

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

“WHEN HE DIVORCED MY MOTHER, MY FATHER DIVORCED ME AS  
WELL.”: THE RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO GREW UP  
APART FROM THEIR FATHERS

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İSTANBUL

2021

“When He Divorced My Mother, My Father Divorced Me as Well.”: The  
Relational Experiences of Women Who Grew up Apart From Their Fathers

“Babam Annemden Boşandığında Benden de Boşandı.”: Babasından Ayrı  
Büyümüş Kadınların İlişkisel Deneyimleri

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Date of Approval of Thesis: 17.06.2021

Total Page Number: 194

**Keywords (Turkish)**

- 1) Ebeveyn Boşanması
- 2) Baba Yokluğu
- 3) Baba-Kız İlişkisi
- 4) Anne-Kız İlişkisi
- 5) Romantik İlişki Deneyimi

**Keywords (English)**

- 1) Parental Divorce
- 2) Father Absence
- 3) Father-Daughter Relationship
- 4) Mother-Daughter Relationship
- 5) Romantic Relationship Experiences

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Hale Bolak, for her insightful comments and sincere support. Her detailed feedback guided me a lot while creating this thesis. I would like to thank Sibel Halfon for her feedbacks. Each interaction with her throughout the master's degree program was an eye-opening experience. I would also like to thank Selenga Gürmen for her participation in the jury. Her encouragement was very valuable for me to stay motivated during the process. Due to the nature of the qualitative research, giving meaning to people's experiences with an emphatic approach was a major part of this study. That process was very familiar because of my experiences in a therapy room. For that reason, it was very important for me to thank the people who helped me gain competence as a psychotherapist. I am very grateful for my professors Elif Göçek and Sibel Halfon and my other supervisors Dalya Benbasa and Pınar Kanlıkılıçer, for teaching me how to see and hear in a therapy room. I also would like to thank each of my friends in my lovely cohort as they made these three years wonderful experience for me.

I am very grateful for my mother who shared all resources she has. I felt her support all the time. Her motivation talks and her great respect to my work made me feel very strong.

I would like to thank Mert, who always gave me unconditional support and love. Besides his constructive opinions, he always shared his valuable time with me to contribute the process.

I would like to thank Cicik and Cücük who have unique personalities in cat bodies. Their presence was very contributing to the process. It was honoured to meet them.

I would like to thank my sister Busem who is one of the most loving and caring person on earth. From the very beginning to the end of the last three years, she was the closest one to me. I am very glad to be with her in the same program and to have lots of shared experiences, which we are going to have more. I would like to thank my other psychotherapist sisters, Sumru, Eda, Gülşah, Sezgi, İpek and Yeşim who are full of love, empathy, humour, and professionalism. I am always

inspired by their wise words. Each of them provided me a unique perspective that nurtured me both as a researcher and as a psychotherapist. Their great support and patience helped me to deal with expected and unexpected difficulties during the master program. My other sisters who were not from the area of clinical psychology, Tuğçe Bağçivan, Tuğçe Erol, Bahar, and Ekin, motivated me incredibly during this process. They helped me to believe in me all the fragile times. I am looking forward to seeing next chapters in our lives together.

Finally, all beloved participants of this study shared their experiences sincerely and openly. I was amazed by the mutual comfort we felt during the interviews. I would like to thank them to accept me to witness their stories.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis aims to explore relational experiences of women who grew up apart from their fathers. Ten heterosexual women (age range: 23-27), who experienced parental divorce before the age of five and who were in a romantic relationship participated in this study. After conducting in-depth interviews and carrying out thematic analysis, four categories were revealed. The first category, father-daughter relationship, includes nine themes: not being close with father, lack of sincerity in father-daughter relationship, rejecting father and being rejected by father, not longing for father, varied contact and communication, limited sharing with father, ineffective conflict resolution, the gap between expectations and reality, and disappointment with unmet expectations. The second category, mother-daughter relationship, involves four themes: feeling close and satisfied with the mother-daughter relationship, empathizing with mother, being able to share with mother, and being able to solve the problems with mother. The third category, parental divorce and separation from the father, consists of eight themes: disclosures about parental divorce, the mediator role of the mother in the father-daughter relationship, alliance with the mother, the effect of observing other family structures, the effect of father absence on childhood experiences, on identity, on others' negative perceptions of self, and compensating for father absence. The fourth category, experience of romantic relationships, consisted of five themes: feeling close with partner, communication challenges and conflict resolution in romantic relationship, the impact of the father on daughter's partner preference and on the nature of romantic relationship. Participants described a negative course of father-daughter relationship including low paternal involvement, rare contact frequency and dysfunctional communication patterns. The mother-daughter relationship was described mostly positively. The results show that the father-daughter relationship and father absence affect several issues in adult daughters' romantic relationships including partner preference, attitudes towards partners, conflict resolution strategies, and the longevity of the relationship. Implications of

the results, limitations and suggestions for further studies are discussed in light of existing literature.

*Keywords:* parental divorce, father absence, father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter relationship, romantic relationship experiences.

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma babasından ayrı büyümüş kadınların ilişki deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 5 yaşına gelmeden ebeveynleri boşanmış ve şu anda bir romantik ilişki içinde olan 10 heteroseksüel kadın (yaş aralığı: 23-27) çalışmaya katılmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapıldıktan ve tematik analiz uygulandıktan sonra dört ana kategori ortaya çıkmıştır. İlk kategori, baba-kız ilişkisi, dokuz tema içermektedir: babaya yakın hissetmemek, baba-kız ilişkisindeki samimiyetsizlik, babayı reddetmek ve baba tarafından reddedilmek, babaya özlem duymamak, değişken iletişim sıklığı ve örüntüsü, babayla kısıtlı paylaşım, işlevsiz çatışma çözümleri, beklentiler ve gerçeklik arasındaki fark, karşılanmayan beklentilere karşı hayal kırıklığı. İkinci kategori, anne-kız ilişkisi, dört tema içermektedir: anneye yakın hissetmek ve anne-kız ilişkisinden memnun olmak, anneyle empati kurmak, anneyle rahatça paylaşım yapmak, anneyle sorunları çözebilmek. Üçüncü kategori, ebeveyn boşanması ve babadan ayrılık, sekiz tema içermektedir: ebeveyn boşanmasıyla ilgili açıklamalar, annenin baba-kız ilişkisindeki aracı rolü, anneyle birlik olmak, diğer aile dinamiklerini gözlemlenmenin etkisi, baba yokluğunun çocukluk deneyimlerine, kişiliğe, diğerlerinin olumsuz algısına etkisi, ve baba yokluğunun telafisi. Dördüncü kategori, romantik ilişki deneyimi, beş tema içermektedir: partnere yakın hissetmek, romantik ilişkide iletişim zorlukları ve çatışma çözümü, babanın kızının partner seçimine ve romantik ilişki dinamiğine etkisi. Genel olarak katılımcılar düşük baba katılımı, seyrek görüşme sıklığı ve işlevsiz iletişim örüntüleri içeren olumsuz bir baba-kız ilişki seyri tanımlamışlardır. Anne-kız ilişkisi genel olarak olumlu şekilde tanımlanmıştır. Sonuçlar baba-kız ilişkisinin ve baba yokluğunun kadınların romantik ilişkilerinde partner tercihi, partnerlerine karşı tutumları, çatışma çözme yöntemleri ve ilişki süresi konularını etkilediğini ortaya koymuştur. Sonuçların sağladığı bilgiler, çalışmadaki kısıtlamalar ve gelecek çalışmalar için öneriler tartışılmıştır.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* ebeveyn boşanması, baba yokluğu, baba-kız ilişkisi, anne-kız ilişkisi, romantik ilişki deneyimi.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This thesis aims to study the living experiences of a group of adult women in Turkey who grew up apart from their fathers due to parental divorce and the effect of growing up apart from their fathers on their romantic relationships. The primary investigator did semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten women. Interview questions covered various aspects of participants' unique experiences including women's perceptions of their parents' divorce as both children and adult daughters, the course of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships after parental divorce, and the effect of growing up apart from their fathers on their romantic relationships. Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R) was also used as an additional data source to gain more understanding about participants' attitudes in romantic relationships.

It is hoped that the findings of the present study will be beneficial for researchers and clinicians who work with children as well as adult clients who experience parental divorce and grow up apart their fathers.

#### **1.1. PARENTAL DIVORCE RELATED VARIABLES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON CHILDREN**

There are various studies addressing the effect of parental divorce on different aspects in children's lives in the short run (Karataş, 2019; Kaynaroğlu, 1984; Selter, 1994). Several studies investigated the link between interparental conflict and parental divorce with children's positive (e.g. joy) and negative affect (e.g. anxiety and stress) (Amato et al., 1995; Jekielek, 1998), emotional well-being (Amato et al., 1995), and behavioural problems (Strohschein, 2005). Internalizing and externalizing problems in childhood (Amato & Keith, 1991) and intense anger and misconduct behaviours in adolescence (Hetherington et al., 1989; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989) were found to be related to parental divorce. Amato (2001)

suggested that parental divorce negatively affects children's social and emotional development and academic life. He claimed that adolescents from divorced families tend to show more behaviour problems and that they are under higher risk of drug and alcohol abuse. Çelikoğlu (1997) found no relation between children's self-esteem and experience of parental divorce among school age children. Nevertheless, she revealed that the degree of children's self-esteem is linked with the presence of a stepmother and contact frequency with non-residential parents. Related to these findings, Şahin (2019) and Tek (2019) showed a relation between frequency of interaction with non-residential parents and adolescents' adjustment process after parental divorce. In his study, Şahin (2019) found that gender, interparental relationships and socio-economic status of the family are other factors contributing to adolescents' adjustment process. Moreover, a few studies examined the impact of divorce in adolescence and childhood in relation to attachment theory (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005; Turan Cebeci, 2009).

Long term effects of parental divorce on children have been investigated in fewer studies (Franklin et al., 1990). In Turkey, Sirvanli-Ozen (2004) investigated the impact of parental divorce on adult attachment styles. One hundred six college students from divorced and intact families participated in the study. Results showed that insecure attachment style is more common among young adults coming from divorced families. Divorced fathers were seen as less affectionate and more controlling by their children compared to married fathers. On the other hand, young adults' perception of mothers did not change as a function of family structure. Sirvanli-Ozen (2004) explained this finding by referring to mothers' heightened attempts to provide a better environment for their children after divorce. Another reason could be related to children's alienation from their fathers even though this consequence may not be desired by neither of the parents.

Long-term impact of parental divorce on children's romantic relationships has been investigated even less (Yu et al., 2010). Booth and Amato (2001) found young adults' romantic relationships, social support resources, and emotional well-being to be related to parental divorce and conflicts in the family environment. Studies showed that children who experience parental divorce have less

consistency, competency, harmony, and loyalty in their romantic relationships (Chen et al., 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Gahler et al., 2009; Shulman et al., 2012). Marriage related attitudes and marriage duration of adult children from divorced families have also examined in various studies (Amato, 1996; Amato & Booth, 1991; Axinn & Thornton, 1996). Maden (2015) investigated attitudes towards marriage among Turkish college students and found college students from divorced families to have more negative beliefs about marriage compared to college students from intact families.

### **1.1.1. Children's Age at Parental Divorce**

Children's development stage at the time of parental divorce plays an important role as it shapes children's perception of parental separation and their vulnerability to self-blame (Yavuzer, 2005). While preschool children tend to feel guilty due to their parents' divorce, adolescents and adult children are more likely to see their parents as guilty (Wallerstein et al., 1988). Allison and Furstenberg's (1989) study showed that experiencing parental divorce during the first five years of life makes children particularly vulnerable to be affected negatively.

These findings are consistent with the premises of the attachment theory, since attachment is thought to be mainly developed during the first few years of life (Bowlby, 1969). Experiencing parental divorce in the first years of life might result in specific adverse impact on children because of various developmental needs and expectations (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Almost complete dependency on the parents, immature coping strategies, and the possible subsequent negative events following divorce are expected to have important implications for the first five-year period in children's lives (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). Quality of parents' interaction with each other and parent-child interaction, parents' personal well-being, and the course of the relationship between child and non-residential parent affect children's process of adaptation to divorce in their first years of life (Eastman & Moran, 1991; Hodges et al., 1992). Stephens (1996) and Aquilino (2006) suggested that the earlier the parental divorce, the less-frequent the contact between

father and child. Parental divorce at a later age increases the chance of establishment of a good father-child relationship as contact duration increases (Cheadle, 2010). Continuity in a routine parental visitation becomes critical for younger children as consistent interaction helps them and their parents to establish a healthy parent-child bond and strengthens the attachment via recollection of shared memories (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). On the other hand, inconsistent and limited contact weakens a parent-child bond, negatively affects child's attachment style, and makes the adjustment process difficult for the child (Eastman & Moran, 1991; Hodges et al., 1991). However, it should be mentioned that not only frequency but also the quality of contact is important (Lee, 1995).

Each child reacts to parental divorce differently. While some children adjust smoothly, others may have difficulty for a long time (Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999). While for some children the effects of parental divorce decline in shorter time, for others divorce related impact becomes more apparent during later developmental stages with their changing needs (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1990; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). During the first two to five years after divorce, parents are occupied with stabilizing a new family environment (Hetherington et al., 1999) which makes this duration sensitive and difficult for both parents and children. Emotional support from a mother, a father or a family member helps children to adapt better to divorce related changes (Jenkins & Smith, 1990). Sensitive and caring custodial parents positively contribute to children's and adolescents' adjustment to parental divorce and parents' remarriage (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000).

While younger children rely on their parents to get emotional support after divorce; adolescents may have a chance to get emotional support from their social networks, which helps them to deal with adverse emotional effects of parental divorce (Hetherington, 1989). However, due to challenging demands of adolescence such as gaining autonomy, forming self-identity and engaging in romantic relationships (Hauser & Smith, 1991), lack of parent support may make this period of life even more difficult for adolescents (Weiss, 1979). For that reason, gaining autonomy and decline in the level of idealization of parents may occur

earlier for adolescents who experience parental divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Especially for daughters with residential single mothers, it might be more difficult to process individuation during adolescence (Kalter et al., 1985). Moreover, in their longitudinal study, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) found that adolescent daughters from divorced families show great anxiety during adolescence, which is illustrated as a by-product of increased preoccupation with their parents' divorce (Kalter et al., 1985).

As mentioned above, there are various findings pointing out different reflections of experiencing parental divorce in different developmental stages of a child. Some studies show that regardless of children's age at the time of parental divorce, divorce have long term effect on different aspects of children's lives including their marital relations (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Webster et al., 1995). Maintaining a healthy parent-child relationship reduces the negative effects of divorce on children and serves an effective protective factor for their development irrespective of children's age at the time of parental divorce (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001).

### **1.1.2. Interparental Conflict**

Studies showed that people with children struggle emotionally more and having a child or children make divorce process last longer (Örsel et al., 2011; Uçan, 2007). While parents feel ambivalent about divorce due to the presence of children and question if their decision is beneficial for them (Yu et al., 2010), the literature shows that children's social development is affected by interparental problems such as relational conflicts, divorce, and domestic violence (Emery, 1999; Kızmaz, 2006).

Children's later attitudes and emotions in their relationships begin to be shaped and negatively affected by not only parental divorce but parents' adverse relational experiences including conflicts and hostility (Emery, 1988). Children may witness parental conflicts related to parental divorce and may observe their parents' dysfunctional coping styles (Brennan & Shaver, 1994). Conflict resolution,

which is learned in the family, is an aspect of romantic relationships and predicts how satisfied individuals are with their relationships (Bowman, 1990). How parents and children react to and solve conflicts, influence both later family dynamics and children's future romantic relationships (Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Moreover, how parents negotiate interparental conflict and manage co-parenting affects children's adjustment and their well-being (Braver et al., 2005; Cookston et al., 2006; Vandervalk et al., 2004). In Morrison et al.'s (2017) study, successfully managed marital conflicts were found to be positively correlated with daughters' self-concept.

Co-occurrence of parental divorce and high interparental conflict predicts negative impact for the offspring during the developmental stages of childhood (Jekielek, 1998), adolescence (Forehand & Neighbors, 1994), and adulthood (Sanders et al., 1999). Long et al. (1988) found that experiencing interparental conflict both before and after parental divorce makes adjustment process more difficult for adolescents resulting in more internalizing and externalizing problems. Regardless of family dynamics (intact or divorced) high interparental conflict predicts negative attitudes towards romantic relationships and a higher number of sexual partners for children (Jennings et al., 1992). Parental divorce and recurrent interparental conflict are related to poor parent-adult child relationships (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Tüzün (2004) showed that children from intact families show more behaviour problems if they witness parental conflict and violence compared to children from divorced families. Apart from these findings, research shows gender difference in terms of children's reaction to interparental conflict. Studies show that daughters tend to engage in interparental conflicts as a mediator (Vuchinich et al., 1988), since they may become more concerned about destructive consequences of conflicts and be more apt to establish more intimate relationship with their mothers following divorce (Arditti, 1999; Orbuch et al., 2000).

Despite acknowledged adverse impact of parental divorce on both parents and children, parents may get a new opportunity to provide a stable and caring environment for their children, support children's emotional development, and improve their relationships (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). After parental

divorce, children could be detracted from unhealthy emotional atmosphere surrounding them and adopt a harmonious environment with their single parents (Booth & Amato, 2001). For some children who witness high interparental conflict, parental divorce may have a stress-relieving function in their lives (Strohschein, 2005). Children who reported to have high conflict parents and experienced parental divorce were better adjusted in the long run compared to similar children who still had intact families (Amato et al., 1995).

Mutual engagement in parenting and childraising of mothers and fathers describes coparenting (Feinberg, 2003). Due to the possible adverse consequences of divorce for children (e.g. lower income and decreased parental well-being), how parents manage coparenting could both a protective and a risk factor for children's development and their adjustment (Lamela et al., 2016; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). The quality of coparental alliance was found to be influential especially during the first few years after divorce (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). Parents' cooperation is important for children's adjustment to divorce as it means consistent parenting practices of parents, effective parenting strategies, and more engaged non-residential parents for children (Markham et al., 2007; Sobolewski and King, 2005). Better coparental interaction positively affects children's development by improving the frequency and the quality of father-child contact and fathers' involvement (Carlson et al., 2008; Laucht et al., 2000; Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011). It also means lower interparental conflicts which helps to create more peaceful environment for children (Ahrons, 2011). Moreover, coparental cooperation was positively related to fathers' both legally obligated and voluntary financial support (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2018; Goldberg, 2015) as it helps non-residential fathers to be informed about their children's needs more (Kane et al., 2015). On the other hand, poor coparenting practices leads to adverse outcomes for children's well being in childhood (Baxter et al., 2011) and cause closeness problems in romantic relationships and lower self-confidence among young adults (Gasper et al., 2008).

### **1.1.3. Parental Divorce and Children's Attitudes Towards Romantic Relationships and Marriage**

Numerous studies revealed various findings regarding the expectations and attitudes about marriage and divorce of adult children of divorce (Amato, 1996; Amato & Booth, 1991; Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Franklin et al., 1990). Some studies showed that divorce is 'transmitted' from parents to children which means that adult children from divorced families are more likely to divorce compared to adult children from intact families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). Research indicated that adolescents with divorced parents found it hard to believe that they could maintain stable and committed romantic relationships, had a high-level anxiety, were afraid of being rejected and abandoned, had more concern about quality of their marriage and their own partnership skills and got married earlier (Amato, 1996; Jennings et al., 1992; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Miles and Servaty-Seib (2010) showed that women who experienced parental divorce had more pro-divorce attitudes compared to women coming from intact families, which might not be considered to directly interfere their romantic relationship experiences. Such attitudes may result in a reduction in their tolerance and make them more likely to think about divorce in the presence of relational problems (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Fowers et al., 2001).

Relationship related factors about parental divorce, such as loss and separation, might be re-evoked in a later period in children's lives. Young adulthood is the time when young adults begin to experience romantic relationships and when personality formation is a dominant issue (Franklin et al., 1990; Wallerstein, 1987). Parental divorce is reassessed by a young adult, which results in forming new beliefs about romantic relationships (Mahl, 2001). Yu and Adler-Baeder (2007) suggested that if parents have new satisfying marriages after divorce, it helps children to reform their beliefs about romantic relationships and weaken their negative beliefs about marriage. Moreover, research supported that being in a healthy and mutually committed romantic relationships could help young adults to deal with their former negative impressions provoked by their parents' relationship

dynamics (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998).

Some studies have shown that children from divorced families experience difficulty in maintaining committed, secure, satisfying romantic relationships (Franklin et al., 1990; Whitton et al., 2008) and these tendencies are more common among women (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Communication style between parents and children (Story et al., 2004), social support (Mustonen et al., 2011) and socio-economic circumstances (Feng et al., 1999) were found to have a mediating role in the relationship between parental divorce and children's later romantic relationship qualities. Considering the negative effects of parental divorce on the quality of relationship between parents and children, children's less optimistic depiction of romantic relationships seems consistent with the findings (Crowell et al., 2009).

Mustonen et al. (2011) proposed that while disrupted bonds between parents and children may not be directly associated with poorer romantic relationships, the relational damage may affect children's social and emotional development in different ways, reflected in children's romantic relationships during adolescence and adulthood. For instance, self-esteem, which is related to romantic relationship quality, was found to be positively correlated with good father-child relationship (Barelds, 2005). Furthermore, individuals, who had healthy relationships with their parents in childhood were observed to perceive more social support from others when they reached adulthood (Riggio, 2004), which relates to romantic relationship satisfaction (Bradbury et al., 2000). Conger et al. (2000) showed that the more parents engaged in their children's lives during adolescence, the warmer and friendlier their children became towards their partners. Moreover, these children became more autonomous and felt more secure in their romantic relationships (Walper & Wendt, 2015). On the other hand, adversities in parent-child interactions predict negative romantic relationship experiences (Walper & Wendt, 2015).

Mustonen et al. (2011) found that the quality of romantic relationships of daughters, who experienced parental divorce before reaching 16 years old, were affected negatively by parental divorce more compared to sons who had same experience. Moreover, studies showed that women, with divorced parents had more negative beliefs about divorce and poorer communication with their partners

compared to men who came from divorced families (Kapinus, 2004; Sanders et al., 1999). As one of the possible explanations, daughters may identify themselves with their mothers, who generally become custodial parents and undertake children's responsibilities, and internalize their mothers' negative beliefs about marital relationships (Mustonen et al., 2011). In their study, Mustonen et al. (2011) concluded that while negative effects of parental divorce are more salient among daughters, healthy relationship with mothers serves an important protective factor for their social and emotional development.

