domestic violence or the husband's irresponsibility. This creates a dual framework of evaluation: on the one hand, divorce is understood as a failure of the ideal household; on the other, women who choose divorce to save themselves and their children are seen as normal and worthy of support. From the externalization stage, religion functions simultaneously as a source of norms and as a buffer against the stigma against divorced women (Marhadi et al., 2020).

At the externalization stage, the people of North Padangsidimpuan express their views on divorced young Batak Angkola women through customary values, Islamic teachings, and everyday social experiences. Patriarchal values, Dalihan Na Tolu, and the principle of *hombar do adat rap ibadat* serve as sources of reference when the community interprets the status of divorced young women as part of the dynamics of life, not a shame to be hidden.

Externalization is evident in the way the community interacts, which tends to be neutral and does not openly reject them: young single-parent women are still invited to greet each other, involved in religious studies, social gatherings (*arisan*), *horja* (*horja* gatherings), and social activities, although occasional scorn from a few people arises when changes in appearance or economic circumstances occur. On the other hand, the religious narrative that divorce is permissible but not loved by God, and that all humans have equal status, is also expressed in the form of advice, prayers, and moral support so that women do not feel inferior about their new status.

In the Batak Angkola, there is a message in the *mangupa* tradition, a tradition of giving advice on married life from the entire family and the entire traditional community. One frequently uttered advice is "*maranak sapulu pitu, marboru sapulu onom*," which means "have 17 sons and 16 daughters." (Efendi & Siregar, 2018).

Based on interviews with traditional leaders, the meaning of this metaphor is that the children born to the couple will eventually become a family that forms a community within a community. Therefore, whatever happens to the boys and girls, they will still be accepted in that community because, in essence, the children are part of the family, and the family never ostracizes one another. The Batak Angkola community is known for its "*hombar do adat rap ibadat*" philosophy, which illustrates that custom and worship (religion) go hand in hand and do not conflict. This is because the majority of the population of North Padangsidimpuan District is Muslim, and the Batak Angkola customs that exist within the community have been shaped to align with Islamic teachings.

In traditional life, the Batak Angkola people clearly distinguish between *marando* (living widow) and *mabalu* (deceased widow), and this distinction serves as an important framework for shaping the initial meaning of divorced women. *Mabalu* widows are viewed as victims of circumstance due to their husband's death, thus garnering more sympathy and respect. *Marando* are seen as related to the dissolution of a marriage, which involves human decision-making, and are therefore more open to moral judgment.

According to customary law, a Batak Angkola woman whose husband dies remains the property of her deceased husband's family, especially if she has

children. Her position within the family is solely as a mother to her children and she can still use her husband's assets for them. A divorced woman retains the same status as her mother-in-law, provided she has children. (Siregar & Fatmariza, 2021)

In traditional practice, Batak Angkola figures explain that a divorced woman no longer has a clear position with her husband and cannot participate in traditional ceremonies as an official member of her husband's family. Divorced young women can still attend traditional ceremonies and assist with behind-the-scenes work, but their symbolic rights, such as seating, order of address, and role in ceremonies, are limited.

Interviews with the community indicate that divorced women are more susceptible to suspicion, for example, if their appearance or economic situation changes after the divorce. Based on this everyday language and practice, the categories *marando* and *mabalu* are externalized as moral markers that differentiate divorce due to fate from divorce due to conflict. Based on this, the status of *marando* is more vulnerable and falls below that of married women and *mabalu* in the traditional social hierarchy.

The Angkola tradition and the Dalihan Na Tolu structure serve as the primary institutions formalizing women's position within the patrilineal family. Women attain their customary status through relationships with men as daughters of a particular father or as *boru* of a husband of a particular surname.

When a divorce occurs, the formal chain of relationships with the husband's family is broken, thus blurring the traditional position of women. Divorced women return to their families of origin, but they no longer play the role of wives in their husband's household and are not fully recognized as unmarried girls.

In practice, in the Batak Angkola community, this is objectified through the restricted role of divorced young women in *horja* (traditional ceremonies) and traditional ceremonies. These women remain present and assist in the kitchen or preparations, but are not included in the formal line of mothers or daughters in the procession. This is due to their position between mothers and daughters.

Based on these rules, custom functions as an institution that objectifies the meaning that divorced women live in an in-between space. They are still recognized as members of their original family, but their symbolic access to the traditional institutions of their husband's family is cut off. Unwritten provisions, such as the prohibition against participating in *menortor* (a ritual ritual) or joining the *Naposo Nauli Bulung* organization, demonstrate the formalization of divorced status as a standard pattern within the traditional structure.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that divorce among young Batak Angkola women is the result of an accumulation of interrelated structural, relational, and cultural factors rather than a single isolated cause. Empirical findings reveal that domestic violence constitutes the most dominant trigger of divorce, often intertwined with economic instability, substance abuse, emotional immaturity,

and the husband's failure to fulfill normative marital responsibilities. These conditions generate prolonged insecurity within the household, positioning divorce as a rational survival strategy for women seeking physical safety, emotional stability, and protection for their children. Beyond individual marital failure, the study confirms that economic irresponsibility and persistent interpersonal conflict particularly involving extended family member significantly intensify marital breakdown. The inability of husbands to provide financial support and assert responsible leadership within the family structure aligns with theoretical perspectives that emphasize the provider role as central to household stability. When this role collapses, women disproportionately shoulder both economic and emotional burdens, accelerating the decision to dissolve the marriage. Culturally, divorce among Batak Angkola women must be understood within the framework of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, a patrilineal kinship system that positions men as lineage holders and women as relational complements. Divorce disrupts this idealized family structure and places women in an ambiguous social position neither fully recognized as wives within their former husband's family nor entirely restored to their original status as daughters. This liminal condition is institutionalized through customary practices that restrict divorced women's symbolic participation in traditional ceremonies, reinforcing their marginal status within the social hierarchy. Religious interpretations further shape community responses to divorce. Islamic teachings, as articulated by religious leaders, frame divorce as permissible yet morally discouraged, emphasizing reconciliation while simultaneously rejecting social stigmatization of divorced women especially when divorce results from violence or neglect. This dual religious discourse functions both as a moral guideline and as a protective buffer that mitigates excessive social exclusion, allowing divorced women to retain social legitimacy despite cultural ambivalence. At the societal level, the process of externalization reveals that divorced young women in North Padangsidempuan are generally not overtly ostracized. They remain involved in social and religious activities, though subtle forms of suspicion and moral judgment persist, particularly when post-divorce changes in appearance or economic status occur. The cultural distinction between *marando* (divorced women) and *mabalu* (widows by death) further objectifies moral hierarchies, positioning divorce as a condition more vulnerable to scrutiny than widowhood caused by fate. This study confirms that divorce among young Batak Angkola women is embedded within a complex intersection of domestic violence, economic precarity, kinship structures, religious norms, and patriarchal cultural institutions. Divorce is not merely a personal decision but a socially negotiated outcome shaped by power relations, moral expectations, and institutionalized traditions. By integrating gender analysis, cultural anthropology, and sociology of religion, this research contributes a nuanced understanding of how divorced women navigate social existence within a society that simultaneously normalizes, regulates, and symbolically constrains their status.

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