Morrison et al. (2017) examined the prolonged effect of parental divorce in their qualitative study. They conducted the study with nine participants, eight of whom had experienced parental divorce in their childhood. Participants stated that their parents' sharing of direct information about separation facilitated their adjustment process, helped them to give meaning to their experience and develop a more optimistic perspective towards romantic relationships. Some participants mentioned the ambiguity they felt due to their parents' use of circumlocution while talking about divorce. Friends who had similar experiences were found to be perceived as an important source of support helping participants to normalize their experience. Participants emphasized the relieving aspect of encountering other people with similar experiences. Parents' coping skills used to solve marital conflicts were shown as an important determinant of daughters' beliefs and attitudes about divorce. Majority of the participants perceived their parents' decision of divorce was to their benefit and none of them preferred otherwise. Participants reported that they tend to be selective in choosing a partner to prevent experiencing the same difficulties their parents did, to seek a steady relationship, and not to be too close to their partners because of the possibility of being abandonment.

## **1.2. THE COURSE OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AFTER PARENTAL DIVORCE**

### **1.2.1. Mother-Child Relationship After Parental Divorce**

Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) examined daughters' adjustment to parental divorce and the course of parent-daughter relationship after divorce in their ten year follow up study. Findings showed that daughters who experienced parental divorce when they were toddler or pre-school age, could remain in a good relationship with their mothers and adjust parental divorce better than others who experienced parental divorce at older ages. Considering mothers' increased responsibilities and distress, establishing and sustaining a healthy mother-daughter relationship seems to be a challenging accomplishment. However, as mothers had much time to improve the mother-daughter relationship and to provide a balanced family life together with their daughters, youngest ones seemed to benefit more from these past ten years. Since toddlers and pre-school age children need their mothers more and fathers were not present, the intensity and duration of shared time may have increased. Daughters' need for contact with their fathers increase during adolescence. Even though some mothers do not welcome this change well, it was found that quality of mother-daughter relationship was not negatively affected due to the increased involvement of fathers. Both at the onset of the parental divorce and after a decade, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) found that mother-daughter relationships were stronger than father-daughter relationships. Some daughters' relationships with their mothers weakened due to mothers' drug and alcohol abuse, psychological difficulties, and remarriage. Daughters stated that they felt rejected, abandoned and angry because of these adverse experiences. Some of these mothers reported that they were overwhelmed with being a single parent. In the matter of working mothers, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) found that even though daughters appreciated the effort of their mothers, they also felt rejected and abandoned due to long hour separations and scarcity of shared times.

Following adolescence, girls begin to engage in romantic relationships.

Moreover, their relationships with their parents evolve and they gain more understanding about each parent's singular situation and their both pre- and post-divorce dynamics (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). Wallerstein and Corbin's (1989) study revealed that some daughters, who experienced parental divorce at a young age, felt stress about romantic relationships when they reached adolescence. Some of them might think that they will leave their mothers alone if they engage in romantic relationship, feel guilty, and worry about their mothers. Their young age at the time of parental divorce allows them to form a strong relationship with their mothers and help them to more strongly identify with their caring mothers. However, this may turn into a challenge when they become adolescents.

One study showed that mother-daughter interactions are more transparent than father-daughter interactions, including a wider range of conversation topics and intense emotional sharing (Youniss & Ketterlinus, 1987). Koerner et al. (2002) investigated the impact of mother's disclosure about specific topics on perceived closeness of mother-daughter relationship after parental divorce. They found that when mothers share information about their financial difficulties, their personal (e.g. job) and parenting related problems, and their negative beliefs about their ex-husband, daughters' distress level become significantly higher compared to daughters of mothers who do not share these information in detail. Adolescent daughters' reports showed that sharing confidential information does not strengthen perceived closeness between mothers and daughters. Moreover, sharing parenting related issues with daughters significantly reduce perceived closeness in mother-daughter relationships. Daughters may tend to care for their mothers. Furthermore, their perception of the family unity and their beliefs about their fathers could also be affected (Koerner et al., 2002). Even though closeness is a significant dimension of a mother-daughter relationship, blurry boundaries between mothers and daughters may have a negative impact on daughters' psychological well-being (Koerner et al., 2002). On the other hand, some researchers suggested that involving children in these issues may have an enhancing effect on children's sense of maturity and confidence (Galambos & Ehrenberg, 1997) and may strengthen the mother-child relationship (Arditti, 1999).

Wallerstein et al. (2013) conducted a longitudinal qualitative study and examined the course of parent-child relationships across 25 years after divorce. Research showed that mothers either adjust to divorce and form a new life for themselves as single women or with new partners, or they keep suffering for many years because of divorce. Maintaining frequent parent-child interaction and minimizing parental conflicts were considered beneficial for parents and children to overcome parental divorce in a short time. However, research showed that stabilizing a new structure of family dynamics and solving financial issues take years (Wallerstein et al., 2013) and that the relationship between fathers and children changes its form in time (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2009).

The degree of child's adjustment to divorce is affected by different mother related variables such as ages of mothers and ages of children, number of children, mothers' psychological and financial resources, mothers' life conditions after divorce. The study showed that many mothers go through psychological and financial difficulties after divorce due to a decline in support resources contrary to an increase in their responsibilities (Osborne et al., 2012). In Wallerstein et al.'s (2013) study, half of the mothers could maintain satisfying relationship with their children while working in paid employment and handling housework at the same time. Some mothers quit their job to continue to give attention to parenting after divorce. While some mothers kept their focus on children by staying single, for some mothers, remarriage became helpful emotionally and financially that reflected on their parenting positively. Another group of mothers struggled to manage mothering and other ongoing responsibilities such as finding a job for living, participating in vocational training and engaging in a new romantic relationship during first few years after divorce. Wallerstein et al.'s (2013) study pointed out various factors that affect mothers' parenting experiences such as mothers' emotional maturity, their social support resources, and quality of the mother-child bond. Mothers who already had a satisfying job before separation and who engaged in a new fulfilling romantic relationship soon after divorce were found to be able to perform parenting practices with less difficulty.

### **1.2.2. Father-Child Relationship and Contact Frequency After Parental Divorce**

Unlike the father-daughter relationship, the relationship between mothers and daughters may strengthen after divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1991). Research suggests that mothers' parenting practices (i.e. caring) and mother-child relationship are less affected by divorce compared to fathers' (Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Buehler et al., 2006). Mothers may rely on their children and give attention to their interaction with their children to repair the sense of loss after divorce (Yu et al., 2010). On the other hand, residential mothers may struggle to satisfy their children's needs as they may prioritize to deal with financial issues, increased responsibilities, and their own distress after divorce (Riggio & Valenzuela, 2011). Non-residential fathers have a weaker relationship with their daughters than residential fathers have (Moore, 2016). Hetherington et al. (1976) conducted a longitudinal study and examined the course of relationship dynamics among family members after divorce. They found that mothers intended to pursue their authority over their children after divorce by becoming stricter and giving more instructions. On the other hand, fathers preferred to be the 'playmate' and became flexible regarding rules. Two years later, while mothers become more competent to manage adverse situations, fathers' efforts to provide always cheerful moments to their children declined.

Parents' decision of getting a divorce affects children's lives directly as for some children it generally means to start living apart from one parent (Emery, 2012). Changes in routines and loss of daily touch with both parents may cause a feeling of loss among children (Aktaş, 2011). Separation from a parent makes children feel anxious, scared, hurt, and rejected. Moreover, they may feel guilty about parental divorce (Wong et al., 2002). Lamb (1999) and Bastaist et al. (2012) found that a lot of children do not interact with their non-residential fathers often and frequency of the contact between non-residential fathers and children diminishes gradually after divorce, in turn, they could not sustain a healthy relationship (Lerman & Sorenson, 2000). Fathers' decreased physical presence

after divorce affects their parenting practices such as monitoring and control (Finley & Schwartz, 2006). Another study revealed that limited, superficial, and infrequent communication between daughters and fathers decrease the possibility of the establishment of satisfactory father-daughter relationship (Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). In line with that, fathers' support, authority and involvement in their children's lives weaken and they feel less capable as parents (Bastaitis et al. 2012; Carlson, 2006). In Babcock's (1989) study, some of the fathers stated that as their ex-spouses carried out parenting role adequately, they felt as contributing less. In another study, fathers reported that they didn't have sense of authority, belonging in father-child relationship, and control regarding child raising (Braver & Griffin, 2000). Decreased contact frequency between fathers and daughters and custodial situations could be potential reasons of this change; however, research showed that the same pattern was observed among children who were adults at the time of parental divorce (Cooney, 1994). Studies reveal that father-child contact frequency declines drastically after father remarries or engages in a romantic relationship (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2009; Seltzer & Bianchi 1988; Seltzer et al., 1989). Time restriction caused by increased responsibilities due to new marriage (Flinn et al., 1999; Seltzer et al., 1989), fathers' new role of being a husband (Stephens, 1996) and caring responsibilities towards stepchildren or a father's new biological child (Cooksey & Craig, 1998) could be some explanations of this change.

As they grow up, children start to feel a greater need for their fathers (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). Fathers have different opportunities to stay in contact with their children and to maintain interaction. Cooksey and Craig (1998) suggested that most studies investigated the frequency of father visitation to evaluate father-child contact after divorce. They claimed that talking on the phone might be an alternative for non-residential fathers to pursue interaction with their children, as it requires less time and less financial effort. Moreover, when children grow up, their free time could decrease which may make engaging in face to face contact with their fathers more difficult (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Cooksey and Craig's (1998) findings showed that calling and writing become preferred ways of communication between fathers and children, when children get older. Moreover, their study

revealed that daughters are more likely to talk with their fathers on the telephone than sons.

Parents who could put their marital problems aside and continue their parenting practices are able to maintain their relationships with their children. In their longitudinal study, Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) reported that few children could have this opportunity. Even though daughters, whose parents divorced while they were toddlers or pre-schoolers, spent less time with their fathers, their relationships with their fathers were found to be relatively better. In general, a father-daughter relationship becomes poorer due to fathers' diminished engagement related to fathers' remarriage and marital quality, psychological issues, and physical distance. Some of the older daughters stated that they felt sad and rejected due to fathers' broken promises about visitations. Moreover, some daughters whose fathers visited them regularly, reported that visitation was not a valid expression of their fathers' love and care for them. Daughters, who experienced parental divorce, were found to feel rejected by their parents, particularly by their fathers regardless of contact frequency (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). The same researchers found that, for daughters, feeling rejection related to mentioned situations is a predictor of low levels of psychological adjustment after parental divorce. Moreover, children may think that something is wrong with them which pushes their fathers away (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Yu et al. (2010) proposed that fathers may consider 'fatherhood' and 'partnership' as associated roles that accompany each other, and that divorce may affect their relationship with their children. Many fathers do not prefer to remain in their parenting roles and engaged in their children's lives after divorce (Furstenberg et al., 1987; Furstenberg & Nord, 1988). Studies suggested that father absence is not supposed to result in deficiency but that it might make children vulnerable to develop emotional and social problems since children could not benefit from parental nurturance including financial and emotional resources (Marquardt, 2005; Tallman et al.; 1993). Studies showed that the ratio of non-custodial father-child pairs who contact with each other at least once a week could not reach half (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Stephens, 1996). Moreover, in his study, Stephens

(1996) found that half of the fathers were not present in their children's lives. As regular and ongoing parenting practices are lost after divorce, fathers have to develop new parenting habits which affect their father identities (Tallman et al., 1993). While building up their new parenting routines and forming a new father identity, their new roles in the relationship with their ex-spouses, with their new partners, and with their children become important variables to determine their involvement in their children's lives (Tallman et al., 1993). Mothers' beliefs and discourse about fathers, daughters' age when they separated from their fathers and the reason of paternal absence are factors that influence the father-daughter relationship (Moore, 2016). Studies have indicated that women who experienced father absence in their childhood have difficulty respecting their fathers, feel abandoned, broken and distant due to lack of paternal effort to create and maintain father-child bond (East et al., 2007; Guardia et al., 2014). They reported feeling neither a father-daughter bond they expected nor their fathers' interest in their lives due to inconsistent interactions. Moreover, young adult children of divorce reported that their fathers' visitations were far from the expected father involvement in their lives (Braver et al., 2003; Finley & Schwartz, 2007). Wallerstein and Corbin (1989) indicated that while younger daughters could attribute more positive qualities to their fathers, older ones could not hold on their beliefs in accordance with recurring negative experiences with their fathers. Findings show that these children dealt with father absence in different ways that were partly determined by their age.

Inconsistency of the presence of fathers may impact their daughter's academic life, sexual and romantic relationships (Lopez & Corona, 2012). Women who grew up with absent father reported that they had to grow up fast because of financial and emotional adversities (Brown, 2018). Moreover, daughters' self-esteem can be impacted negatively by unstable presence or absence of fathers (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012; Lopez & Corona, 2012). Some women stated that they sometimes 'misbehaved' to gain attention from their fathers, which seems another way to bring their fathers close to them regardless of the nature of the interaction. Moore's (2016) study investigating the effect of father absence on daughters' intimate relationships. Adult daughters reported that they wanted their fathers to be

engaged in their lives regardless of the conditions. In line with Moore's (2016) findings, other studies indicated that children from divorced families stated that they missed their fathers and desired to have emotionally involving fathers (Finley & Schwartz, 2007). Moreover, in Finley and Schwartz's (2007) study, women from divorced families were found to be more vocal about their unmet expectations regarding emotional involvement of fathers.

There is inconsistent evidence about the gender effect on father-child contact frequency. While some findings supported less father-daughter contact after divorce compared to frequency of father-son contact (Furstenberg, 1988), another study concluded no gender difference in the amount of father-child interaction (Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). King (2002) and Hakvoort et al. (2011) revealed that the relationships between non-residential fathers and daughters are more negatively affected compared to dynamics between non-residential fathers and sons. The frequency and duration of visitation of non-residential fathers with their sons was found to be higher (Hakvoort et al., 2011). Moreover, Lee (2019) found that divorced fathers have better relationships with their sons compared to their daughters during adolescence.

In the study by Solomon and George (1999), divorced fathers reported that frequent contact is a key to create a bond with their young children and regular contact predicted secure father-child attachment for divorced fathers. Frequency of father-child contact increased perceived affective quality of fathering (Williams & Finley, 1997). The more frequently fathers and children spend time together the more pleasant relationship they have (Hofferth et al., 2010; Washington & Hans, 2013), which results in easier adjustment process for children after divorce (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Seltzer and Bianchi (1988) proposed that when there is more than one sibling living together, the number of special days, such as birthdays, increase and fathers may feel more responsible due to presence of multiple children. For that reason, fathers with multiple children may tend to remain in contact with their children more, especially if siblings live together. Apart from that, fathers' emotional stability (Kruk, 1991) and relatives' encouragement to remain in parental involvement (Tallman et al., 1993) were found to be some

other predictors that direct the course of paternal involvement after divorce. Fine et al. (1983) revealed that good marital relationship, healthy father-child relationships and family dynamics before parental divorce and better socioeconomic conditions serve as protective factors for the course of father-child relationship after divorce.

As mentioned above, father visitation and financial support are the main parts of the fathers' involvement, which affects children's well-being (King, 1994). While the former helps fathers to sustain the relationships with their children and have a sense of parental authority, later one improves quality of children's lives. However, the nature of a paternal engagement was a better determinant for father-child relationship quality compared to the frequency of father-child interaction (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Waller, 2012). The lower interparental conflict and effective parenthood of fathers positively affect the quality of father-child interaction (Hawkins et al., 2007) and helped fathers to contribute social and emotional development of children (King & Sobolewski, 2006). It also predicts better behavioural outcomes in children and reduces children's vulnerability to externalizing and internalizing problems (Simons, et al., 1994). Moreover, increase in father-child contact is related to higher financial support provided by fathers for their children (Graham & Beller, 2002, as cited in Waller, 2012). Fathers' financial support after divorce was found to be influential in the quality of children's education (King, 1994) and academic performance (Argys et al. 1998). Their support helps children to adjust to parental divorce better (McLanahan et al., 1994, as cited in Hawkins et al., 2007) and perceived emotional involvement of fathers increases (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2008). The research didn't show a greater link between fathers' financial assistance and children's well-being (Hawkins et al., 2007); however, it is considered as an important aspect of father involvement due to its connection with the father-child relationship quality (Carlson et al., 2017).

### **1.2.3. The Effect of Mothers' Beliefs on Father-Child Relationship After Parental Divorce**

Research showed that the functioning of relationships among the family members (father-mother, father-child, and mother-child) influences one another's dynamic and quality (King, 2006). The nature of father-child relationship is influenced by the nature of father-mother relationship (Yu et al., 2010). Moreover, infrequency of father-child contact negatively affects both father-child attachment quality and also a mother-child relationship (White et al., 1985). Morrison et al. (2017) observed that many children from divorced families are much closer to one of their parents and their interaction is insincere with the other one. Considering all these findings, it can be suggested that the negative effects of parental divorce on a parent-child relationship may be acknowledged as a latent reason of the association between parental divorce and children's romantic relationship qualities (Lee, 2018).

Mothers may moderate the relationship between fathers and children (Arendell, 1992; Dudley, 1991). Moreover, the more mothers have contact with fathers to share about their children, the more likely that children have secure attachment with their fathers, which indicates that mothers may play an important role in shaping father-child relationships especially in early years (Solomon & George, 1999). Mothers' positive beliefs about fathers' parenting skills and their encouraging attitude towards father-child contact increase father involvement and improve father-child relationships (Arendell, 1992). Solomon and George (1999) investigated the effect of father visitation frequency and mothers' parental sensitivity on children's attachment among divorced families. They found that mothers who are hostile towards their ex-spouses due to relational conflict feel inadequate to calm their children when children are distressed. These mothers also feel unwilling to plan father-child interactions (Frank, 2007; Solomon & George, 1999). Whereas parental conflict has been found to be an important factor affecting father-child attachment, it has been found to have less effect mother-child attachment (Belsky et al., 1984; Belsky, 1996). That mothers' beliefs about fathers and their caring skills and their interference in father-child interaction would be an

explanation for this finding (Brown, 2018).

Gardner (1992) proposed parental alienation syndrome to explain children's experiences of being estranged by one of their parent from the other one. Parental alienation syndrome is generally caused by high interparental conflict due to custody dispute or visitation litigation and alienation is generally triggered by mothers' behaviors. Baker (2006) conducted a qualitative study with adult children of divorce who experienced parental alienation when they were children. According to participants' retrospective reports, alienated parents behaved to strengthen alienation by not engaging in their lives and giving inadequate effort to keep in touch with them. Bernet et al. (2018) suggested that children who were alienated from their parents did not show ambivalent feelings regarding their parents and hold extreme negative thoughts for one parent and extreme positive thoughts for another. They might have used splitting to tolerate their overwhelming emotions towards their parents during separation. On the other hand, children who were neglected by their parents had higher negative opinions about less preferred parents but they were not totally against their parents due to their hope to be loved by them. In some studies, parental alienation syndrome was criticized by being a simplistic explanation of children's rejection of parents as multiple factors impacted their perceptions and attitudes (Johnston & Kelly, 2004; Meier, 2009; Walker et al., 2004). Researchers suggested that a parent's strong negative attitude is not the only reason that leads to parental alienation but that abuse, neglect, violence, and abandonment are other factors that arise negative strong beliefs in children (Johnston & Kelly, 2004; Meier, 2009). Moreover, children may develop sympathy for residential parents and tend to be loyal to them to protect their relationship (Baker, 2006). For instance, Fine et al. (1983) suggested that as daughters and residential single mothers share more time together, daughters like to be closer to their mothers and feel appreciation for their mothers' effort. For that reason, it should be acknowledged that parental alienation has a continuum and to differentiate parental alienation from children's justifiable rejection of a parent, family dynamics and family background should be understood in detail (Bernet et al., 2018).

Post-divorce father-daughter relationships may be more sensitive to emotional damages compared to post-divorce father-son relationships (Hetherington & Elmore, 2004; Nielsen, 2011). There are some explanations behind this dynamic mentioned in various studies. For example, fathers may struggle to find common interests to share with their daughters (Haaz et al., 2014). Frank (2007) claimed that compared to sons, daughters attach more importance to the negative effect of marital conflicts on their mothers. They may identify themselves with their mothers, which makes them feel ungrateful and unfaithful to their mothers when they pursue their close relationship with their fathers (Cooney, 1994). Nielson (2011) claimed that when mothers provide negative information about fathers, father-daughter relationship is impaired and daughters may side with their mothers (Koerner et al., 2000). On the other hand, fathers may feel hostile towards their daughters, as their daughters remind them of their ex-wives due to their gender and their closeness to their mothers (Frank, 2007). Thus, the hostility between parents may have a stronger influence on daughters' perception of their fathers and father-daughter relationship compared to sons.

### **1.3. THE EFFECT OF FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP ON DAUGHTERS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

The quality of father-child relationship predicts children's sense of security as well as level of satisfaction and intimacy in their romantic relationships (Baggett et al., 2015; Haaz et al., 2014). Daughters may carry the adversities in their relationship with their fathers into their romantic relationships (Endres, 1997). Poor father-daughter relationship predicts negative romantic relationship qualities regardless of the marital status of parents (van Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Findings have demonstrated that daughters who are not satisfied with their relationship with their fathers tend to have unpleasant romantic relationships (Leonard, 1982). Deficiency in daughters' positive shared moments with their fathers and negative recollections of them may make daughters more concerned about approaching men and seeking closeness (Haaz et al., 2014). Moore (2016) proposed that daughters'

feeling of detachment from their fathers may have a negative influence on their potential for maintaining long-term romantic relationships.

Healthy father-daughter relationship could be an important protective factor for children in terms of the quality of their romantic relationship (Haaz et al., 2014). When the interaction between daughters and fathers includes emotional sharing and joy, daughters report more satisfaction (Punyanunt-Carter, 2005), which predicts secure father-daughter relationships (Punyanunt-Carter, 2007). Supportive and caring father-daughter relationship encourages daughters to perceive other men in a more optimistic way, which makes them feel comfortable to approach people of the opposite sex (Haaz et al., 2014). Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) also found that coping strategies adolescents and their fathers use to deal with their problems, determine adolescents' problem solving approaches in their own romantic relationships. Strong father-daughter relationship helps daughters to better cope with relational problems and they tend to be more satisfied in their romantic relationships (Freeman & Almond, 2010).

Psychological security and protection help children to accept and trust themselves (Bowlby, 1985) and to feel secure in their later relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Fathers create a model for (heterosexual) romantic relationships for their daughters with their availability and attention (Moore, 2016). Daughters begin to conceptualize how a romantic relationship should be (DeLPriore & Hill, 2013; Moore, 2016). Moreover, the nature of father-daughter relationship influences the development of sense of self as a woman (Guardia et al., 2014). Daughters' self-esteem is developed in the dyadic relationship with their fathers, which impacts their beliefs about themselves as partners in romantic relationship (Biller & Kimpton, 1997). The quality of father-daughter relationship also shapes the daughter's view of men (Moore, 2016). How daughters perceive their fathers shapes their expectation from their romantic partners (Rostad et. al., 2014). For example, when daughters describe their fathers as loving and trustworthy, they also seek these qualities while choosing partners. On the other hand, daughters of absent fathers do not perceive their fathers' support which may lead to adverse consequences in relationship with self and others (Moore, 2016). In Moore's (2016)

study women who grew up without their fathers stated that they wish they could have learned more about romantic relationships from their fathers.

Lopez and Corona (2012) suggested that daughters with absent fathers may engage in risky sexual behaviours to strengthen their self-esteem and compensate their feeling of rejection. Jackson (2010) who interviewed seven women whose fathers were absent when they grew up found that while they did not hesitate to disclose their needs and emotions towards their partners, they still preferred to stay in unhealthy romantic relationships for a long time. Christiani (2003) suggested that women who experienced father absence may remain in longer romantic relationships, but not necessarily of high quality. He also claimed that women who experienced father absence are inclined to attach anxiously in their romantic relationships. Brown (2018) also revealed that women who grew up without their fathers showed preference towards emotionally unavailable or 'fatherly' partners as these patterns are familiar to them. Research indicated that daughters of absent fathers struggle with building and pursuing romantic relationships (Guardia et al., 2014). Some studies proposed that women who grew up without their fathers tend to break up with their partners to protect themselves from being abandoned (Aquilino, 1996; Krohn & Bogan, 2001). On the other hand, Calvin (1993) suggested these women may stick to their relationship more, reinforced by the same concern. Moreover, Scheffler and Naus (1999) claimed that women with absent fathers try to protect themselves from being abandoned by avoiding intimacy in their romantic relationships and many of them do not overcome their fears of being left. Moreover, these women reported that they felt insecure about themselves and gave too much in relationships. Women who grew up without their fathers stated that absence of their fathers created a sense of ambiguity, and for some, guilt (Brown, 2018). Decreased interaction with the father may lead to insecurity and sense of abandonment and create the tendency to be clingier and demanding from their partner to avoid repeating the same dynamic they experienced with their fathers (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010; Mullet & Stolberg, 2002).

## **1.4. ATTACHMENT**

### **1.4.1. Attachment in Childhood**

Attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby (1969), is a well-known psychological theory that suggests that early relationships with caregivers serve a template for social relationships. Attachment theory is commonly used to explore and explain individual's early relationship dynamics with their caregivers and the reflection of these relationships on adulthood (Frazier & Cowan, 2020). Ainsworth et al. (1978) focused on the infant's beliefs about the caregiver's availability and sensitivity while explaining attachment styles. Ainsworth et al. (1978) designed the Strange Situation procedure to observe children's attachment related reactions. Various observations of the separation between infants and mothers showed that infants react to pre- and post-separation in different ways. Three attachment types were introduced by Ainsworth et al. (1978) depending on the findings. These attachment styles were named secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. Securely attached children become uncomfortable during separation and they are easily soothed by their mothers during reunion. They can continue to explore the room easily. Children who have anxious/ambivalent attachment style become irritated and stressed when their mother leaves the room. They do not welcome stranger's emotional care. During reunion, they cannot calm down easily and they prefer to stay close to their mothers instead of exploring the environment. On the other hand, children who show avoidant attachment style are not affected by separation and do not show closeness during reunion. Their focus is mainly on the toys and the room.

Attachment system is established in relationships with attachment figures and internalized as an internal working model that determines attitudes and beliefs about the self, others, and relationships throughout life (Bowlby, 1969). Internal working models are shaped by the degree of parental responsiveness to children's attachment related demands (Bowlby, 1973). Main et al. (1985) suggested that internal working models impacts individuals' reactions, behaviours, emotional and cognitive processes such as attention and memory. Moreover, internal working

models determine individual's perception about self and others not only in early relationships but also in romantic relationships (Brennan & Shaver, 1994). When the parent is warm, holding, involved, and provides a secure space to child to explore the environment, the parent-child relationship becomes well-established, which leads to a child having secure attachment. Securely attached children have more positive beliefs about their parents and they can take emotional support from others while they are upset or stressed (Fitton, 2012). They also go through adolescence smoothly and they do not avoid conflict, exploration and developing individuation (Steele et al., 2015). While inconsistent care or lack of emotional responsiveness to attachment needs predicts anxious/ambivalent attachment, neglect and rejection predicts avoidant attachment style (Fitton, 2012). Anxious attachment style is demonstrated when a person has lower self-esteem and higher positive beliefs for others. On the other hand, positive concept of self and negative concept of others is related to an avoidant attachment style.

Further studies have supported fathers' equal impact on development of children's attachment styles considering infants' post-separation reactions (Lamb, 1977). Kotelchuk (1972, as cited in Lamb, 1977) found that infants reacted negatively when their fathers left and welcomed them when they come back as they did with their mothers. According to Lamb's (1976a, 1976b) findings, while infants tend to prefer their mothers as safe haven during 12 to 18 months, this preference becomes blurry at the age of 21 months. Children start to explore the environment after they feel secure; thus, socializing comes after the establishment of attachment (Bernier & Miljkovitch, 2009). Mothers tend to be more involved in their children's early times compared to the fathers (Russell & Russell, 1987). Fathers' roles increase in time and their effect on their children's lives become apparent as their children get older (Roggman et al., 2002). Involvement and emotional availability of fathers predicts closeness in father-child relationship which increases the chance of having secure father-child attachment (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Several studies have supported and compared the effect of mother-child and father-child relationships on children's romantic relationship qualities (Dalton et al. 2006; King 2002; Walper & Wendt, 2015). Seiffge-Krenke et al. (2010) showed that while

mother-child relationship could be connected to the degree of intimacy in children's romantic relationships, father-child relationship might be related to children's anxious attitudes and behaviours in their relationship during adolescence.

#### **1.4.2. Attachment and Parental Divorce**

Attachment continuity has been investigated in various studies, and findings support the connection between early attachment experiences and adult romantic relationships (Erickson et al., 1985; Main et al., 1985; Sroufe, 1983). However, children's attachment styles can be impacted by the alteration in family structure (Sroufe, 1988, as cited in Hazelton et al., 1998). Bowlby (1969) considered attachment styles as dynamic entities that could change as individuals adjust to new experiences and life events. According to the findings, quality of parent-child interaction reflects attachment security, thus, a change in caregiving practices and family conditions affect its course (Holmes, 1993). Various studies showed that any disruption or potentially traumatic experiences such as divorce may affect children's attachment style negatively by increasing the possibility of developing insecure attachment (Beckwith et al., 1999; Mickelson et al., 1997). Waters et al. (2000) longitudinal study showed that many children with secure attachment style, who experienced negative life events such as parental divorce, parental loss, abuse, parental psychological disorder or physical illness, show insecure attachment patterns when they reach adulthood.

Hetherington (2003) claimed that the parent-child attachment is disrupted due to parental conflict and divorce. Predictable emotional availability of parents and being a trustworthy support figure for a child are important aspects of secure attachment (Altenhofen et al., 2010). When parents try to adopt a new family structure, they could be occupied with their own concerns about caring for their children alone, which leads to difficulty in focusing on the quality of parent-child interaction. Parental divorce triggers children's attachment system (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Decreased interaction with a parent after divorce may create a feeling of loss, which activates attachment distress (Altenhofen et al., 2010). Due to

a decline in perceived parental availability and responsiveness, children may cope with their emotional struggles by themselves which result in internalizing and externalizing problems (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Internal working models could be reshaped in line with these experiences. Parenting style, contact frequency with a non-residential parent and children's age are some of the factors that impact children's attachment formation after parental divorce (Feeney & Monin, 2008).

As early attachment predicts later relationship dynamics, disruptions on attachment are reflected in adult relationships as relational problems (Altenhofen et al., 2010). Studies find that children from divorced families tend to show insecure attachment styles compared to children and adolescents from intact families (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2004; Gloger-Tippelt & Konig, 2007). Lewis et al. (2000) conducted a longitudinal study with children of divorced parents from one year of age to adulthood. They revealed that adolescents from divorced families tend to have insecure attachment in their adulthood. Their adult attachment styles were found to be independent from their early attachment style at one year of age. Other studies have found anxious attachment style to be more likely among children who experienced parental divorce more compared to children in intact families (Feeney & Monin, 2008; Werner-Wilson & Davenport, 2003). On the other hand, in their study with children from divorced families, Gloger-Tippelt and Konig (2007) found a higher number of children with avoidant attachment style compared to children with anxious attachment style. The explanation they provide has to do with the protective side of having avoidant attachment style for both parents and children during divorce. They pointed out heightened conflict and distress as a part of anxious attachment behaviours as opposed to avoidant attachment style. Consequently, children with avoidant attachment style may withdraw their attachment related demands to help parents to focus on making the arrangements for new family dynamics.

Attachment style serves as a bridge between parents' marital relationships and offspring's own romantic relationships (Brennan & Shaver, 1994). This should be considered while interpreting findings that point to higher divorce rate among children who experienced parental divorce compared to children from intact

families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999). However, nature of parental relationships and change in family structure after divorce should be acknowledged as other factors that could impact the person's beliefs and behaviours in romantic relationships (Caspi & Elder, 1988).

### **1.4.3. Attachment in Adulthood**

Social and emotional experiences in childhood are considered to be related with adult love within the scope of attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Children try to arrange the degree of proximity to their parents depending on their attachment style (Bowlby, 1969). Similarly, keeping a balance of closeness is part of adult romantic relationships. Relational dynamics of parent-child relationships and adult romantic relationships resemble each other and adults establish their romantic relationships by using their attachment materials carried from their childhood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987,1994). Hazan et al. (1991, as cited in Fraley & Davis, 1997) proposed that some of the attachment characteristics, such as using the caregiver as a safe haven and seeking physical proximity, are transferred from childhood to adulthood and could reflect on adult relationships. Not parents but peers such as friends and partners are started to be more preferred to satisfy some of the attachment related needs in adulthood. Fraley and Davis (1997) agree that adults tend to maintain proximity with their peers and consider their peers as companions with whom they can share their negative emotions. Another study showed that shared views on closeness and intimacy are important for people while choosing partners (Collins & Read, 1990). Nevertheless, in Collins and Read's (1990) study, participants did not prefer to be with people who have similar concerns about abandonment and rejection. Weiss (1982) claimed that individuals tend to look for partners who match their attachment system's demands, which might be an explanation of Collins and Read's (1990) findings.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized adult romantic attachment styles and their reflections on romantic relationships, based on m attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) attachment style classifications. Shaver

and Hazan (1988) advocated the predictive role of early attachment dynamics for later romantic relationships and suggested that the nature of the relationship between caregivers and children resembles adult relationships in different ways. For example, attachment theory provides a frame for adult love with the help of relational aspects it intends to cover and explain, including various emotions and relational attitudes such as jealousy (Hindy & Schwarz, 1985, as cited in Hazan & Shaver, 1987), being uncomfortable with intimacy (Hatfield, 1984, as cited in Hazan & Shaver, 1987), fluctuations in emotional experiences (Tennov, 1979), sensitivity to others' needs, closeness (Sternberg, 1986), and believing in other people (Dion & Dion, 1985). Moreover, attachment theory is interested in loss and separation which are both related to adult romantic relationships (Shaver & Rubenstein, 1980; Weiss, 1973).

Attachment related anxiety and avoidance are two important aspects of adult attachment (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). One study showed that people who are not afraid intimacy and can rely on others comfortably, have higher self-esteem and can express themselves more easily (Collins & Read, 1990). On the other hand, higher anxiety predicts lower self-esteem and lower self-control. Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that adult children of parents, who were perceived as cold and unpredictably available, have more negative beliefs about themselves and others, and their anxiety scores are higher. Fraley and Shaver (2000) claimed that while attachment related anxiety is related to fear of rejection and abandonment, attachment related avoidance is associated with fear of intimacy in relationships. While high anxiety is related to intense seeking of relational security to compensate insecure internal working models, high avoidance is attributed to avoid closeness as a way of dealing with insecurities (Shaver & Hazan, 1993).

Hazan and Shaver (1987) did not find a correlation between attachment style and the length of time that parent and child lived separated, when they examined individuals' attachment history. However, the highest impact on adult attachment style was found to be the nature of the parent-child and mother-father relationships. Attachment security is positively related to intimacy and negatively

related to jealousy in relationships (Fitton, 2012). Unsurprisingly, individuals with secure relationships have satisfying romantic relationships. Securely attached individuals have higher self-worth and they believe that they are worthy of love (Fitton, 2012). They are sensitive to their partners' needs and they do not have difficulty in trusting their partners (Mikulincer, 2006). Individuals who have secure attachment report that their parents were more sensitive and more responsive in their childhood compared to people who have anxious and avoidant attachment styles (Collins and Read, 1990). They also have less concern of being abandoned and rejected. Securely attached individuals are more loving and peaceful partners and better capable of dealing with negative situations in their relationships (Simons et al. 2014). Moreover, they believe that their partners are loving, warm, caring, and trustworthy people whom they can rely on (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

While securely attached people describe their romantic relationships as warm, reliable, and pleasant, people with anxious/ambivalent attachment style mention emotional fluctuations, feeling of insecurity and intense jealousy, and preoccupation with their romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). People with avoidant attachment style emphasize their fear of being emotionally close to others, avoiding intimacy, and negative romantic expectations while portraying their experiences in romantic relationships. Moreover, anxiously attached people are vigilant to both positive and negative sides of their romantic relationships, while embracing positive sides of romantic relationships is difficult for people with avoidant attachment style (Dandurand et al., 2003). Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that while people with secure attachment style reported that there might be ups and downs in their love during relationships, the love they feel remains; people with avoidant attachment claimed that finding 'the one' and falling in love is quite impossible and love does not persist generally. On the other hand, people with anxious/ambivalent attachment said that while falling in love is easy for them, it is hard to find someone who they feel will truly love them; moreover, they agreed with securely attached people and stated that love continues with its ups and downs. Studies showed that anxiously/ambivalently attached adults develop strong feelings for others quickly at short intervals (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and separate and

reunite with their partners often (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Moreover, their attachment related attitudes and behaviours are activated when they split up with a person with whom they are not in an exclusive romantic relationship (Fraley et al., 1995, as cited in Fraley & Davis, 1997), and relational problems and dating abuse may make them feel more intimate with their partners (Morgan & Pietromonaco, 1995).

### **1.5. THE PRESENT STUDY**

Besides children's emotional and social development, their relationships with their parents could be disrupted due to parental divorce (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). In line with the findings, studies point out the effect of parental divorce on children's attachment and its reflection on children's future relationships (Altenhofen et al., 2010; Sirvanli-Ozen, 2004). As opposed to mother-child interaction, father-child contact tends to decline after parental divorce, and many children even lose connection with their fathers (Amato & Keith, 1991). Studies show that daughters' attributions related to romantic relationships and their experiences with their partners are impacted by the decline in post-divorce father-daughter interaction (Jackson, 2010; Lopez & Corona, 2012). Majority of the studies were quantitative examinations of the connection between the quality of father-daughter relationship and adult daughters' romantic relationships. However, how adult daughters give meaning to their retrospective experiences of growing up apart from their fathers and its relation to their romantic relationships have not yet been investigated qualitatively especially in the Turkish context.

According to the data taken from State Statistics Institute, 135.022 couples divorced and for 124.742 children, custody decisions were made in Turkey in 2020 (TUIK, 2021). Mothers received custody of 75.8% of children and 24.2% of children's custody were given to fathers. Each year the number of children who are affected from parental divorce increase in Turkey (TUIK, 2021). Many children adjust to a new family environment and each parent-child dyad is impacted during both pre- and post-divorce period. The effects of parental divorce on different

aspects of children's lives were studied by several researchers as mentioned previously. However, the effects of post-divorce separation from father on children's later romantic relationships and qualitative aspects of children's experiences are still under investigated.

The present study aims to address adult daughters' perceived post-divorce mother-daughter and father-daughter relationship dynamics as both children and adults, their attributions and experiences related to parental divorce, the experience of growing up apart from their fathers and its reflections on their romantic relationships. Considering the gaps in the literature, results of the study aim to provide a detailed perspective on the unique experiences of a group of adult women in Turkey who grew up apart from their fathers due to parental divorce. Following research questions are addressed in the present study:

- a. What is the lived experience of women who grew up apart from their fathers and how do they make sense of their experience as children and as adults?
- b. How do women who grew up apart from their fathers experience their romantic relationships?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHOD**

#### **2.1. PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING METHOD**

Snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants. Following the approval of İstanbul Bilgi University Ethics Board Committee, a flyer was shared in the primary investigator's social network. Volunteer individuals contacted the primary investigator through telephone or e-mail address on the flyer. The inclusion criteria were being a heterosexual woman between the ages of 22 and 35, experiencing parental divorce between birth and the age of five years, growing up apart from fathers, and being in a romantic relationship at least for three months. The appointments for interviews were arranged with volunteers who met eligibility criteria.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were specified in consideration of related literature. The age of children at the time of parental divorce is important as Allison and Furstenberg (1989) claimed. Their study showed that the first five years of life is critical for a child and experiencing parental divorce at very young age makes children most vulnerable to be affected negatively. These findings are consistent with the nature of attachment theory as attachment is thought to be mainly developed during the first few years of life (Bowlby, 1969). Almost complete dependency on parents, immaturity of coping strategies with traumatic experiences and possible subsequent negative events following parental divorce are also considered, while explaining the significance of the first five-year period (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989). To investigate the effect of growing up apart from their fathers on adult daughters' lives and understand the perspectives of adult daughters, the amount of father-daughter contact was also an exclusion criterion. Women who had not contacted with their fathers while growing up were excluded as nature of the father-daughter contact and how fathers present themselves in their daughters' lives are also investigated in the present study. To enhance homogeneity of participants' characteristics, women who identified themselves heterosexual

were included. Participants who have romantic relationships that have been lasting at least 3 months were involved in the present study in the light of previous studies to gain better understanding about participants' relational patterns (Fletcher, et al., 2000; Lujansky & Mikula, 1983). Before interviewing participants, a pilot interview was done to finalize the structure of the interview.

## **2.2. INSTRUMENTS**

Twenty-four open-ended interview questions were directed to participants. The primary investigator aimed to understand participants' perception towards parental divorce, the course of relationship with their mothers and their fathers, their attribution about the effect of parental divorce and growing up apart from their fathers on their romantic relationships, and certain aspects of their current romantic relationship experiences within the scope of interview questions, which were presented in Appendix C.

Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) was another tool that was used during data collection process. Fraley et al. (2000) developed Experienced in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) as a self-report questionnaire to assess attachment related anxious and avoidant attitudes. 36-item were responded by participants on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Scores were summed for both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance dimensions and average scores represented the scores for each dimension. Sibley and Liu (2004) tested psychometric properties of ECR-R and found cronbach alphas of .94 and .93 for anxiety and avoidance dimensions, respectively.

Selçuk, Günaydın, Sümer, and Uysal (2005) tested the psychometric properties of ECR-R in Turkish sample and adapted the questionnaire for use in Turkish population. They found cronbach alpha values of .86 (for anxiety dimension) and .90 (for avoidance dimension) which represents high degree of internal consistency for ECR-R. In their study, the test-retest reliability coefficients were .82 (for anxiety dimension) and .81 (for avoidance dimension), which means that ECR-R produces stable and consistent results. Karataş et al. (2019) conducted

a recent study with young adults in Turkish population and reported cronbach alphas of .81 (for anxiety) and .85 (for avoidance). Since both internal consistency and reliabilities values were found to be high, ECR-R becomes a recommended and trustworthy measure to study adult attachment related topics (Selçuk et al., 2005).

### **2.3. PROCEDURE**

After receiving approval from the Ethics Board, the study was introduced to volunteer individuals who contacted the primary investigator with an interest in participating in the study. After checking eligibility criteria and taking their approval to participate in the present study, the primary investigator informed participants that she would send a consent form and a demographic form via e-mail before interviews, which could be found in Appendix A and Appendix B. The consent form included a brief explanation about the aim and the significance of the study, confidentiality rules, and the rights of research participants. The primary investigator and participants met on a Google Meet link that the primary investigator had shared via e-mail. After a brief warm up, voice recorder was turned on with the approval of participants. The semi-structured interviews took an hour to one and half hours.

The primary investigator took field notes during the semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded by two separate devices. Audio-records were transcribed by the primary investigator and transcriptions were stored on the encrypted files in the primary investigator's password-protected computer. All files (audio-records, transcripts, the consent forms and the demographic forms, the scales) were kept in the primary investigator's password-protected computer for five years following the approval of thesis.

In the present study, participants' self-reports gained from ECR-R helped the researcher to achieve a deeper understanding regarding participants' attitudes in their romantic relationships. Participants were asked to fill in Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised, which could be found in Appendix D, after the interview. The primary investigator sent ECR-R to participants via e-mail after

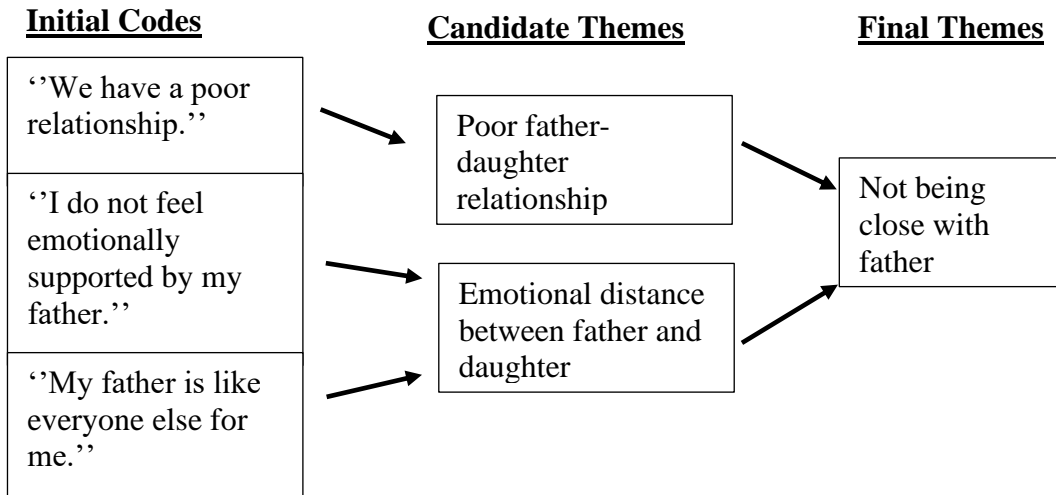
completing each interview.

## **2.4. DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to better understand the lived experience of women who grew up apart from their fathers. Thematic Analysis is a systematic method that helps researchers gain a detailed and organized understanding of participants' unique experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) presented six steps technique for thematic analysis. First, the data was transcribed by the primary investigator. The primary investigator reviewed transcriptions and field notes several times. This process helped the primary investigator to familiarize the data and form an opinion about participants' perception. Secondly, the primary investigator determined a rich number of initial codes to cover several aspects of the participants' experiences. After the primary investigator reviewed and finalized initial codes, these codes were combined into potential themes. Then, the primary investigator decided which extracts would be used to present each theme. The primary investigator integrated all related data under appropriate themes to specify and define them by benefitting from visual maps. The primary investigator checked compatibility of extracts and themes to entire data set and finalize the process by relating analysis with literature and research questions. The primary investigator reviewed extracts and field notes not to miss any data that is part of final themes. Final themes were analyzed and results were presented. In the coding process, MAXQDA Software program was utilized. From the early stages of coding to the formation of final themes, interpretations were discussed and revisited with thesis advisor, when required. Final themes were shared with participants via e-mail to conduct member checking. None of the participants described a desire to change any of the themes. To illustrate how initial codes were formed into themes, Figure 2.1 presented below.

**Figure 2.1**

*An Illustration of The Development of Initial Themes*



## **2.5. THE PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR’S PERSPECTIVE**

I do not know how many times I was about to change my thesis subject. Each time, my inner voice reassured me about my decision. I am one of the women who grew up apart from their fathers. My story is quite different from the beloved participants who shared their incredible and unique experiences with me. I was brought up by a single mother as I lost my father when I was a little child. I was always curious about how my experience is reflected in my personality and my romantic relationships. My individual therapy and my chosen profession helped me to become more aware of my experiences.

In the beginning, I was afraid of being overwhelmed by the whole research process. Despite the difficulty of conducting a study, the subject was very familiar to me. During conducting the literature review, I had a chance to get to know many researchers who have addressed the issue I was curious about. Even though we did not know each other personally, all researchers unintentionally guided me to approach my thesis with professionalism. Moreover, my thesis advisor, Hale Bolak Boratav, encouraged me to remain focused on my research and gave constructive criticisms to improve my study the whole time.

Throughout each interview, I felt like I was exactly where I was meant to be and felt glad to be conducting this study. Each woman made me reevaluate my experience and realize the certain needs of daughters that I was not aware of before. Every tear and nervous laugh was familiar to me, despite the differences in our experiences. Due to my therapeutic experiences and acknowledgment of my motives to select this certain topic to research, I was aware of my feelings through the study; thus, it was not a struggle to regulate my emotions while conducting the interviews. As a psychotherapist, these women's perspectives on their childhood memories and developmental needs were insightful and helped me to improve my clinical judgment.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

This section handles the results of the study including demographic characteristics of participants, the findings from Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) and the themes emerged in participants' accounts.

#### 3.1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Ten women participated in the present study. The age of participants varied between 23 and 27. Educational level of participants was high. The length of their romantic relationships varied between 3 months to 9 years. Two participants were currently married. None of the participants had children. Sequential numbers were assigned to participants to maintain participant confidentiality. Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

ID	Age	Siblings	The Age at Parental Divorce	The Duration of Romantic Relationship	Occupation	The Age during the last interaction with father	The frequency of face to face interaction with father
P1	26	One step-brother (age: 23)	1 y.o.	3 mos	Kindergarten teacher	26	Once in a year
P2	23	One step-brother (age: 18)	3 y.o.	6 mos	University student	22	Once in a year
P3	27	One brother (age: 39)	2 y.o.	5 yr	Banking	26	Few times in a year
P4	23	Only child	4 y.o.	9 mos	University student	23	Not seeing father currently
P5	25	One step-brother (age: 21)	2 m.o.	9 yr	Doctor	23	Once in couple years
P6	25	Two step-sisters (age: 16, 14), Two step-brothers (age:12, 12)	1 y.o.	5.5 yr	Special education teacher	18	Not seeing father currently

P7	27	One brother (age: 29) One step-sister (age: 20)	8 m.o.	2.5 yr	High school teacher	27	Few times in a year
P8	25	Two brothers (age: 17, 30)	5 y.o.	1 yr 10 mos	Lawyer	25	Once in couple years
P9	25	Two sisters (age: 36, 40), One step-brother (age:25)	2.5 y.o.	8.5 mos	Pilot	19	Not seeing father currently
P10	23	One step-sister (age: 18)	2.5 m.o.	3 yr	Master student	22	Not seeing father currently

### **3.2. THE FINDINGS FROM EXPERIENCES IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS-REVISED (ECR-R)**

Participants responded to 36 items in Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R). While 18 of 36 Likert type items (e.g. “I’m afraid that I will lose my partner’s love.”, “I worry that romantic partners won’t care about me as much as I care about them.”) represents attachment anxiety scores, other half of the items (e.g., “I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.”, “I do not feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.”) constitutes attachment avoidance scores. Because the variations in attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were considered continuous, there were not suggested cutoff points for ECR-R in previous studies (Sibley et al., 2005). For each attachment dimension, average scores were calculated and descriptive statistics were presented in Table 3.2. Mean score for attachment anxiety was 3.46 and mean score for attachment avoidance was found to be 2.72. Standard deviation among participants’ scores for each dimension was 0.75. For anxiety dimension, 5.28 was the highest score and 2.56 was the lowest score among participants. For avoidance dimension, 3.98 was the highest score and 1.61 was the lowest score. For each dimension, four participants’ scores were higher than average scores. However, only two of these participants’ scores were higher than mean scores for both dimensions.

**Table 3.2**

*Descriptive Statistics for Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R)*

Dimension	Anxiety	Avodiance
Mean	3.46	2.72
Highest score	5.28	3.98
Lowest score	2.56	1.61
Standart deviation	0.75	0.75

As sample size of the research was narrow, participants' scores were elaborated within the context of participants' narratives retrieved from interviews. It was observed that among four participants with the highest scores for anxiety dimension, three of them reported highest interparental conflict while describing pre- and post-divorce processes. Their contact frequency with their fathers were lower than other participants and interaction avodiance in father-daughter relationship was high among these participants. Three of these participants were not seeing their fathers currently. Moreover, participants who had described their needs to be loved by their partners constantly and who had tendency to be in romantic relationships to avoid loneliness reported highest anxiety scores. It was surprising that even though only one participant (P10) identified herself as an avoidant person in romantic relationships during interview, her score for avoidance dimension was lower than average score of the group. Her self-evaluation regarding her attitudes in romantic relationships varied in unstructured narrative and in a structured scale.

### **3.3. THEMES**

This part presents the results of the research based on the semi-structured interviews. The content was analysed to identify the salient experiences among ten participants' narratives. The four major categories of data were: father-daughter

relationship, mother-daughter relationship, parental divorce and separation from father, and experience of romantic relationship. The analysis revealed some major themes regarding participants' experience of growing up apart from their fathers and their experiences' reflection on their romantic relationships.

### **3.3.1. FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP**

Participants described various aspects of father-daughter relationship while sharing their experiences of growing up apart from their fathers. Father-daughter relationship was the most salient category that was discussed by all participants. As seen in participants' accounts, father-daughter relationship was elaborated with mostly negative attributions. Three comprehensive sub-categories emerged: 1) closeness in father-daughter relationship, 2) communication in father-daughter relationship, 3) expectations from the father.

#### **3.3.1.1. Closeness in Father-Daughter Relationship**

Closeness in father-daughter relationship was the most salient sub-category in the participants' narratives. This sub-category presented participants' perceived closeness to their fathers with various aspects of their relational dynamics. Participants mostly made negative attributions about the father-daughter relationship and shared adverse memories. Four themes emerged in line with participants' statements: 1) not being close with the father, 2) lack of sincerity in father-daughter relationship, 3) rejecting father and being rejected by father, 4) not longing for the father.

##### **3.3.1.1.1. Not Being Close with the Father**

All the participants mentioned that they were not close to their fathers. Majority of participants mentioned that they felt emotionally distant from their fathers since the beginning of their relationships. They mostly associated their

interactions with their fathers with negative emotions such as boredom, worry, and rage. It was observed that emotional distance affected participants' willingness to interact with their fathers negatively. They perceived father-daughter interaction as an obligation instead of a joyful shared activity.

*I sometimes read my diaries. I have written that " Spending time with him was not as nice as waiting for him." My father is a teacher; however, unfortunately he did not have an idea about raising a child. He approached me very wrong. (P4)*

Three participants mentioned that they were scared about being kidnapped by their fathers, when they were children. They explained that they felt worried and unsafe. As children, they had shared their fears with their mothers and changed their roads while going to school to protect themselves.

*He was like a stranger for me. I remember that when I was in kindergarten, my mother told me that my father wanted to see me and I started to cry. I had stomach ache when the meeting day was getting close, because he was a stranger whom I did not share anything and did not know anything about. I always felt closer to women than men. It was another stress factor for me that he was a man. It was not pleasing to wait him to come, I was worried. There was a soap opera in which a man kidnapped his children after he divorced. I was afraid that I was being kidnapped by my father too. (P10)*

According to the participants, as they have had poor father-daughter relationship for a long time, it became easier and inevitable that the bond between them weakened and broke over time. Moreover, one participant mentioned that the quality of father-daughter relationship was not related to the frequency of contact. Another participant shared that when her need for her father's financial help ceased, her connection with him got weaker as she lost the reason to interact with him.

*Even though I have good memories with my father, there were wounds he opened inside me that could not heal. He has never been a man, whom I could have relied on unconditionally. Regardless of shared memories and frequent contact, our relationship was very weak and ruptured. That's why our relationship fell apart easily. (P6)*

*My relationship with my father... Since I do not ask financial aid from him anymore, he is just a man whom I sometimes get in contact with and call father. (P7)*

Some participants pointed the burden of feeling negative emotions towards their fathers. It was notable that they had attempts to create shared moments with their fathers to feel closer.

*He is a man whom I see once a year. I had difficulty in calling him father and it is still difficult for me. I'm afraid of him and I'm getting bored when I'm with him. It is very uncomfortable to feel this way, because he really wants to see me. (P5)*

*Couple years ago, he had a heart attack. I offered him to move near me to being able to help him. I told him that I did not feel like having a father and fatherhood is an empty concept for me. If he was near to me, maybe I started to feel something to him. I did not feel anything to him and he was like everyone else. He said I was right to feel this way and he did not put enough effort for me. (P8)*

Nearly all participants emphasized that they did not have a sense of knowing their fathers due to lack of intimate sharing and inconsistent and rare contact. They mostly used the word “stranger” to describe their fathers. During the interviews, they had difficulty finding three adjectives to describe their fathers. Some participants mentioned that they did not know much about their fathers' lives. They

became informed about the changes such as fathers' new marriage by relatives or formal documents.

*I do not know much about him actually. When I describe my mother, I am thinking which adjectives I should pick, but when I describe him I am thinking what kind of person he is as I know little about him. ... I do not know much about him. I could talk about him for less than five minutes, and then I become run out of information. (P10)*

*As we do not see each other frequently I could not learn about him. Our interaction consisted of a couple phone calls and few meetings. As I mentioned before, there is no relationship or interaction. (P9)*

The mutual sense of not knowing was revealed by participants. They commented about their fathers' perceptions of themselves and claimed that their fathers did not have enough knowledge and curiosity about their lives either.

*I think he perceived me as a stranger also, because I was a child whom he saw once in five years. We could not have shared many things. For that reason, I tried to learn something about him during our interactions a few years ago. However, he does not ask me what I like or what I think. I always ask him and learn something about him then I described my opinions and experiences. I carry the conversation. (P10)*

*I remember that he did not know my grade at school when I was a child. (P7)*

*Since my father was not with me when I grew up, he did not know me either. He tried to restrict me which my mother would never do, as she knew that I would be furious. (P3)*

### 3.3.1.1.2. Lack of Sincerity in Father-Daughter Relationship

Nine participants described their relationships with their fathers as being fake and their relationship dynamic as lacking sincerity and honesty. Additionally, while almost all participants described their fathers with negative adjectives, more than half of them chose the words “liar” and “hypocritical” to describe their fathers.

*Our relationship is still insincere. I could never say ‘my dear father’ to him but I respect his existence. In the past, I felt like I was obligated to express love to him but I do not feel this way anymore. That’s why I do not become nervous during our meetings. (P1)*

*He was a stranger in the past. After a while we got closer, but we could never be sincere with each other. We share something but we are not sincere. I do not call him when something happens. I could not make sincere and intimate sharing with him. (P2)*

For some of the participants, their father’s words of love were not meaningful and these words did not make them feel happy or being loved. It was observed that fathers’ expressions of positive emotions and appreciation did not help to improve the father-daughter relationship. One participant elaborated that one of the reasons that she perceived father-daughter relationship as fake was lack of her father’s effort to be present in her life.

*I have never felt anything towards him, I will not lie. I have never felt very excited and happy when I went to see my father. Actually, I have not hidden joy I felt, I really have not felt anything. At times, as I became more aware of everything, it even became a stress factor for me. I did not really want to see him, because when he said “my dear daughter” to me, it seemed so fake especially during adolescents. Why were not you be with me if I was your dear daughter? I thought it and it made me furious. During my childhood,*

*our interaction was standard. I was not very happy. At times, the gift he gave me made me happier, because he is not a familiar person I have an emotional bond with. (P1)*

*It is a fake relationship. If I behave nice to him, it would be a lie, because I am not close to him. He presents himself to other people as a good father but I know and everybody knows that he is not a good father and he is not a good husband. Fake relationship is being created. I could not change my father or I could not divorce him like my mother did. I could not say that I have a new father or I do not have a father but I do not want to be a part of this fake relationship either. I try to stay out of this relationship. I do not pretend as if we are close. (P3)*

*I have not liked the way he talks and behaves. He has an unlikeable and insincere way of talking. I could have understood that, even a child could have understood. To me, his behaviors were insincere and fake. He was becoming happy when he saw my report card. He was giving money and telling me that I was his dear daughter and he was proud of me. It was fake. (P9)*

Pretending to be good to father during childhood was one of the experiences presented by participants. One participant described ambivalent feelings toward her father. She stated that to not lose her father and their relationship, she should have pretended her feelings. However, this experience was confusing for her as a child.

*My mother answers the phone very quickly if someone she loves calls. If she answered the phone by saying "Hello." coldly, I was saying "Oh no!". My father was picking me up and we were touring around. He was asking about my education life. He was hugging me and kissing me. He was kissing me in a way that I do not like at all. To be nice, I was not cleaning my cheeks. By the time, I got out of the car, I was cleaning my cheeks immediately. (P6)*

*I wanted to defend my father as I did not want to be fatherless in my childhood. I faced the reality that my father was a monster but I think I was avoiding confronting it. (P4)*

### **3.3.1.1.3. Rejecting Father and Being Rejected by Father**

Besides the weak emotional bond with fathers and lack of sincerity in father-daughter relationship, nine participants explained that they did not want to get in contact with their fathers and they avoided interacting with their fathers. Moreover, one participant said that she changed her surname as she did not have a surname of a man whom she did not know.

*Even though I do not want my father as a father, I would still like to have another father figure. (P3)*

*When I had a chance to be distant from him and maybe as I became a grown up, I decided that he won't change and I should be distant from him to protect myself. For a long time, during approximately two or two and half years, we did not see each other. I could not remember but it was a long time compared to our usual contact frequency. I was not answering his calls. (P3)*

*I am scared that he will want to contact me or involve my life again. I definitely do not want that. I do not have strength to contact him, even I do not have strength to block the interaction now. Our current relationship style should maintain until death. (P6)*

*He came to my house to stay with me during the pandemic.... We had many fights. I feel very bad when I remember those two months. When travel ban ended, he went back. When he was leaving, he thanked me as I made him*

*live the worst times. I told him that I wanted to thank him for making me feel like this for twenty-three years. He left and we did not contact each other again. That's why I say that I do not have a father now. (P4)*

Seven participants rejected consulting their fathers about romantic relationships. Moreover, they did not find their fathers as a successful partner. This was another reason of participants' reluctance to learn from their fathers. It was observed that any kind of father involvement was intentionally avoided by participants.

*In terms of romantic relationships, I think he shouldn't give advice to anyone. To be honest, I do not think he is happy in his second marriage either. He has been doing something wrong apparently. Maybe, I can ask to him what I shouldn't do. What is your advice about not to do? (P10)*

Four of the participants shared that their fathers rejected them in different ways. They explained that their fathers avoided communicating with them, being involved in their lives, and supporting them financially.

*According to my mother, my father should have paid alimony after divorce. I know that my father said that he wouldn't raise me and be a father for me if he were pay alimony. (P4)*

#### **3.3.1.1.4. Not Longing for the Father**

Most of the participants stated that they did not miss or long for their fathers. The common explanation of shared apathy towards father absence was that participants felt as if their fathers were always absent. They thought that their family has never included a father figure. Moreover, some participants added that other divorced family members and friends from divorced families made them normalize their own experience. The sense of not having a father from the beginning of their

lives was reflected on participants' discourse as a sense of indifference towards their fathers' presence and absence.

*If you do not know something exists, you do not miss it. As I did not grow up with my mother and my father together, I did not long for it. Maybe I missed my father but I did not long for living together, because I have never experienced it. (P5)*

*As I did not know his presence, his absence made me feel nothing. There was only my mother. Our family consisted of two people. I have never thought that "My father would say that..." when something happened. It still does not come to my mind. My mother has always said what should be said. That's why I did not feel his absence. (P2)*

Two participants mentioned that as no relationship was established so far, it was too late to have a father-daughter relationship. To one participant, feeling indifferent about her father was worse than having negative feelings towards him.

*It feels like it was too late to me. Fatherhood is not a concept that I felt... It does not exist. Mother... Father does not exist. To me, there is no concept as a father in my life. I do not feel emptiness, it is worse. It does not exist at all. (P8)*

### **3.3.1.2. Communication in Father-Daughter Relationship**

Participants elaborated on their interaction with their fathers mostly accompanied by negative attributions. Three themes related to communication in father-daughter relationship emerged: 1) varied contact and communication with the father, 2) limited sharing with the father 3) ineffective conflict resolution in father-daughter relationship.

### 3.3.1.2.1. Varied Contact and Communication with the Father

All participants highlighted inconsistent contact frequency with their fathers. While most of the participants stated that they had been seeing their fathers at least once a year during summer holidays in childhood, for some participants, contact was less frequent.

Participants emphasized that contact frequency depends on various variables such as their fathers' schedule, family occasions, the presence or absence of conflict in father-daughter relationship, and unexpected life events (e.g. fathers' sickness or loss of a family member).

*Our relationship frequency has always depended on his schedule. We have been seeing each other when he was available. (P1)*

*We are on good terms for the half of a year and we are on bad terms during the other half. This cycle has been going on for years. For example, I could have used his credit card, so I could have kept getting financial support from him, but the interaction between us was broken, we were not calling each other. I do not know what happened but something happened. I think he had emotional ups and downs. He switched to be a "good father". When he started to play like a good father, we started to see each other again. (P4)*

According to one participant, inconsistency of her father's presence created ambiguity in her life as she could not know how to behave to her father and that uncertainty affected her self-perception negatively.

*As we contact sometimes and we do not interact during other times, I could not decide whether I live my life as I have a father or I do not have a father. If I live like I do not have a father, I should cut off communication with him and he shouldn't exist for me. However, when we start to interact again, I*

*feel like I have a father and I should not disobey him. Maybe this cognitive dissonance causes my low self-esteem. (P4)*

Nearly all participants talked about mutually initiating communication while describing father-daughter interaction. However, more than half of the participants stated that contact frequency has decreased as they grew up, in line with the increase in their awareness about parental divorce, their fathers' negative behaviours, and their reluctance to initiate interaction.

*During my high school years, our contact frequency was similar; maybe we were seeing each other less, but we were calling each other. However, I started to become unwilling to call, which was not like that when I was a child. It was getting worse. (P7)*

*I was seeing my father once a year but as I mentioned before, I did not see him as my hero and I started to realize the mistakes he made about me. (P4)*

### **3.3.1.2.2. Limited Sharing with the Father**

All participants described their sharing with their fathers as limited and superficial. They stated that content of their conversation mostly consisted of academic and work related topics. Almost none of the participants shared emotions with their fathers or sought their fathers for emotional support. One participant explained that she did not feel understood by her father. Moreover, some participants described mutual avoidance of deeper conversations and sharing personal feelings.

*For example, I am a teacher and he asks me if I have a plan for having a master. Anyone can ask me this question. He asks me if I feel good or how I feel, and anyone can ask them too. I do not talk about my existential issues with him. We do not talk about deeper topics. We avoid it. (P1)*

*I do not share intimate things with him. I do not share my relational problems or work related problems with him. I do not think that he could understand and support me. I have not received support from him so far. I talk to him with no details and distantly, as I talk one of my colleagues. "How are you? How is your relationship going?" That's it. It's a kind of a conversation that you can do with anyone. (P4)*

One participant intentionally avoided sharing the topics she thought that her father wouldn't approve, so that she could maintain closeness with him. Her experience represented the difficulty of balancing closeness with her father. She explained that she could share anything with her mother as she knew that she wouldn't lose her mother.

*I always expect to be approved by my father. If I did something he wouldn't approve, I was not sharing it with him, but I was sharing with my mother whether she would approve of it or not. I thought that my mother would accept me whatever happens but I do not think my father does that too. I think, I do not share with him not to lose his closeness. (P4)*

According to one participant's statements, she did not have major conflict with her father as their communication was not deeper enough to have contradictions.

*We talk about daily life. If we talk on the phone right know, we talk about pandemic, quarantine, and work. He does not ask me about my education life either. We just talk about daily life... We have not had conflicts or contradictions so far. Our relationship was never deep enough. (P2)*

### 3.3.1.2.3. Ineffective Conflict Resolution in Father-Daughter Relationship

Most participants were angry with their fathers due to various reasons such as fathers' broken promises, inconsistent contact frequency, negative discourse about their mothers, and their attempts to restrict their lives. Four participants described themselves as vindictive and stated that they did not forget their fathers' faults. More than half of the participants mentioned that they confronted their fathers about negative feelings they had towards them.

*There was a time we could not afford school bus payment. I was humiliated by the school employee. I called my father and told him what happened. I hadn't told my mother. If my mother had heard it, she would have been very angry. My father said that he did not have enough money and he could not do anything about it. This answer made me furious and we had a fight. I did not talk him for a while. It was a very reckless behaviour. He is that kind of a person. He is not thoughtless but he does not give effort to solve problems either. It is a reckless attitude for me. (P8)*

*I was telling my father that I was visiting him once a year for ten days and that he did not spend time with me. We were having fights about it. Moreover, my father is a despot. He pretends to be a democratic or a libertarian person. He criticizes people, but he is an incapable parent. He was trying to impose his beliefs on me with lots of pedagogical mistakes. For that reason, we had fights. When I grew up and he started to have certain expectations from me, we started to fight. I think I was ten years old, when our fights started. (P4)*

Most of the participants had difficulty believing their fathers' words and behaviours. While some participants did not believe their fathers' positive emotion expressions, others thought that their fathers were trying to present themselves as a different person. It was noticeable that participants' common reaction was

avoidance of confronting the fathers about these critics. The reason for avoiding arguing and confronting their fathers was that they did not believe that anything would change or that their problems would be solved.

*We had been constantly arguing but these fights were not constructive. We could not have talked and solved the problems. Those recurrent fights were unsolvable. I stopped to fight with him after five or six years. I accepted that he will not change. I was exhausted because of these fights. The focus of our conversations was not problem solving. (P3)*

*I do not talk about problems with my father, because we are in a place where we cannot solve anything and I also become angry. That's why I do not talk about them. (P7)*

*I was very angry about my parents' marriage when I was in high school. I'm still angry, I become angry when I'm talking about it right now. It is a sensitive topic for me. I have never talked about it with my father, I will not talk about it either. If I talk about it, I cannot look at his face anymore. That's why I ignore it, I do not talk about it. (P8)*

Seven participants explained that they were not able to solve problems with their fathers. Some of them stated that they maintained their relationships with their fathers with mutual ignorance towards the problems in father-daughter relationship and continue their interaction as if nothing happened. Lack of hope and belief regarding the potential change in father-daughter relationship and difficulties in communicating with fathers were the dominant reasons for participants' reluctance and avoidance of taking initiative for problem solving process.

*We do not solve our problems. We prefer not to solve them. I like to talk about the problems in detail. When I have a problem with my mother, my grandmother, my friends or my partner, we talk about it and we solve it. I*

*think he is an avoidant person. When I had a tantrum and I told him that he should have talked to me about the problems, he blocked me. He cut the ways of interaction and avoided communication. That's why the problems are not solved. The problems are covered up and ignored. (P10)*

*Nothing is solved. None of our problems have been solved. These are not solved as they were not discussed by two people who want to solve them. I do not have hope about solutions. I do not want to do something about it either. I think that it is pointless to tire myself. It is nearly impossible to affect him or make him to understand. It will be just tiring attempt for me. That's why the problems are going to exist and we keep our relationship in this way. (P3)*

### **3.3.1.3. Expectations from the Father**

During the interview, all participants talked about their expectations from their fathers. Participants' expectations from their fathers were related to various aspects of father-daughter relationship such as father involvement, financial support, parental practices, and family dynamics. While describing their expectations, they mentioned how their lives were affected by unfulfilled expectations and how unfulfilled expectations made them feel. Participants' expectations from their fathers were presented in two themes: 1) the gap between expectations and reality, 2) disappointment with unmet expectations.

#### **3.3.1.3.1. The Gap between Expectations and Reality**

Most of the participants expected to see their fathers making effort to get in contact with them. For some, these expectations were encouraged by fathers' promises in their childhood. However, participants underlined that credibility of their fathers' words decreased over time, as these expectations were not met.

*I have never forgotten when we first met. My father, my brother, and I were lying on the floor in the living room. My father said that he had been searching for us for a long time and he would see us from now on. I was little at that time. I remember that I felt something to my father for the first time. We connected for the first time. After that, nothing happened. He did not call. I did not get emotional since my father did not call me at all. I was not feeling absence of my father but I was surprised as I would have a father from that time. He has never called me. I shouldn't say 'never' but he did not call me as I expected. (P8)*

*I was always asking my father when he was going to visit us. He was always saying that we would see it or it could be soon. He was always saying these kinds of things. After a while, me and my brother started to joke about it. We were laughing and saying 'soon'. (P7)*

The desire to have a stronger father-daughter bond was another expectation that was mentioned by participants. Some of them expected their fathers to take more responsibility to improve their relationship.

*I do not miss anything in my relationship with my mother but sharing something with the father and the father-daughter relationship is different. I could not experience that. I wish I could have experienced it. My friends share something with their mothers and share something different with their fathers. Like our routines with my mother, they have their own routines with their fathers too. I wish I could have experience other aspect... I wish we had a rapport. (P10)*

As mentioned before, participants described their fathers with mostly negative adjectives. They assumed that their lives would be better compared to their current situation, if their fathers have different characteristics.

*I wish I had a father who was devoted, hardworking, decisive, calmer, and wise. I wish he gave more support than he received. I wish he was a respectful person with whom could be communicated easily. I think it is important. He was embarrassed himself in different occasions with other family members and friends too, not just with me. I wish I had a father whom people wanted to meet and talk with and who brought serenity and joy. (P3)*

*It would have been nice to have a father who looked out for their children and shared responsibilities with the mother. The child belongs to both. Fatherhood is not a hobby. It would be nicer with the presence of a father who shared responsibilities equally. (P9)*

Three participants had expectations from their fathers related to family dynamics. They stated that they wish they could have witnessed their parents' healthy and lovely marital relationship. The desire to observe both parents together represented their wish to be a part of an intact family. Moreover, they stated that observing both parents in same household could have guided them in their own romantic relationships.

*If they hadn't had problems and divorced, I definitely would have liked to observe the relationship of a mother and a father, a wife and a husband, two lovers... I wish I could have experienced a family dynamic where household chores and responsibilities were shared by two parents who loved each other. (P1)*

While participants mostly describe their expectations from fathers, one participant explained that she could not form expectations related to her father's behaviours as she did not know what a father should do for his children.

*Actually, I did not want him to call me frequently. As my parents divorced when I was very little, I did not have memories about the times before their*

*divorce. I did not remember my father's face. I have few memories with my father. I do not have any memory after that until I was twelve. I do not know how a father should call his daughter. I have not had any expectations. (P8)*

### **3.3.1.3.2. Disappointment with Unmet Expectations**

While describing their expectations, participants emphasized disappointment they felt due to unmet expectations. One participant stated that she felt absence of her father more, when her father did not support her even though he promised the opposite.

*I was being let down by my father several times. He broke his promises. When computers became popular, I wanted to have a computer too. I requested it from my father. I wanted him to do something unforgettable and nice to me so that I could love him. I wanted to create a memory with him by asking him to buy a computer. He said that it could be possible but he did not buy it... One time my phone was broken. I told him that I could not contact anybody. He said that he would handle that but he did not do anything. It was just a phone. He could have figured it out... I felt very lonely at that time due to lack of my father's support. (P6)*

Majority of participants identified negative emotions related to unfulfilled expectations. They felt a rupture in the father-daughter relationship, which was not repaired by their fathers. One participant claimed that when her father decided to divorce her mother, he divorced her too. It was observed that participants generally withdrew their requests from their fathers. However, one participant pointed out that she made an effort to make her father meet her needs, when he did not satisfy her expectations.

*He has never remembered my birthday. I remember that I was reading Tom Sawyer when I was in elementary school. My mother had been reminding*

*him my birthday every time. One day, my mother forgot to tell him and he forgot my birthday. I punished him. I was reading Tom Sawyer to him on the phone every day and I was asking him to remember what I had read the previous day. (P4)*

*I became very furious. I was calling my father and telling him that I needed something. He was saying that he could not help me. My needs remained unmet. I was becoming angry with him on the phone. I think I could not forget the past. We could not be a pair of regular father and daughter. (P8)*

*He divorced me when he divorced my mother. I cannot believe that. You have a child but you do not wonder about her. You do not contact her for years. I do not think that a decent person could do that. No one should block his daughter because they had conflicts. I do not know. I think people do not give up on their children, they wonder about them. (P10)*

### **3.3.2. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP**

Participants talked about different dimensions of mother-daughter relationships, describing mostly positive experiences. Two sub-categories appeared in participants' account regarding mother-daughter relationship: 1) closeness in mother-daughter relationship, 2) communication in mother-daughter relationship.

#### **3.3.2.1. Closeness in Mother-Daughter Relationship**

Closeness in mother-daughter relationship was described by all participants during interviews. As opposed to the mentioned aspects of closeness in father-daughter relationship, this sub-category mostly included participants' positive experiences. Participants elaborated on their experience in two themes: 1) feeling close and satisfied with mother-daughter relationship, 2) empathizing with mother.

### 3.3.2.1.1 Feeling Close and Satisfied with the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Participants described the mother-daughter relationship in positive terms. First of all, they used mostly positive words such as ‘strong’, ‘resilient’, ‘humorous’, and ‘altruistic’ to describe their mothers, in contrast to the negative depictions of their fathers.

Nearly all the participants stated that they have had a positive relationship with their mothers since childhood. Some participants mentioned that their relationships got worse when they reached adolescence; however, they were satisfied with the quality of their current relationship and they described a strong mother-daughter bond.

*I had a good relationship with my mother, I cannot remember something negative. We had fights as everyone living in the same house but we did not have any major conflict. We were yelling at each other but they were not lasting long. When I reached adolescence, my mother reached menopause. Those three years were hard for both of us, but I have not felt distant from my mother. There is nothing negative about my mother. (P3)*

*Maybe because we lived together, we do not hesitate to express our love at home or outside. My mother expresses her love too. When she could not reach me during a long time and a long time is about five hours, she wonders about me. She does not make under pressure. I always feel being loved by her. (P7)*

*You know, in foreign movies, there are mothers and daughters who are getting along, go shopping together, and share everything. My mother and I were always like that. She was my best friend but she did not cross the line. She was telling me that I had lots of friends but that I needed a mother and that at times and she should have done more parenting. (P6)*

### 3.3.2.1.2 Empathizing with Mother

It was noticeable that participants frequently emphasized their mothers' point of view while describing the mother-daughter relationship. Some shared their memories with their mothers and gave importance to their mothers' effort to create those moments.

*We have shared moments. Since I was a child, we have been going to the cinema every Saturday morning... It is our routine and we started to do that when I was little. Still, when I visit her, we go to the cinema if we have time. She put a lot of effort to make us have 'our things'. I can see that when I think about it right now. (P10)*

Participants empathized with their mothers' experience of being a single mother and appreciated how they were able to overcome the challenge of being a single parent. One participant valued her mother's courage to stabilize her life after divorce by herself and pointed out the difficulties she experienced due to lack of support. She stated that, her mother was able to make herself and her children priority in an environment where men were overvalued as husbands and despite gender stereotypes.

*I do not know. I do not have a child but maybe raising a child by herself was difficult. There is no one to support you. It's not about being in a marital relationship, but even one person would have made a difference. There was no one. It was bad. Maybe she did not have somebody to rely on. She only had two children... She was not working. She was living with her family and she had two children. Nowadays, maybe it's not a big deal but people were over estimating husband figures back then. She took her two children, moved far away, and tried to begin a new life. She did that for us and for herself. It was a big thing for me. I always thought that my mother could handle everything, she could do anything by herself. (P5)*

Some participants claimed that divorce process may have been difficult and challenging for their mothers but that they did not observe any adverse experiences during and after the divorce process. They thought that their mothers were strong as they did not reflect their negative emotions or weaknesses related to the divorce process.

*I think divorce process was messy and traumatic for my mother but my mother was always strong, independent, and tough. I did not see her experience any trauma. If she processed trauma, she did it behind closed doors. She was always in control. (P10)*

*I think, raising a child requires putting in an effort for a long time. Not only supporting child's education but there are a lot of aspects of parenting. My mother succeeded in it. That's why she is strong. I did not hear any complaints from her. I do not remember her saying that she could not do something. Maybe she did not show me but what I saw was that she was strong. (P2)*

It was observed that participants had concerns about their mothers in terms of their loneliness and well-being. They had protective attitudes towards their mothers.

*When I moved here, I did not leave my mother alone; my grandmother was there. I was fine about it. After my grandmother died, I started to feel very bad. I tried to deal with negative emotions by myself. No one requested me anything or complained about anything but maybe I was overthinking. Maybe it was normal, I do not know. I was thinking whether I should live with her or invite her to live with me. As if she would always need a friend or someone next to her. I was thinking that she was alone and she could not*

*handle it. I was not with her and I was upset for her. I thought the situation was difficult for her and I felt remorse. (P1)*

*It would have been difficult for my mother to struggle by herself. When I saw my mother having difficulty, I became very upset. Apart from it, we had good times. (P8)*

*Her life became more difficult most probably. New city, new job. I think she became happy later. I think she thinks that it was better to be alone and free than to be with a man like my father. (P7)*

### **3.3.2.2. Communication in Mother-Daughter Relationship**

Most of the participants mentioned that they preferred open communication with their mothers. As seen in participants' statements, they consulted their mothers and attached importance to their opinions. It was observed that while some topics were easier to be shared, there were some concerns they were reluctant to share with their mothers. While describing their communication with their mothers, participants also emphasized how they were able to solve their problems with their mothers. Two themes related to communication in mother-daughter relationship came forward: 1) being able to share with the mother, 2) being able to solve problems with the mother.

#### **3.3.2.2.1 Being Able to Share with the Mother**

All participants stated that they were able to share almost all experiences with their mothers. They mentioned that they did not share only daily experiences but also their deeper emotions to their mothers. Richness of content and degree of intimacy in sharing with mothers differed from the communication patterns between fathers and daughters.

*I can talk about my psychological problems and my qualities that I do not like with my mother. For example, I can say that I overthink about that or I am a lazy person without feeling any shame. I can share everything. (P9)*

*I talk about my romantic relationships and I can consult her when I feel desperate. My boyfriend went abroad to work. I was very sad that time. When I learned that he would go, my mother became the first person I called. I only wanted to call her and I called her first. (P2)*

*I was telling everything to my mother. My mother called me ‘my parrot’ back then. When I came from school, I was telling everything that happened in school, while she was cooking. I was following her in the house. It is still the same and we still talk about those days. (P8)*

Some participants mentioned that they talked about their fathers with their mothers. They emphasized that they observed change in their mothers’ discourse related to their fathers. When participants grew older, their mothers started to share their own feelings comfortably and became more open about their negative feelings related to their ex-spouse.

*After I contact my father, my mother and I talk about my father’s mistakes and laugh about them. (P8)*

*If my father calls me and tells me something about his life or if he requests something from me, I tell that to my mother. She does not criticize my father, she talks as if she talks about a friend. (P1)*

*I think she got comfortable. She realized that I can distinguish right and wrong. We criticize him together now. (P6)*

It was noticeable that some participants limited their sharing with their mothers to not upset them. They explained that they tried to cope with their emotions and difficulties by themselves or by sharing them with their peers. They preferred to share negative experiences with their mothers when they felt desperate. Their experience was related to participants' supportive and protective approach towards their mothers.

*I share everything. We talk every other day on the phone. There is nothing that I do not share with her. She just does not know that I smoke. She quit smoking when I was six or seven. I remember that she quit smoking to not being a bad example for us. For that reason, I do not tell her that I smoke. I think it upsets her. Apart from that, she knows most of the things about me. (P7)*

*As I do not want to upset my mother, I do not consult her if I can manage the situation. I take emotional support from her after some time. If I can handle my emotions, I do not call her directly. Sometimes I really cannot deal with my problems and I call my mother when I cry my eyes out. I do not have difficulty receiving emotional support from my mother. (P1)*

Beside these experiences, two participants stated that they did not prefer to talk about their feelings related to family issues as they did not want to make their mother feel bad or guilty about divorce and father absence. It was observed that family was the most sensitive topic that they were reluctant to talk with their mothers.

*I do not talk about family related things. I do not tell that I miss her generally. I do not want to upset her. I talk about my partner or my friends. I do not open family related subjects. I think she has wounds. I do not want to open these wounds. (P5)*

*Generally I am able to use direct communication with her but when the subject is about her, I want to make her stay outside of these issues as she did for me too. I do not want to upset her with these things... I'm afraid that she feels guilty about what happened. It is her choice to marry and I was born from this marriage. I do not blame my parents for their marriage. I am happy that I was born but despite the way things have gone; I do not want my mother to feel guilty. I do not want her to feel guilty as she chose that father to me. (P3)*

#### **3.3.2.2.2. Being Able to Solve the Problems with the Mother**

All participants stated that they were able to solve the problems with their mothers and that the conflicts in mother-daughter relationship did not last for a long time. Participants described different problem solving strategies, such as humouring mother, having time out, and mutual compromise to make peace. As mentioned before, participants had problems in conflict resolution with their fathers. According to participants' statements, their experiences were different in the mother-daughter relationship.

While some participants stated that they could yell at their mothers and defend themselves during fights, other participants preferred to hold back and accommodate their mothers. One participant mentioned that as she started to empathize with her mother over time, her aggressive attitude towards her mother declined and they started to solve their problems more smoothly.

*She calls me and I explain calmly what I do not want. She says okay and hangs up. I wait for some time to pass. After I think that my mother calmed down, I call her and explain myself. It does not take more than a day in general. It takes maximum two days. (P5)*

*We yell at each other. We solve problems by yelling. When I was adolescent neither of us compromised. In time, she started to see me as an adult person. She started to compromise. She became a friend more than a mother. As I grew older, I started to look from her perspective, control myself, and stop yelling at her. We deal with problems by mutual compromises but we yell at each other first. I get used to it. It's our communication style. (P10)*

Some participants described their mothers as dominant and short-tempered. According to them, conflicts were generally resolved when they accommodated their mothers' desires.

*She can get angry very much when I talk back to her or when I say something she does not like. In general, we take some time. My mother gets angry quickly but calms down quickly too. She forgets everything. The problem was able to be solved this way. We do not talk about it. (P8)*

*I failed one of my courses and I should have studied one more term. I told her on the phone and she got a little angry. She asked me why I hadn't studied harder. I said that the exam was difficult. There was tension between us and we hung up. Then, she called me and said it was okay. It does not last long. The problems were able to be solved in short time. (P2)*

Some participants explained that they did not solve their problems with their mothers by talking. It was observed that they made peace by expressing positive emotions and being caring towards each other after conflicts.

*I think I am the one who talks. My mother talks too. She has a dominant character. What she says is logical and even though she is open to others' opinions, her comments become logical, so she does not say anything that is changeable. We calm down first and after some time, we start a regular conversation. We do not say that we are calm and ready to talk about the*

*problems. The focus of conversation is not problem solving. For example, she asks if I would like to eat an apple. We need some icebreaker sentences before talking about problems. (P1)*

*I talk and I am the one who gets angry. Next day, she begins the day as if nothing happened before. If there is something serious, I go to her and talk about it. You know, you have to make peace if someone looks after you even though she does not apologize. I do like that. (P9)*

### **3.3.3. PARENTAL DIVORCE AND SEPARATION FROM THE FATHER**

Participants elaborated on their experience of parental divorce with different aspects from pre-divorce marital conflicts to post-divorce experiences. Moreover, the course of the mother-daughter and non-residential father-daughter relationship, separation from the father, the effect of being apart from father on different dimensions of their lives, and how they gave meaning to their experiences in social context were explained by participants. In light of participants' statements, two sub-categories were identified in this category: 1) communication about parental divorce, 2) the effect of father absence.

Before presenting the related themes, participants' description of their family environment should be acknowledged to gain deeper understanding about their experiences. Seven participants described less interparental conflict while discussing the divorce process. Among seven participants four of them described father related reasons for parental divorce such as interventions of fathers' extended family members, fathers' extramarital affairs, and the lack of fathers' support to the family (e.g. not working and lack of emotional involvement).

Three participants described higher interparental conflict including domestic and sexual violence and psychological abuse. They stated that they were not abused by their fathers but that their mothers and older siblings, who had to

spend more time with their fathers before divorce, experienced greater difficulties. It was observed that they witnessed the damage their mothers and their family got when they were very little. They described adverse memories regarding the consequences of interparental conflicts, which were told to them by their mothers or their older siblings.

*He did not care about his children and he was beating my mother frequently. There were stitches on my mother's eyebrow, her eyelid was cut, and her ribs were cracked. He was gambling. He cheated on my mother multiple times. It is disgusting. My mother was physically and psychologically abused. He had sexual intercourse with my mother by beating her. As she was his wife, he thought he had right to have sexual intercourse with her. It is serious psychological and physical violence. (P3)*

*My father did not look after his family. He was playing cards with his friends and drinking alcohol during the day. He was coming home in evening. I do not remember very much, it is my mother's narrative; but one day when my mother and I were waiting my father, I sat on my mother's lap and said that we were not happy with my father and asked my mother why we were with him. Even though my mother intended to maintain her marriage, she decided to divorce after my words. Of course, there was domestic violence too. (P4)*

*He threatened to kill me and my mother. He put a gun on my head when I was a baby. I do not remember as I was 8 months old. When all these were told to me when I was eighteen or twenty years old, I was traumatised. I did not believe that a person could behave like this to a baby. I think I overcame it a bit. He is that kind of a man. You can understand. Death threats, putting a gun, domestic violence, psychological violence... (P6)*

### **3.3.3.1. Communication about Parental Divorce**

During interviews, participants described how they communicated with multiple individuals including their mothers, other family members, and family friends about parental divorce. Moreover, they mentioned how they were affected by those conversations when they were children. As seen in participants' accounts, participants' attitudes towards their fathers and the father-daughter relationship were influenced in line with the sharing about parental divorce. Moreover, they elaborated on how the mother-daughter relationship was affected while they tried to manage their relationships with both parents. This section addresses three themes related to communication about parental divorce: 1) disclosures about parental divorce, 2) the mediator role of mother in father-daughter relationship, 3) alliance with the mother.

#### **3.3.3.1.1. Disclosures about Parental Divorce**

Nearly all participants stated that they did not remember the first explanation of parental divorce. One participant expressed her confusion about the divorce and stated that as a child, she could not understand the changes in her life after the divorce process.

*I did not realize that they divorced. My father was working away. I did not know details but he stayed away due to his work for some time. I did not know what he was doing at that time. I was also surprised that my parents had divorced but I do not remember anything. We moved to another city after divorce, I did not remember anything. I remember that I was playing games. I do not remember that I was surprised to the change of places or father absence. (P8)*

Some participants described their curiosity towards parental divorce during childhood and mentioned that they were asking their mother about the divorce

process. One participant mentioned that her mother was reluctant to talk about divorce as those times evoked negative emotions inside her. She added that she could talk about divorce with family friends.

*I asked her. She did not talk about divorce or my father if I did not ask. She did not talk about details. When I asked about details I was asking how she could forget these things. She was telling me that she wanted to forget. For that reason, she did not like to talk about it. I started to ask about divorce after a while. There were family friends. I asked them too. (P8)*

Some participants explained that their mothers did not communicate about parental divorce with them. They gave meaning to their experiences by themselves, when they started to observe other families at school and engaged in social interactions with different people. Participants especially mentioned their school memories and stated that it was difficult experience to see their peers with both parents together.

*You know there is something you do not remember. I have always known that. I do not know when they told me. I realized that as people were talking about it. When I started to go to school, I understood that my mother divorced. In school, teachers asked about your father and you should have explained that your parents divorced. I knew that when I was in elementary school but no one explained to me anything. (P9)*

*I do not remember the first time she explained the situation to me. I had curiosity about it when I was a child. I started to go to school when I was five or six. Both mothers and fathers were coming to school. Until that time father absence was not a problem as I did not realize it. However, when I started to go to school, during special days at school, parent-teacher conferences, and celebration of public holidays, I saw that my friends had two parents. When I saw my mother and my aunt, I started to feel weird. I*

*was not a child who cried and asked about father absence. I tried to understand my parents' divorce and reasons of father absence by myself. My mother did not explain it clearly. She avoided to talk about it since she was afraid to affect me negatively. I always realized things by myself. (P1)*

Some participants explained that they communicated about parental divorce with mothers' friends and mothers' extended family members such as grandparents and aunts. Participants thought that communicating with other people about divorce was not beneficial as they heard much more than a child should have heard. It was observed that these sharing had emotionally negative impact on participants. Moreover, they stated that their mothers became unpleasant due to these undesired communications.

*I started to wonder why they divorced when I started to go to school. She said that they were not getting along. She did not give details. Then, I learned about the conflicts from my mother's close friends. They told me these things as they thought that they were doing a good thing. My mother became furious because these things were shared with me. (P6)*

*My grandfather told me about the divorce. I heard something while other family members were talking but my mother did not want to talk about it and she did not want my grandfather to tell me these things either. I remember that was a crisis and my mother got angry with my grandfather about his sharing. (P3)*

Some participants did not talk about the divorce during their childhood. They stated that they started to discuss divorce recently, as they grew older. In her childhood, one participant was thinking that families did not necessarily include fathers. Maybe for that reason, there was nothing to talk about. She claimed that she started to talk about divorce when the conflicts in father-daughter relationship escalated.

*My mother and I talked about the reasons for divorce just two years ago. I asked her how she decided to divorce, what the problems were, if it was hard to decide to break up, if she still loved him, and how traumatic it was for her. (P10)*

*I do not have any memory about explanation about divorce told by either my mother or my father. I was always thinking that marriages were like that. Our family was crowded. I'm an only child but I have ten cousins who had both parents generally. However, I do not have a portrait of family that should include mother, father, and a child. My mother did not talk about divorce for a long time. As I reached adolescence and I started to have conflicts with my father, I learnt that my father was guilty. I did not know about these when I was a child. (P3)*

It was noticeable that nearly none of the participants talked to their fathers about parental divorce or asked questions to their fathers about it. One participant stated that she did not talk to her father about divorce as she was contacting him rarely.

*I was generally asking to my mother. As I saw my father rarely, it was no time to talk about it. I was asking to my mother if she was happy to be divorced. She was saying that she was happy and we had a good life. (P8)*

Two participants mentioned that they were talking to his father about divorce; however, they did not believe his arguments. They perceived their mothers' statements more reliable.

*He was saying to me to not think about it. He was saying that there were things he could not tell. It was ridiculous. There was nothing he did not tell.*

*I think it was hard to say that he is a bad husband or a bad father. That's why he did not explain anything in detail. (P3)*

### **3.3.3.1.2. The Mediator Role of the Mother in the Father-Daughter Relationship**

While describing the father-daughter relationship, participants mentioned their mothers' both positive and negative discourse about their fathers. According to participants' narratives, mothers' discourse affected their perception of their fathers. They stated that they mostly experienced negative aspects of their fathers' characteristics during interactions and they agreed with their mothers' opinions about their fathers.

Mothers' encouragement for father-daughter contact and support for their relationship was emphasized by most participants. Mothers' effort to arrange interactions continued until participants became grown-ups and decided how they wanted to shape their relationships with their fathers. One participant stated that despite her mother's willingness to organize father-daughter meetings, her father sometimes rejected her.

*She has a positive role in my relationship with my father. She encouraged me to visit him during summer holidays. She has never said that she did not want me to see my father. She always wants me to maintain my communication with him. (P2)*

*When I was little, she wanted me to see my father. She thought that it would have been nice as I was his child too. I was fatherless. She took me to my father's house but my father did not want me sometimes. When I grew older, she told me that I should see my father as I was younger than eighteen and people may have thought that she did not want me to see my father. She told*

*me that he was my father and he did not do anything to me and it was their own problem. He did not do anything to me technically. (P9)*

According to some participants, their mothers helped them to maintain the father-daughter relationship longer than it could have been. However, their mothers could not change participants' current perception of their fathers, as seen in participants' statements. They thought that their fathers were responsible for the negative course and the poor quality of the father-daughter relationship.

*She did not have a negative effect. Even though we had stronger negative opinions about him, she stopped us and said that we were young and our opinions may have changed. For that reason, my father established our relationship actually. (P8)*

*My mother had a critical role in me having a relationship with my father. If my mother wanted to block our relationship, she could have done that. Considering that we were living in different cities from my father, we could have seen each other much more rarely and our relationship wouldn't have maintained. For example, I could not have visited him. I think she was not influential in later stages. She just postponed the negative outcome. She bought him extra time but it did not work. (P3)*

For some participants, their mothers were the reason to establish a father-daughter relationship. Their own attitudes towards their fathers were more negative and they were reluctant to see their fathers. They stated that after their mothers started to stay outside of the father-daughter relationship, they could act on their own decision to avoid communication with their fathers.

*My mother had positive effect on our relationship, because she talked about my father positively. If my mother did not talk about my father positively,*

*my anger that I already have due to his absence may have escalated. I wouldn't have wanted to look at my father's face. (P1)*

*My mother made me contact my father until I reached eighteen. I kept seeing him until that time due to my mother's statements that he was my father and I should see him. If she had not said these things I would have probably refused to see him. When I became an adult and I could make my own decisions, I gave up on him. (P6)*

Two participants elaborated on the different aspect of mothers' positive effect on father-daughter relationship. One of the participants shared that she felt cheated when she realized mothers' effort to arrange father-daughter interactions. Even though mothers' encouragement was helpful to maintain the father-daughter relationship, learning that mother was responsible for interactions made her feel disappointed about father's lack of effort.

*My mother told me positive things about my father. Moreover, she wanted me to interact with my father to know him by myself. She put serious effort to arrange meetings with my father. I understood her effort later. I hadn't understood it before, because she did not show me anything. I got furious when I understood the situation. I felt cheated by her. (P1)*

For another participant, her mother's encouragement for father-daughter interaction helped her to know her father by herself, but it was not a good experience. It represented a bitter-sweet side of her relationship with her father.

*She said that she wanted me to know my father by myself even though it was a worse and harder case. She said that if she had told me that my father was a bad person, I would have idealized him and after I realized that he was not the person I had imagined, I would have felt disappointed. She said that she did not want to be guilty. She thought that even though it was very*

*upsetting for me to know my father by myself, it would be a better choice.*  
(P3)

### **3.3.3.1.3 Alliance with the Mother**

Five of the participants were allied to their mothers. Their closeness and support of their mothers resulted in concerns about mothers' thoughts regarding the father-daughter interaction. Fathers' negative discourse about mothers was one of the reasons for cutting off communication with their fathers for three of the participants.

*He was asking me if my mother talked to me negatively about him or if she did not want me to see him. He was saying he could not stand her. When he said negative things about my mother, he crossed the line. I was done with him. He was He cannot say that. My mother was doing the opposite. (P9)*

*When I was in university, I visited my father. We were just the two of us. He drank alcohol and talked about my mother negatively. Next day I decided to cut off communication with him. (P3)*

Two participants worried about their mothers' thoughts and feelings regarding their closeness to their fathers. They had been struggling between two parents and consequently, they became hesitant to get closer to their fathers.

*I was waiting for him coming to our house and I became happy when he came. I wanted to sleep with my father and I was asking my mother if she became upset. She was telling me that it was okay. (P7)*

One participant thought that being close to her father would be wrong for her mother. Her appreciation of her mothers' effort and acknowledgement of

difficulties she faced challenged her in terms of balancing the mother-daughter and father-daughter relationship.

*To be honest, I do not think that we can be a regular father and daughter again, after he moves the city where I live in. I think it is not fair to my mother. When I think the possibility of being good with my father, my mother comes to my mind. It would be unfair to my mother. (P8)*

As seen in participants' accounts, beside their supportive attitudes towards their mothers, they were supportive about their parents' decision of divorce. Four participants stated that they were satisfied with their parents' decision. They made negative assumptions about the presence of their fathers and explained that they were glad to be with their mothers.

*When I started to become aware of the things, I was saying that I'm glad that my father was not with me. If my father had been with me, he would have tried to restrict my life. I was telling my mother that luckily, we were just the two of us. (P7)*

### **3.3.3.2. The Effect of Father Absence**

Participants stated that growing up apart from their fathers resulted in absence of their fathers not just physically but also emotionally. This sub-category underlined how father absence reflected on their lives and how they gave meaning to their experiences both as a child and as an adult. When asked to describe the experience of father absence to participants, they addressed five themes: 1) the effect of observing other family structures, 2) the effect of father absence on childhood experiences, 3) the effect of father absence on identity, 4) the effect of father absence on others' negative perceptions of self, 5) compensating for father absence.

### **3.3.3.2.1. The Effect of Observing Other Family Structures**

While sharing their unique experiences, nine of the ten participants made comparisons between their families and other families. It was observed that participants' perceptions of father absence and parental divorce was affected by other families' experiences. In light of the participants' statements, two sub-themes were emerged: 1) downward comparison, 2) upward comparison.

#### **3.3.3.2.1.1. Downward Comparison**

One participant mentioned that her age at the time of parental divorce was an advantage for her. She thought that people whose parents divorced later felt father absence more. She emphasized that she did not feel fatherless as she has never been familiar with her father's existence in her life.

*I always say that older people suffer more when their parents' divorce. You do not miss something when you do not know that it exists. As I have never had two parents, I did not feel lack of a father. (P5)*

One participant emphasized that she felt better when she observed other intact families, who had family problems. For her, it was better to be fatherless than to have a bad father.

*In high school, I had a best friend whose parents had high conflict. Her father was yelling and beating her wife. It was very bad. When I saw them, I became glad to not have a father. After I came to my house, I felt thankful...I do not want to see problematic parent figures. I am glad that they divorced if the other option was seeing them in high conflict. As I'm a teacher, I know my students who experience it and I can see later outcomes of these experiences clearly. (P1)*

One participant stated that when she shared her negative feelings related to father absence, her mother tried to give emotional support by comparing their situation with other people who had more difficult experiences. The participant added that that conversation did not make her feel better, as making comparison was not a solution.

*She tried to calm me down. She said that my older sisters struggled more and I had a relatively better life. I know that I had a better life. She said that I should look at the bright side and think about people who lost both their parents, who were subjected to violence, who were in need or sick. She said that I may miss something but my life is not the worst one, I'm in a good place and I graduated from university, and I have a mother and older sisters. She tried to calm me down with these words... I was emotional since I was feeling alone, her words did not make any difference. It seems logical to think about people in worse situation but why do not we want better one? I do not know. (P9)*

#### **3.3.3.2.1.2. Upward Comparison**

Participants stated that they experienced emotional difficulties when they saw different family dynamics. They described their desire to be a part of intact family which was triggered when they were with people who had their mothers and their fathers in same household. Participants made positive assumptions about other father-daughter dynamics and family relationships.

*I was hard. It was bothering to see other families with mother, father, and children going somewhere to spend time together. For family occasions, we were always going to my grandmother's house. My two uncles, their wives, and their children were coming together. They were all intact families. We were just me and my mother. We were not a family. I was feeling very lonely at those times. (P6)*

*Sometimes when I saw happy father figures in my friends' lives, it was hard. There was a lot of time when I felt bad about it. (P1)*

*I had a friend in secondary school. She was one of my close friends. I was often going to her house to sleepover. Her family included a mother, a father, and a child. I remember that first time I wished to have a family like that. I did not feel something like that with other family members. I was visiting my cousins too but probably as it was a different family, I felt different. That family seemed more peaceful to me. Maybe I observed good mother-father relationship or my friend's good relationship with her father. I might even have been jealous of her. (P3)*

To one participant, presence of fathers might help their daughters to be happy with being single and make them feel that being in a romantic relationship was not always necessary. She suggested that a father figure might be enough for a daughter which made her not to seek another male figure in her life particularly.

*I had a friend when I was a child. She had a perfect relationship with her father. She did not have a dream of a boyfriend or marriage. Every little girl wishes to marry. She was not like that, she was happy. Maybe, If I had my father with me, I would have been happy with being single and wouldn't have wanted to have a boyfriend. (P5)*

Another participant stated that after loss of his partner's father, her partner could continue to talk about his father positively. For the participant, it was a difficult experience to have a physically present father who was absent emotionally. She felt that presence of a good father figure in a child's mind was important regardless of his physical existence in his child's life.

*My husband's father died when my husband was little. When we talked about it, I told him that he did not have a father in his life but that he talked*

*about him very nicely and his father gave him emotional support. I have never had a support figure like he had. It made me feel bad. I want to have a father figure in my life. (P3)*

### **3.3.3.2.2. The Effect of Father Absence on Childhood Experiences**

Sense of freedom was a salient aspect of father absence described by most of the participants. They stated that they grew up freer compared to their friends who had fathers with them. They mentioned that they did not feel restricted or controlled by their mothers due to the presence of mutual respect for boundaries in the mother-daughter relationship.

*I grew up so free. It was good. We live in Turkey. Most of the people cannot live free due to their fathers. I grew up as a free kid who could have done what she wanted to do. (P5)*

*My mother was calm and respectful of my boundaries and I had one person instead of two people who interfered in my decision-making process. It helped me to make my decisions easily. When I was a kid, my friends were getting permission from both their fathers and their mothers. They had conflicts as they could not have an agreement. As opposed to their experience, I was just going to my mother and sharing my decision with her. She was saying it was okay for her if that was what I wanted to do. Both my mother's character traits and not having a father in the household helped me to make decisions faster. (P1)*

Sense of efficacy and feeling obligated to take care of herself were common for most of the participants. Many participants mentioned that since they were little children, they had to arrange their lives differently compared to other people who had their fathers with them. They underlined that they became self-efficient adults due to father absence but that it was not their choice to always be in control. They

stated that the necessity of being self-efficient due to lack of father support made them feel anxious.

*You must do everything by yourself. As you cannot rely on someone, you know that you should take care of yourself. For example, I tried to learn how to repair things by myself. No one taught me to do it. Maybe it's an easy thing to do but I had never known how to talk with a man who carried my stuff to my new house. Unfortunately, people do not take women seriously. I'm twenty-three years old. I'm a petite young woman. I learned how to talk to them by myself. They damaged my furniture, I had to figure it out by myself. I did not rely on someone. I did not make someone to call them. I called them myself. I had experience now but it was bitter to have that kind of experience... If my father had been with me, he would have taught me these things. Nowadays I have been feeling bad about it. I cried on Father's Day. (P9)*

*I think maturing early made me miss my childhood. I even found my hobby myself and registered in art courses by myself. Even though I have never had financial responsibility, I have been working since freshman year. I think the reason is growing up apart from my father... It helped me enter work life earlier. I think people with fathers do not need to do these things. (P4)*

For one participant, lack of father's financial support resulted in more work hours for her mother. As her mother worked long hours to make their financial situation better, she struggled to create shared memories with her mother in her childhood.

*As my mother had to work hard, I have no holiday memory with my mother. We could not have gone somewhere together at weekends. As she was working during long hours, she was becoming tired and she was sleeping a*

*lot at weekends. For that reason, we were always at home. My mother has never had a holiday. I do not have any vacation memories. Maybe, if I had both parents who put equal effort, I would have had more family memories since my mother wouldn't have been so tired. (P8)*

For one of the participants, father figure meant physical safety. She explained that she had to think twice to avoid putting herself in a situation where she could need support when she was younger. Since she did not have her father with her, she had to make limitations in her life.

*Sometimes I went to the theatre or to the cinema or I had to go to my house in evening. My friends' father picked them up but I had to make extra plans. I was thinking about the arrival time of the buses to feel safe. I was careful about the time not to be too late. If I had a father, he would have picked me up and I wouldn't have thought about it. (P6)*

Participants admitted that their current communication style was affected due to having missed the chance to observe intact family dynamics and parents' romantic relationship. Participants disclosed their wish to have experienced intra-family communication in childhood and shared their negative feelings related to not being able to experience it.

*I think, I missed something about the communication between mother and father or a daily life of an intact family. I observed family dynamics later but my father was not there. I feel that something was missing about communication. (P2)*

Two participants thought that they missed shared moments with their fathers that other children could have experienced. They had a desire to have a strong father-daughter relationship as they had with their mothers.

*I was seeing other children having fun with their fathers. I missed to have fun with my father. My father had been diving before... I took a scuba diving certificate as I was curious about it. I might have taken it as I was inspired by him. I do not know. I missed these childish moments with my father. (P5)*

### **3.3.3.2.3. The Effect of Father Absence on Identity**

Similar experiences were seen in participants' accounts regarding the effect of father absence on their identity. More than half of the participants identified low self-confidence as an aspect of the difficulties of being fatherless. They stated that inconsistent presence of their fathers, fathers' broken promises and low involvement in their lives resulted in having low self-confidence. That their fathers were not involved in their lives even though they could, was a devastating experience. Their fathers' lack of involvement by their own choice made them feel insecure about themselves. One participant assumed that she could have been more courageous if her father had been a supportive parent and if he had been with her.

*If he had been with me, conditions would have been better. I would have been braver. Parents provide support for children. Children rely on their parents until they become grown-ups. I think if I had felt his support, my life would have been better. Maybe I wouldn't have been vulnerable. (P6)*

Two participants mentioned that they could not engage in social interactions easily. They added that they preferred to hold back in relationships and they could not form friendships comfortably. One participant described her tendency to be alone and suggested that if she were a part of intact family, she could have been more open to social relations.

*My mother and I, we were a beautiful family but I have never been a part of a 'real' family including a mother, a father, a child, and siblings. For that reason, I felt lonely. I could not be a part of something bigger, I have tended*

*to become lonelier... For example, I'm a timid person. I could not make friends. I have just three friends in university. (P2)*

One participant associated her aggressive attitude with having an absent father and poor father-daughter relationship. She assumed that presence of her father would have made her have more inner peace, that she needed to gain by herself in her current situation.

*Sometimes I think that I'm a quarrelsome person. It is because I do not have a father or because of the quality of our relationship. My inner peace would have been stronger. Nowadays, I try to gain it by myself and I need to put more effort to have inner peace. (P3)*

It was noteworthy that one participant thought that she did not deserve to be loved as her father was not in her life. She described a difficulty in trusting herself and acknowledging her self-worth. She claimed that parents were generally willing to be a part of their children's lives. For that reason, she felt responsible for her father's choice to not be present in her life.

*For a long time, I thought that my father did not love me because I was inherently lacking something or I had something that was not worthy to be loved. People love their children no matter what happens. A man could be a serial killer but his mother still loves him. I thought that I had something repulsive that made my father not love me, not wonder about me, or not interact with me. It was a terrible cycle I experienced for a year. (P10)*

The same participant also emphasized that due to the lack of her father's emotional responsiveness, she struggled to express her negative emotions to other people and was unable to internalize the value of her feelings. As her father did not acknowledge her feelings, she developed negative perceptions about the worth of her own emotions.

*For a long time, I thought that my sadness would be valuable when other people validated it. I was hurt by him, I became upset but he did not recognize it or he did not care. I was thinking that my feelings could be validated when the person, who was the source of this sadness, said that I can be sad or I'm right. I overcame it. If I feel sad, it is about me and I do not need that person saying that I'm right. His perspective can be different from mine. However, I still have a long way to go in terms of expressing my feelings. (P10)*

Two participant had trust issues due to father absence. They stated that feeling disappointed in relationship with their fathers and subsequent unsatisfying romantic relationships and friendships resulted in lack of trust in other people.

*I would have been able to trust other people. Lack of trust in a father and being deceived in friendships during adolescence made me have trust issues with people. For example, when I tell something to someone, even though I trust that person, I feel uncomfortable. I ask her if she will keep that secret. I think that I shouldn't tell anything to anyone or I should reassure the confidentiality of that secret so that that the person understands its importance. I have trust issues. (P6)*

Nearly half of the participants associated their sense of strength and independence with absence of their fathers. They claimed that they became stronger and braver. For one participant, overcoming the effects of father absence and the ability to adopt her own decision to cut off her father from her life empowered her. According to another participant, since she should have taken care herself more than necessary in her childhood due to father absence, she became self-reliant as an adult.

*I'm an independent person. There were not any men in our household. I have never thought that I could not do something as I was a woman. I could have repaired something if it broke. My mother and my grandmother could have done that too. My friends' fathers repair things when it is needed. I'm surprised when I see that dynamic. It is good to have self-reliance. Even though a parent's choice to not be in his daughter's life is a traumatic experience, dealing with it gave me power. When someone annoys me, I do not care. I think that I'm the person who changed my surname and removed my father from her life, who are you? (P10)*

*I have always done crazy things. I do extreme sports. I became brave as I grew up fatherless. I had to protect myself more than necessary and I was a responsible child. My self-confidence was built up from my experience of growing up fatherless. I think that's not the way it should be. (P4)*

It was notable that six participants emphasized that they could not describe the effect of father absence on their identities, even though they were sure to be affected by this experience.

*I think, people who grew up fatherless see its impact in later stages. It would show itself later. I always thought that I would see its effect on me. I also wondered which aspects of my life were affected by father absence. I cannot be sure. I cannot gain insight about it by myself. (P7)*

#### **3.3.3.2.4. The Effect of Father Absence on Others' Negative Perceptions of Self**

One of the effects of father absence on participants' lives was related to other people's perceptions of them. According to participants' expressions, both their mothers and they felt that they were different from others and should have been more careful about their behaviours. The absence of a male figure in the household increased their mothers' and their own sensitivity about other people's

attitudes. Some participants described their own perceptions of others' opinions and the impact on their lifestyle. One of the participants shared her experience of being bullied by their friends in childhood due to being fatherless.

*One day, they made me upset and I decided to not give my bike to my friends. After that, they called me 'bastard'. It was a very devastating moment. I stopped going out and started to spend time in the garden. (P4)*

Two participants explained how growing as a free child may have been negatively perceived by others. They stated that people might have associated the freedom participants had with father absence and lack of a monitoring and disciplinary parent at home.

*I had a freedom most of my female friends did not have. My mother supported it as she thought that it was right, but she always had hesitation about what people said about us. She was thinking that she did not have a husband and we did not have a father and that people could say something. Although she worried about it, she gave permission to me to meet my boyfriend. I always thought that she put us first. (P7)*

*I was very extroverted and cheerful. After university, I suppressed some of my behaviours to be calmer and girly. I grew up freer than my friends. People may think that I do not have a father and my mother does not discipline me. If I cross the line, my mother would take control but maybe my mother heard something from people. Other people also said something. I did not remember who they were. They said I do not have a father. My mother was influenced by people's words... I was feeling the pressure to marry. My mother was saying that I had a five-year relationship and that everybody knows it. Even though my mother and I are strong and have a very good relationship, I'm a fatherless girl in the eyes of the society. I think,*

*my mother felt the pressure and made me feel that pressure too. I was tired of it. (P6)*

### **3.3.3.2.5. Compensating for Father Absence**

According to participants' accounts, the effect of father absence was compensated by other people, and mostly by their mothers. Some participants claimed that they did not feel missing anything due to their mothers' efforts and involvement in their lives. They saw their mothers as both a mother and a father.

*She tried to satisfy our all needs. I did not feel different from a child who had both parents. Everything was good for me. For example, everyone was picked up by her father but my mother had a car too. She was picking me up and I was proud of it. I was thinking that my mother was both a mother and a father by herself. (P7)*

Some participants had other male figures in their lives such as family friends, uncles, teachers, and friends. They claimed that they tried to compensate the lack of male figure in their lives with these beloved people. They were satisfied with their experiences and expressed positive emotions related to these male figures.

*There were a lot of women in my family but all my friends were male. I think I compensated the deficit by having male friends as substitutes. (P9)*

*We have a family friend. I always call him first on Father's Day. I see him like a father. Since I was a little child, we had a good relationship together. There were times when I did not see my father but he always in my life. (P7)*

*I have two uncles. Especially one of them was very influential in my life. Most of the time I saw him like my father. Until I reached twenty-three, I*

*filled the void in my life with him. It took time to realize that. He was a responsible man and he was always asking me how my exam was or if I needed anything... He had an extra role in my life besides being an uncle. I gave him a father role, I tried to do that at least. (P3)*

*I compensated the lack of a father at home with my teachers at school. I had two male teachers whom I respected a lot. I still have strong relationship with them. One of them became witness at my wedding. (P6)*

Beside mentioned male figures, partners also had important role in participants' lives. While describing her romantic relationship, one participant emphasized that her negative feelings related to father absence faded away, when she started to have relationship with her partner.

*I wrote a note on his photo that I have not felt the absence of a father since he came into my life. I wrote that note on Father's Day. I wrote that from now on instead of becoming sad on that day, I started to get excited about him becoming a father in the future. One day one kid would hug him by saying 'dad' and I would smile while looking at him. (P6)*

#### **3.3.4. EXPERIENCE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

Participants elaborated on their current romantic relationships. They both focused on their unique romantic relationship dynamics with their partners and the effect of the father-daughter relationship on their romantic relationships. Five themes emerged from this category according to participants' statements: 1) feeling close with the partner, 2) communication challenges in the romantic relationship, 3) conflict resolution in the romantic relationship 4) the impact of the father on daughter's partner preference, 5) the effect of father absence on the nature of romantic relationship.

#### 3.3.4.1. Feeling Close with the Partner

This theme taps participants' perceived closeness with their partners in their current romantic relationships. Nearly all the participants mentioned that they felt close to their partners. They elaborated their experience of intimacy by illustrating different aspects of their romantic relationships.

More than half of the participants stated that they felt understood and supported by their partners. One participant emphasized that her partner was curious about her emotions and appreciated his acknowledgement of her sadness and his support.

*He asks everything. He asks me when he cannot deal with something or he wonders if he would upset me. It makes me feel good as he puts effort. His curiosity means that he wants to get information about the subject I talk about or that he thinks about it. (P2)*

For one participant, her partner was a supportive male figure in her life, which helped her fill the gap of not having father influence in her life.

*He filled the gap of male figures in my life in the best way. He constantly supported me. He was always with me. Whenever I became upset, he was there. He supported me financially and emotionally. Thanks to him, I felt absence of my father much less. (P6)*

One participant expressed her satisfaction regarding shared responsibilities in her romantic relationship.

*Doing housework makes me nervous. As I stay at home for a longer time, I should do more housework. Especially cooking is something that really annoys me. As he cooks, I feel very comfortable. It was a real issue for me to decide what to eat every day. I do not want to order out food. First couple*

*of months of the pandemic, we did not order food. I was cooking but he was cooking even more. Nowadays, I cook less since I work longer hours. (P7)*

One participant described her romantic relationship as peaceful and balanced. She stated that she chose a calm partner intentionally. While describing the reflections of father absence on her identity, she had shared her difficulty to feel inner peace. She mentioned that she tried to enhance her inner tranquillity by herself. Moreover, she had mentioned that she could not respect her father. While describing her romantic relationship, she specifically mentioned that her romantic relationship included mutual respect.

*We have a beautiful relationship and a peaceful home. I picked a partner who is as calm as possible. I'm the one who is more active and aggressive. We have a balanced relationship. We respect each other. We have known each other for a long time. We are still good friends. For that reason, we have a good relationship. (P3)*

#### **3.3.4.2. Communication Challenges in the Romantic Relationship**

In the participants' statements it was observed that, many participants preferred open communication in their romantic relationships. Their experience with their partners has a contradiction with their communication style with their fathers. However, they described certain topics that they did not share with their partners such as personal anxieties and family issues. They preferred to deal with these issues by themselves.

Two participants mentioned that they felt more communicative about feelings compared to their partners and they perceived open communication as a necessity in romantic relationships.

*I'm open to him... I can tell him that I'm bored or I'm stressed and I need to be cared for by him. I can share my expectations about our sexual life. He got used to this dynamic. He started to be more vocal. I feel more comfortable in romantic relationships that includes open communication. (P10)*

*When I get angry, I should talk about my feelings. This is how I am. I cannot keep it inside me, I should share it immediately. If he upsets me or makes me get angry, I tell him about it. If I keep my negative emotions inside me, they suffocate me. For that reason, I tell him what I love and what I do not love. He expresses himself less. I am the more open one. (P8)*

Two participants stated that they had difficulty in sharing their emotions with their partners before. They added that it took time to be more open and recently they felt more comfortable to share both positive and negative feelings.

*I do not have difficulty in expressing my love to him. In the beginning, I struggled too much. When I started to feel love for him, I could not express it. Nowadays, I do not have any difficulty. I can say that I miss him. When I angry at something or when I do not want to do something, I share it with him. (P1)*

For some participants, communicating about personal negative feelings with partners was difficult. They preferred to handle their negative emotions by themselves rather than expressing them to their partners. For instance, two participants had a hesitation to share their anxieties with partners, and one of them thought that talking about her own anxiety would be tiring for her partner.

*My anxiety may escalate sometimes. I try to control it. He gets tired, I know. When I start to think about climate change or feel worried about my*

*mother's health, I find myself in a cycle. When I include him into this cycle, he gets tired. I do not prefer to share my anxiety with him sometimes. (P3)*

Two participants were reluctant to share their negative emotions with their partners as they were worried about their partners' perception of them. They stated that feeling sad or being hurt may be an indication of weakness for other people. They did not want to show any vulnerability to preserve their image in the eyes of their partners.

*When I feel hurt, I have trouble to share it. It's a toxic mentality but I think feeling sad or feeling hurt was weakness. I try to overcome it. I'm afraid that people perceive me as sensitive when I share my feelings with them. For that reason, it is difficult to share when I feel hurt. When I feel sad, I tell my mother or my closest friends. I do not tell the person who hurt me. (P10)*

*I think it wouldn't be nice to talk about my personal and intimate issues for our romantic relationship and for his perception of me. I think that I should hold something inside me. People have opinions about your strength or your success. For instance, they may love your sympathetic attitude. My partner says that he loves my sympathetic approach but I have difficulty in being sympathetic to him. Sometimes I get angry with him. If I become open about it, his perception may change. (P9)*

One participant, who had shared her experience of holding back in relationships and emphasized her timid attitude, had trouble sharing her intimate feelings with her partner. She stated that she could express her feelings related to other people to her partner; however, she preferred to keep her feelings related to her partner private. She was worried that her partner would give a superficial or unsympathetic response to her intimate sharing. She adopted this coping strategy in order to not feel sad and to avoid being disappointed by her partner.

*If I get angry at something, not with him but at anything else, I can tell him. I can tell him when I'm sad or I'm happy. I just cannot share my feelings related to him... I'm scared that he will give a causal response. Like 'Me too.'. You know when someone says 'I love you.' and her partner says 'Me too.' I'm scared that this will happen and I will become very sad. For that reason, not to feel sad, I do not share my feelings. (P2)*

Family issues and related feelings were the most common subjects that were perceived as difficult to be shared by participants with their partners. One participant expressed her displeasure with talking about her family and her partner's family. She claimed that she preferred not to have deeper conversations with her partner.

*I do not want to talk about his family either. I do not want to talk about anything related to families. However, I can talk about my gynaecological problems with him. I can express my expectations but I do not want to show my weak spots to him. (P9)*

Another participant did not prefer to talk about family issues as her partner had divorced parents. It was noticeable that even though her partner was familiar with her experience, 'family' was still a too sensitive topic to talk about in her romantic relationship.

*I do not share my emotions and thoughts. His parents are divorced too. For that reason, I do not tell him that I miss my family. I do not talk about family. However, I can share my feelings about my friends. (P5)*

Only two participants mentioned that they could talk about their families with their partners. Their partners knew about participants' family dynamics and they were comfortable to talk about them.

*I talked about my family in detail. I told everything to him. I did not talk about it in the beginning but approximately after two years, I was more open. Actually, it might be noticeable by other people. In general, people see their fathers more frequently. I do not see him often or I do not respond to his calls. My partner asked what happened and I should have told him after a while. (P3)*

### **3.3.4.3. Conflict Resolution in the Romantic Relationship**

Participants described their conflict resolution strategies they used in their current romantic relationships. While describing their communication patterns with their partners in the presence of conflicts, many participants expressed that their partners were involved in the problem-solving process and used direct communication.

Some participants explained that they found compatible ways to solve their problems in their romantic relationships. They described mutual involvement in problem-solving processes. Most of these participants felt understood by their partners.

*Sometimes he waits for me to calm down. He comes to me later and says that he understands me. Sometimes I start a big fight. You know, your anger escalates and you hug your partner in the end. It happens like that... In general, we both know that we understand each other and we cannot change each other. For example, if I do not like something, he should approach me considering that. It applies to me too. (P5)*

*We talk about problems. After that, I ask him what we can do to solve problems. In general, we can meet halfway. We did not have big conflicts. There were just a few big fights. We have never had an unsolvable problem so far. We could always find solutions. (P7)*

On the other hand, it was observed that many participants preferred to cope with relational issues by themselves.

*I want him to call me frequently. Maybe not for ten minutes but he can call me for a minute to talk. He does not call me as frequently as I want. I try to deal with it by myself. (P9)*

Some participants were reluctant to share their expectations and talk about problems with their partners. They believed that their partners wouldn't change and that issues could not be solved. Two participants claimed that they have accepted their partners as they were and they tried to lower their own expectations.

*In general, I share my expectations with him but as he does not meet my expectations, I have not been sharing them for about two or three years. I accept him as he is. You know, you accept your brother as he is. It's like that. (P5)*

*I think as I share my emotional expectations and these expectations are not met, I will start to hold back. I have predictions about how it will be. I feel that I'm holding back. I feel that he is not the one with whom I can share these things. (P4)*

*Recently, I became sad and he says that he cannot meet my expectations. Sometimes, instead of fixing problems, he says that this is all he could give. Sometimes he wants to solve problems and other times he tells me that he cannot do more. (P9)*

Similar to the described unwillingness to engage in communication about problems, some participants were conflict avoidant in their romantic relationships. They preferred to humour their partners or have breaks to avoid escalation in conflicts.

*I prefer time out to avoid feeling rage. I do not want to yell or I do not want to upset him. I ask him to be quiet. I change my place. I think that not being exposed to anger evoking situations make me feel better. I prefer not to be exposed to the thing that makes me angry. (P1)*

One participant thought that her partner's problem solving strategies were similar to her father's approach to conflicts. She was displeased with this resemblance. She predicted that her relationship with her partner would be similar to the course of her relationship with her father.

*He does not approach me or he never apologizes. He says that he is sorry half-heartedly. He is very similar to my father on this point. This similarity makes me feel bad. It is a sign that our relationship will be like my relationship with my father. (P4)*

#### **3.3.4.4. The Impact of the Father on Daughter's Partner Preference**

While describing current romantic relationships, participants expressed certain expectations from their partners. It was noticeable that participants' expectations regarding the partners' characteristics and behaviours were affected by their relationships with their fathers. Some participants described the effect of the father-daughter relationship on their relational expectations. Moreover, while describing their expectations, participants presented whether their expectations were met or unmet.

Half of the participants acknowledged that they preferred partners who did not have similar characteristics with their fathers. One participant stated that she did not want to have children with a person who was similar to her father due to her desire to support her children to have shared experiences with both parents. She did

not want her children to miss any experience with their parents that had important impact on children's development.

*If I want to have a child one day, I definitely want it to be from someone who is not like my father. I want my child to have two parents. It does not mean that my mother is a bad mother or she did something wrong, but I think childhood and adolescence involve sharing with two parents and it's the significant part of these developmental periods. I want my children to experience this. I do not want my children to become upset when they see a father and a daughter playing in a park. (P10)*

Three participants who had described their fathers aimless or lazy preferred to have hardworking and ambitious partners. One of them had mentioned that her mother had the same sensitivity and expectation from her daughter's partner.

*I was saying this when I was little too: I definitely cannot be with a lazy person. The person who wants to have a romantic relationship with me should be hardworking. I do not mean it thinking about his career. My boyfriend has a promising future but he could not settle his life so far. I should know that that the person puts effort into it and works for it. We may be fired or we may lose everything, one day but I should know that this person is a go-getter. (P8)*

A common experience is that participants described their current partners as having qualities opposite from their fathers. One participant described a preference towards introverted partners due to her father's outgoing personality.

*My current partner is nothing like my father. I think I chose him intentionally. I realize it now clearly. He made me avoid extroverted and social people. I do not find these people attractive. I always like calm and introvert people. My father influences my partner preference. (P3)*

While describing expectations from partners, three participants stated that they preferred to be with older people. They expected for older partners to be more mature. According to these participants, older people could take care of them and support them more compared to their peers. One participant associated her preference towards older people with absence of authority figure and absence of a father figure in her life.

*All my partners have been older than me. The reason may be the absence of my father. For example, my current boyfriend is twelve years older than me. My previous boyfriend was nine years older than me and another one was seven years older than me. I generally like older men. I do not think that I specifically choose them but there can be reasons for this tendency. My peers always seem a little childish for me. (P7)*

Two participants had sensitivity about their partners' behaviours towards women. They had preference towards partners who got along with their mothers. For one participant, her partner's attitude towards women predicted that person's trustworthiness and reliability in relationship.

*I cannot stand men who misbehave to their mothers. It's the limit that shouldn't be crossed. Mothers are important. I was always fond of my mother. (P10)*

*I give importance to men's behaviours towards their mothers and women in general. In romantic relationships, affection fades away over time. You respect your partner, you make a life together, so you shouldn't let him down. A man's behaviour to his mother and his relationship with his mother shows whether that person lets me down or not. (P8)*

Loyalty and trust were highlighted by nearly half of the participants as an important aspect of romantic relationships. For three participants, being trustworthy is a significant quality in a partner. It could be observed that trust means a partner

whom one can rely on. Moreover, one participant expressed her fear of abandonment. She engaged in romantic relationships with loyal partners. She acknowledged that she preferred committed partners to avoid the possibility of being abandoned.

*I have phobia or maybe fear of abandonment. For that reason, it's important for a person to be loyal. I do not choose them intentionally to be honest. When I flirt with someone or when I feel attached to someone, this tendency does not surface consciously but when I think about my past long-term relationships, I realized that all my previous partners were loyal. They were not problematic. I had casual relationships with unfaithful or problematic people but nothing more. (P10)*

*I like tall men. Tall men seem more trustworthy to me. I do not have a specific preference towards my partners' physical qualities but I want it to be a person whom I can trust. (P9)*

Three participants attached importance to compassion in romantic relationships. They had expectations for their partners to be compassionate. Two of them acknowledged that their preference could be related to absence of their fathers.

*I expect my partner to be compassionate and fatherly. Compassion is really important for me. I'm not sure if it is important due to absence of my father but it is important. Maybe the reason is my father. (P8)*

*I realized that I always expect my partners to be compassionate. Even though I do not talk too much about my family issues, I expect them to help me regulate my emotions with their words or behaviours and give emotional support to me when I talk about my adverse childhood memories. I had certain expectations from them in terms of their reactions to my experiences. (P4)*

Three participants showed preference towards avoidant people. One of them explained that being with avoidant people gave her a sense of conquest. She stated that having romantic relationships with avoidant people and having an option to leave an avoidant person made her feel victory in the relationship. She highlighted the link between her feelings related to avoidant people and her father's choice to be not present in her life. Apart from that, two explained that they were attracted to people who got attached too easily. One of these participants also elaborated that her partners generally became more prone to develop addictions. Overall, their common experience included two edges: having 'too close' or 'too distant' partners.

*I know that I prefer people with avoidant attachment style or people who stick to me and do not leave me. (P10)*

*I realize that I always like avoidant men. I have never liked securely attached men. I always chose avoidant ones. My current partner is not avoidant. He is my first... My partners have a tendency to be addicted to something. One of my ex-partners was a drug addict and another one was an alcohol addict. He was not alcoholic but he mentioned that her father was alcoholic and he was consuming too much alcohol too. He might have been alcoholic. I have attracted people who had a higher risk of becoming addicted. (P1)*

Two participants explained that they felt closer to people with similar experiences and they could easily get attached to people who had family conflicts. One of them mentioned that she desired to care for her partners. She associated her tendency to be with people with problematic families with lack of observation of her parents' romantic relationship.

*Even though I had a good relationship with my mother, not able to observe my mother's romantic relationship with her partner affected me and I always attract people with problematic families. I can accept that. Having family issues is their common qualities. I think about it. I cannot be sure*

*about the reason but I know that even though I had a good relationship with my mother, other parent's absence in the household affected me. I realized that I can bond with people with similar experiences or even with more problems faster. Sometimes I hadn't known that they had adverse experiences, but after I learned that, I started to have a desire to care for them and to look after them. (P1)*

In addition to preference towards people with certain character traits, participants described certain behaviours they expected from their partners. Involvement was the most salient expectation of participants in their romantic relationships. One participant highlighted the importance of frequent interaction in romantic relationships. She had expectations for her partner to call her frequently. For her, lack of frequent connection made her feel doubt about her partners' emotional sincerity.

*For me, my partner should call me few times in a day. I'm obsessed with it. I think that if he does not call, then he does not miss me. (P9)*

Participants expected for their partners to be involved in problem solving processes. They desired to be emotionally supported by their partners, when they were in need. Furthermore, one participant gave importance to her partner's curiosity towards her life and her emotions, as it reflected her partner's involvement in their relationship.

*I expect for my partner to be curious about my life and to solve my problems with me. (P2)*

*I do not expect my partner to help me financially or share responsibilities with me. I expect him to stand by me when I have emotional problems. I expect him to offer solutions to my problems. (P4)*

One participant was sensitive about mutual emotional involvement in romantic relationships and highlighted the inconvenience of one-sided relationships.

*I think everything should be mutual. I do not like platonic relationships. As long as someone gets close to me, I can get close to him. As long as I let someone come close to me, he can come to me. I believe that, at least in romantic relationships. (P1)*

Some participants expected to be their partners' priority. They wanted to feel their partners' devotion in their relationships. They stated that they made their relationships a priority as well. Along the lines of this expectation, two participants described their needs to be reassured that they were being loved more in their romantic relationships. One participant acknowledged the connection between her expectation and growing up apart from her father.

*I should be loved more by my partner in my romantic relationship. I think it might be related to my father. I should know that I'm my partner's top priority. (P8)*

*I'm attracted to men who could express their love, make sacrifices, and accommodate my desires, more. He should make me his priority. For example, I make him my priority. It's a matter of priorities. If his family is his first in order of preference, I should be placed second. He should make sacrifices. (P9)*

Another participant pointed out that being loved more helped her feel emotionally safe in romantic relationships. She preferred to be loved rather than feel love to ensure not to be abandoned by her partner. For her, other aspects of romantic relationships, such as passion, could be renounced for the sake of feeling trust towards a partner.

*I know that this person loves me more than I love him. It gives me sense of trust. Maybe I do not feel very excited about him and I might feel more passion towards another person but it's a 'wild card'. I may be abandoned by a partner I love but I know that I become the one who will abandon when I'm with a man who loves me. I had had this kind of preference, I was not aware of that thought pattern. (P10)*

#### **3.3.4.5. The Effect of Father Absence on the Nature of Romantic Relationship**

All participants had a self-awareness regarding the effect of father absence on their romantic relationships. It was notable that their views of romantic relationships and relationship dynamics were influenced by father absence. In the participants' accounts, the absence of paternal love and inconsistent availability of fathers were most salient aspects of father absence that had impact on participants' romantic relationship experiences.

Three participants admitted that they got attached to their partners quickly. They highlighted their needs of being loved and being in a romantic relationship. They made connection between their desire to feel their partners' love constantly and their experience of growing up apart from their fathers. One participant claimed that she might have tried to compensate the absence of a male figure's love with her partners. Another participant mentioned that if her father had been with her, she might not have been in a romantic relationship for a long time. She had doubts about her desire to maintain long-term romantic relationship. She thought that she sacrificed more to stay in a romantic relationship.

*I have a long-term romantic relationship. Maybe, I maintained this relationship because of the attachment deficit. I'm twenty-five years old and I have had relationships since I was sixteen. I have never been single. Maybe I have attachment deficit or lack of love or lack of a male figure. I think my*

*long-term relationship is related to these experiences. I cannot say the specific reason, I do not know. Since I was a child, I have always had a boyfriend. I know that sometimes I struggled too much in my relationships and I made sacrifices to continue the relationship. Maybe I do not want to break up, because I do not want to be alone... If I had a father with me, maybe I would have thought about romantic relationships differently or I hadn't stayed with my partner so long. Maybe my father would have been enough for me. (P5)*

It was observed that while describing the effect of father absence on their romantic relationships, participants got emotional, had pauses, and laughed nervously. One participant also verbalized that it was difficult to talk about this topic. It was notable that participants had struggle to admit that their romantic relationships were influenced by their relationships with their fathers.

*It is hard to accept it... Well... If I should be really honest with you, I think I got addicted to be loved. I have a need to be loved so much. I cannot be satisfied. I should be satisfied at some point. Not everybody can love me or hug me. I should be happy at some point, there should be enough love for me. As if no degree of love can satisfy me or maybe I just need more. I desire to be loved constantly. When he does not call me for a couple hours, I feel terrible. I think that he does not love me. (P9)*

*Maybe my expectation from my partners to express their love could be related to growing up apart from my father. There was not a male figure in my life. I could not bond with my older brother either. Since I could not receive love from men, maybe I try to fill this void with my partners. (P7)*

Beside participants' statements regarding compensating father absence with the help of romantic relationships, one participant explained that she expected to heal the pain of parental divorce with the support of her partners.

*I realized that I have wounds related to absence of my father and my parents' divorce. I have been expecting for my partners to fill my emotional void. (P4)*

One participant had multiple non-committed romantic experiences concurrently. She had shared that she had low esteem due to lack of her father's acknowledgment of her negative emotions. She mentioned that she engaged in multiple short-term romantic relationships to ensure her self-value. Furthermore, she highlighted the emotional difficulty of being with multiple partners at the same period.

*When I noticed my pattern, I tried to change it but as I love to cause attention, sometimes I had multiple flirts at the same time. They were not committed relationships. I tried to feel that there was nothing wrong with me with the help of those relationships. It was very tiring in many respects, especially emotionally. I think, I dealt with that pattern after noticing it. I hope I could overcome that. (P10)*

One participant shared her unhealthy romantic relationship experiences and difficult break ups and associated them with the lack of opportunity to observe her parents' marital relationship. She mentioned that as she could not observe healthy romantic relationship in household, she had difficulty to tolerate some of her partners' behaviours.

*I have not lived with both of my parents. I have not observed my parents' happy romantic relationships. I did not have friends with healthy romantic relationships. I had a lot of romantic relationships. I had both short-term and long-term relationships. However, I have not maintained a happy relationship. In general, I have not experienced break ups with grace. Since I do not know about these examples, my tolerance level was too low in my romantic relationships. (P1)*

One participant acknowledged that her relationship dynamic with her father affected her sexual experiences with her partner. She mentioned that she has been going to therapy to overcome her vaginismus problem. It was a difficult topic for her to share and she cried while telling her experience. She had trust issues with her father which she considered as the reason of her negative experiences in her sexual life.

*I have been having treatment for vaginismus. I think my father is the reason. I could not trust him for years and because of my trust problems now I struggle with vaginismus. (P6)*

The process of break up was another aspect of romantic relationship experiences, which was affected by father absence. Three participants had a tendency to break up easily. One of them stated that she could not maintain connection with her partners for a long time. Two of them accepted that they may have caused emotional insecurity for their partners in their romantic relationships.

*I think that if we break up, it won't be a problem for me. I become upset but if I have problems in my relationship, I can break up easily. I think it's related to my family dynamic. I think my behaviours are affected by my father. I actually think about my behaviours. I know that my partner sees me as if I can break up in any moment. I break his trust. (P8)*

One participant acknowledged that she had avoidant attitude in her relationships. She claimed that lack of observation of stable romantic relationships made her have an unhealthy view of romantic relationships. She always made a break-up plan when she engaged in romantic relationship, as she believed that all romantic relationships would end one day. She explained that she had some partners who would like to marry her but she never had a future plan like their partners had. She was aware that her mentality would be upsetting for her partners.

*I think I could not observe many stable romantic relationships in my family. I think that it affected me... I think I have a distorted view of romantic relationships... I always think that my relationships will end. Some of my partners had been thinking differently from me. I had multiple partners who wanted to marry me. I think I'm avoidant. I always have an escape plan. I do not act upon them but they are present in my mind. If I marry my current partner, I will have a plan about divorce process and the possible consequences divorce. I will think about how I continue my life, if our relationship ends. For some of my partners, it was a devastating. For that reason, I do not talk about it with my partners. (P10)*

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION**

The present study explored women's experience of growing up apart from their fathers due to parental divorce and the reflection of their experiences on their romantic relationships. Participants of this study were young heterosexual women (age range: 23-27), living in Turkey, whose parents divorced in their first five years of life. The nature of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationships, romantic relationship dynamics with their current partners, perceived advantages and disadvantages of growing up apart from fathers, and how women gave meaning to their experiences of parental divorce and father absence both as children and as adults were explored. Themes that were identified through the analysis were organized under four categories. The first category, father-daughter relationship, includes three sub-categories: closeness in father-daughter relationship, communication in father daughter relationship, and expectations from father. The second category, mother-daughter relationship, presents two sub-categories: closeness in mother-daughter relationship and communication in mother-daughter relationship. The third category, parental divorce and separation from father, involves two sub-categories: communication about parental divorce, the effect of father absence. The last category, experience of romantic relationship, includes five themes: feeling close with partner, communication challenges in romantic relationship, conflict resolution in the romantic relationship, the impact of the father on daughter's partner preference, and the effect of father absence on the nature of romantic relationship.

Individuals' attitudes and behaviours in their romantic relationships reflect their attachment needs (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Attachment anxiety is correlated with fear of abandonment and emotional insecurity. People who have anxious attachment may preoccupy with their romantic relationships and want to reassure the security of their relationship (Shaver & Hazan, 1993). On the other hand, people with avoidant attachment try to avoid closeness to cope with their insecurities. They may have negative expectations towards their romantic relationships. Consistent

with these findings, participants described behavioural tendencies related to anxious or avoidant attachment styles in romantic relationships which will also be further discussed. Moreover, research has indicated that children from divorced families may tend to develop insecure attachment styles in their relationships with their partners (Christiani, 2003; Sprecher et al., 1998; Summers et al., 1998). In addition to in-depth semi-structured interviews, Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR-R) was used to understand participants’ anxious and avoidant attitudes in romantic relationships. Because of the small sample size, scores were analysed depending on participants’ narratives. It was found that some participants’ higher anxiety and avoidance scores were compatible with their anxious and avoidant attitudes and behaviours in their romantic relationships. Nevertheless, most of the participants presented richer narratives including anxious and avoidant coping strategies compared to their scores on ECR-R. The disparity between participant’s narratives and lower scores on ECR-R could be a result of the nature of questions on self-report scales, which demanded direct answers for that specific topic. The questions on self-report scales like ECR-R could trigger participants’ defenses and participants may want to create a socially desirable self-presentation that affects their answers (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007).

In this section, the results based on the narratives of ten women will be further discussed in consideration of similarities and differences among experiences and connections within participants’ own discourse. The results of the current study will also be discussed in the context of the previous literature.

#### **4.1. FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP**

When asked to describe their fathers with three adjectives, all participants, except one, used negative adjectives such as liar, irresponsible, lazy, and thoughtless. It was the complete opposite of their description of mothers. It was observed that they split positive and negative characteristic traits between mothers and fathers. Maybe, it was easier to rationalize mothers’ negative behaviours and find excuses for their mothers’ motives as they were the primary and only parent in

daughters' lives. In addition to rationalization, using devaluation as a defense mechanism might have helped them deal with anxieties caused by the early father-daughter separation. Considering the closer mother-daughter bond that was described by participants, it might have been easier to exclude the fathers and make negative attributions about them. Children may try to deal with the anxiety caused by high interparental conflict and parental separation by using splitting, which means holding strongly negative opinions for one parent and strongly positive opinions for another. Splitting may serve to balance emotions towards the two parents and reduce uncertainty (Bernet et al., 2018). Despite the mostly positive maternal discourse about the fathers, the difference in their acceptance and rejection of the two parents was quite salient. Bernet et al. (2018) claimed that even though children may avoid contact with their parents and use splitting due to parental alienation, their rejection of a parent and the mechanism of splitting could be caused by lack of interaction with that parent due to justifiable reasons (e.g. abuse and neglect). For that reason, underlying reasons of children's attitudes and behaviours towards less preferred parents should be explored in detail.

Previous research has shown that not many children have an opportunity to maintain a good relationship with their fathers after their parents' divorce because of decreased paternal engagement (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). All participants in the present study described a negative course of relationship with their fathers and for many of them, father-daughter relationship was poor since the beginning. For some participants, lack of early connection with their fathers made it difficult to establish a father-daughter relationship in adulthood. One participant described a lack of connection and feeling of emptiness towards her father, which, in her words, was worse than feeling hostile towards him. Experiences like this pointed clearly to the importance of father involvement during daughters' early childhood period and the effect of this early bond on later father-daughter relationships.

Behaviour consistency is an important aspect of relationship stability (Ayres, 1983; Duck, 1988). In this study, all participants described impaired father-daughter relationships, devoid of routinized shared activities or behaviours. Only a few participants shared positive childhood memories with their fathers. However,

even among them, there was no single participant who defined a strong father-daughter relationship in adulthood. Poor interaction, decreased shared time with fathers, lack of emotional responsiveness, not communicating feelings and thoughts, relational problems, authoritative behaviours, and inappropriate expectations between fathers and daughters lead to relational damages, supporting previous research (Harach & Kuczynski, 2005). Studies have shown that father-daughter relationship could be repaired in dyadic relationship or in a social network. Creating shared moments, open communication, and expressing remorse and positive feelings may help fathers and daughters reduce conflicts. Relational repair can benefit daughters and fathers to maintain and improve the quality of their relationships (Harach & Kuczynski, 2005). As seen in their accounts, participants did not receive repair attempts from their fathers and ruptures in their relationship gradually increased. Many participants stated that they could not improve their relationships with their fathers as it was too late. The presence of effort to heal wounds may prevent unhealthy progress of the father-daughter relationship. It may also offer another perspective to daughters on conflict resolution and the possibility to compensate for negative events and feelings. It might be suggested that due to a lack of relational repair and unstable emotional, physical, and behavioural presence of fathers, many participants described themselves as vengeful in order to protect themselves against disappointment when their expectations were not met by their fathers. Moreover, the negative effect of father-daughter relationship on their self-evaluation could be related to the absence of such a repair effort.

Lack of involvement and effort was the most salient aspect of the negative course of father-daughter relationship. Participants shared that it became difficult to maintain the father-daughter bond since they became increasingly more aware of their fathers' lack of engagement in their lives as they grew up. Their experiences were consistent with Wallerstein and Corbin's (1989) findings that while younger daughters could have a positive father image in their minds, older daughters struggled to make positive attributions to their non-residential fathers as they had been disappointed and hurt many times. Shared effort in father-daughter relationship predicts daughters' relationship satisfaction. Lack of paternal effort

makes daughters feel abandoned and emotionally distant from their fathers, and makes it difficult to respect them (Guardia et al., 2014). This was the case in this study as well. Many participants claimed that regardless of their fathers' expressions of positive affection and presents, they did not feel loved by them and they did not respect them as the fathers did not put effort to improve their relationships.

Several studies demonstrated decreased contact frequency and lower involvement in father-child relationship after divorce (Lamb, 1999 & Bastaist et al., 2012) which is sometimes caused by several changes in fathers' lives (e.g. new marriage or new child) (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Flinn et al., 1999, Stephens, 1996). Furthermore, fathers may have perceptions that their ex-wives are successful parents who fulfill their children's all expectations, which makes them feel unneeded (Babcock, 1989). Moreover, children's developmental stage is an important factor for father involvement. Studies showed that mothers are engaged in their children's lives more during the first few years (Russell & Russell, 1987). Consistent with the promises of attachment theory (Lamb, 1976a, 1976b), fathers become more influential in their children's lives over time (Roggman et al., 2002). In this study, participants separated from their fathers, when they were under the age of five. For fathers, it could have been a challenge to bond with their daughters during the first few months or years of their daughters' lives, as their needs were met mostly by mothers. Because there was not a familiar bond that had been established in the first place, both connecting with their daughters and engaging in their lives after separation could have been more difficult for them. For that reason, one of the underlying reasons of daughters' statements about poor quality of father-daughter relationship, including the sense of not knowing their fathers and not being known by them, could be related to the amount of time they spent together in the same household which was less than three years for most of the participants.

Participants described inconsistent father-daughter contact both in childhood and in adulthood. It was observed that during childhood, father-daughter interaction was relatively routinized as they saw each other during summer holidays, organized with the contribution of their mothers. However, by

adolescence, a noticeable decline in contact frequency was described. Both changes in fathers' lives and increased conflicts between fathers and daughters resulted in the decrease despite participants' increased financial and emotional needs from their fathers over time. As seen in participants' accounts, unpredictable availability of fathers created uncertainty in participants' lives. One participant struggled to give meaning to her experience, as she could not be sure if her father was in her life or if he had left her many years back. She emphasized that fluctuations in both the quality and the frequency of father-daughter contact affected her self-confidence negatively. In parallel to her narrative, her attachment anxiety score in ECR-R was one of the highest scores among participants. Her experience was meaningful as attachment anxiety is correlated with inconsistent parental care and predicts lower self-esteem among children (Fitton, 2012). Considering that, inconsistent availability of fathers might be related to many participants' statements about having low self-esteem, even though, only one of them mentioned it overtly during interviews.

Previous research has also shown that inconsistent presence of fathers made daughters think that their fathers were not curious about their lives (East et al., 2007; Guardia et al., 2014). In this study, participants thought that their fathers were not interested in their lives, as they did not ask questions about their experiences and feelings. Consistent with Punyanunt-Carter's (2008) findings, participants described limited and superficial communication with their fathers. Participants neither received emotional support from their fathers nor communicated their feelings with them. When participants were asked what they wanted to learn from their fathers about romantic relationships, seven out of ten rejected learning something from their fathers, as different from related previous findings (Moore, 2016). Many of them saw their fathers as not capable of giving advice to them and perceived them as unsuccessful fathers and unsuccessful husbands.

It was noteworthy that participants did not share their feelings and major issues in their lives with their fathers and many of them did not argue with their fathers either. Even though they were angry with their fathers for several reasons, they preferred not to confront these feelings with them. Many participants did not

believe that any problem could be solved and avoided arguing with their fathers. One participant stated that her relationship with her father was not deep enough to have conflict. Another participant admitted that she did not prefer to share the issues her father would not approve of. Participants may not be perceiving their fathers as holding figures who can carry their negative emotions and help conflict resolution process. For that reason, by holding their negative emotions private, they may want to avoid losing the father-daughter connection, even though it was not satisfactory. Participants' experience revealed that the absence of conflicts in father-daughter relationships may not always predict a stronger bond and better communication between them.

Participants described their expectations from their fathers and the negative effects of unfulfilled expectations on their lives. Research has shown that balanced expectations in father-daughter relationships increase daughters' relationship satisfaction (Miller, 2010). Moreover, daughters may feel rejected when their fathers do not keep their promises (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). All participants expressed their dissatisfaction with unmet expectations and the gap between expectations and reality was salient. According to participants' accounts, their expectations about fathers' emotional and financial involvement were not met. None of the participants mentioned repair attempts for their recurrent unmet expectations, which resulted in disappointment, anger, and sadness in them. Hence, they withdrew their expectations from their fathers and their involvement in father-daughter relationship decreased over time. Daughters may try to protect themselves from possible disappointment by not creating any expectations from their fathers. One participant stated that she did not have any expectations from her father as she did not know what daughters may expect from their fathers. Her experience demonstrated how father absence could affect daughters' view of fatherhood.

#### **4.2. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP**

During interviews, participants were asked to describe their mothers with three adjectives. All participants used positive adjectives such as strong, go-getter,

compassionate, and altruistic, and most appeared to idealize them. They made attributions about their mothers' resilience during the post-divorces process and also their emotional sensitivity and responsiveness towards them. Besides, some participants described everything about their mothers as 'perfect'. In contrast to their fathers, they did not describe expectations that were not fulfilled by their mothers. Nearly all participants highlighted their appreciation of their mothers considering the difficulties they had faced as single mothers. It was observed that participants struggled with making any negative attributions about their mothers. For instance, after using an adjective that might be perceived as negative such as 'dominant', they immediately explained that their mothers had to be dominant to provide discipline in the household as a single parent. Participants' appreciations towards their mothers were expected due to previous findings (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). If anything, one participant described her sorrow about not having enough moments with her mother due to her mother's long work hours.

All participants were satisfied with their current relationships with their mothers. As seen in previous studies, mother-daughter relationship after parental divorce was found to be stronger than father-daughter relationships (Fine et al., 1983; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). The course of mother-daughter relationship was described as relatively stable. Four participants mentioned that they had conflicts with their mothers during adolescence which was not surprising considering changing communication patterns between parents and children during this period (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Participants highlighted their mothers' effort to be involved in their lives by giving examples from various childhood memories and their mothers' emotional and financial support. On the contrary, lack of effort was the most salient issue participants discussed while describing the father-daughter relationship. Research showed that as daughters become older, they may feel sorrow and guilt while engaging in romantic relationships (Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). They may feel that mother-daughter team will be broken due to their new partners. Participants did not mention this kind of concern about their mothers. However, one participant felt remorse for not supporting her mother enough, as she did not live with her mother. Moreover, many participants worried about their

mothers' loneliness and psychological and physical well-being. The burden of individuation while maintaining a close mother-daughter relationship appeared in several participants' narratives.

In line with previous findings (Cooney, 1994; Mustonen et al., 2011), nearly all participants identified with some of their mothers' qualities, sense of strength being the most dominant feature. They expressed that they believed in themselves and their capabilities thanks to their mothers. Moreover, participants were encouraged by their mothers' statements ("You are my daughter, you should be strong."). Being hardworking and perfectionism were some other qualities participants seemed as being alike with their mothers. While some qualities could be protective for daughters, it was observed that these traits reflected on their romantic relationship dynamics in more challenging ways. Participants described a need of being in control in romantic relationships and playing an instructive role as a partner. One participant had difficulties in being taken care of by her partner due to her desire to do everything by herself. Along with the effect of father absence, identification with mothers' 'always in action' side seemed to impact participants' role in their romantic relationships.

Participants presented a wide range of content in mother-daughter communication. Their mothers were involved in problem-solving processes and they were generally able to solve conflicts. Non-verbal behaviors and mutual positive emotion expressions such as hugging or preparing a meal were used to sustain a positive relationship. It was seen that being in the same household benefitted mothers and daughters to resolve their conflicts. Research has indicated that besides the quality of verbal expressions, mutual gestures, physical attitudes, facial expressions, and movement play a role in problem-solving process (Laursen & Collins, 2004). Since nearly all participants were living in different cities from their fathers and they generally maintained their contact with each other via phone calls, it could be suggested that non-residential fathers did not have the opportunity to fix the problems within a face-to-face interaction. They had to find other ways to express their affections.

### **4.3. PARENTAL DIVORCE AND SEPARATION FROM FATHER**

Of the ten participants, three described high interparental conflict including domestic and sexual violence and psychological abuse. They witnessed their parents' fights and their fathers' abusive behaviours. These three participants' anxiety scores in ECR-R presented the highest for the anxiety dimension among all participants. This result was consistent with findings of several studies that indicated a positive correlation between interparental conflict and distress among children (Amato et al., 1995; Jekielek, 1998; Long et al., 1988). One of the participants expressed that her older siblings suffered more as they shared more time with their father in the same household. Research has revealed that parental divorce may benefit some children as it offers an opportunity to move from stressful and harmful environments and grow in a more stable and healthy household (Booth & Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Moreover, in line with previous findings related to the harmful effects of interparental conflict on father-child attachment (Belsky, 1996; Hetherington, 2003), participants who observed interparental conflict, expressed that they could not get closer to their fathers and they could not forget what they had done.

The content of parental disclosures about divorce affects daughters' reactions and relationships with their parents (Koerner et al., 2002). Researchers have indicated that daughters' stress levels may be heightened when their mothers share their problems (e.g. financial and interparental) with them. In accordance with these findings, participants highlighted their displeasure about learning details of interparental conflicts. Two participants explained that even though their mothers did not prefer to talk about the issues, other family members and family friends were willing to tell details, which traumatized them. Another participant criticized her mother's detailed disclosures about her hostility towards her ex-spouse. She stated that her mother's sharing caused her to hold a grudge against her father. She also criticized her mother as her mother told her that she was divorced because the participant wanted her to leave her father. Sometimes children may be more involved in the divorce process. Their encouragement of separation can make their

parents see them as confidants (Westberg et al., 2002). In Westberg et al.'s (2002) study, when children were asked their experience of playing an effective role in the divorce process, they described their experience as too much responsibility for a child, similar to the experience of this participant. As research has demonstrated, deeper sharing between mothers and daughters may not predict a closer relationship between them. Besides the effect of the communication on daughters' perception of their parents, daughters may develop a tendency to care for their mothers due to this sharing (Koerner et al., 2002). One of the participants, whose mother communicated about financial difficulties with her daughter, had constant concerns about her financial position and had a fear of being a burden for her mother, which made her start to work earlier than her peers. On the other hand, research has shown that children who were included in family issues by their parents may develop a sense of maturity and have high self-confidence (Galambos & Ehrenberg, 1997). In the present study, participants described a sense of self-capability; however, they also highlighted their dissatisfaction with the necessity of taking care of themselves more than necessary, as the circumstances required them to grow up early.

Children may not always be informed by their parents about divorce (Hingst, 1981; Waldron et al., 1986). In one study, it was found that one-in-three children were uninformed about their parents' divorce (Jacobson, 1978). Divorce is generally explained by one of the parents, mainly by mothers, instead of being discussed among the whole family (Westberg et al., 2002). In this study, a large number of participants mentioned that parental divorce was not explained by their parents. They did not remember when their parents told them about divorce and they could not create a narrative about the first explanation. Moreover, some participants reported that divorce was not discussed in family and they did not ask questions about divorce to their parents either. These participants struggled to give meaning to their parents' divorce including the changes in their lives during post-divorce process. One participant told that even though she moved to another city with her mother and separated from her father, she could not fully understand the change in her life. Participants stated that they started to talk about divorce when they reached adolescence; however, even then, they preferred to talk about it with

only their mothers. Depending on the age of children at the time of divorce, the length of time it took for them to give meaning to their experience may take longer. For that reason, parents should explain the changes in their lives to help their children integrate new information not only during divorce but also after that process. This may help children's adjustment to parental divorce and have a positive effect on the course of the parent-child relationships (Thomas et al., 1995). Ducibella (1995) found that younger children at the time of divorce had higher fear of abandonment. Older children could give meaning to their experiences better, may rely on established attachment with their parents, and might be familiar to the divorce process due to their friends' similar experiences. However, for younger children, parents are the ones who create meaning for their experience and provide emotional safety. Children from divorced families have reported that open communication about separation helped them to understand their experience and develop a more optimistic view of romantic relationships; however, unclear information from parents make them feel confused (Morrison et al., 2017). In this study, it was found that many participants had a sense of insecurity and some participants had trust issues, which could have been triggered by the uncertainty they experienced during the divorce process. Overall, to clarify children's confused minds and to support them to create meaning for their experiences, communicating about parental divorce was found to be protective for children.

Existing literature includes discussion of the effect of parental relationship and mothers' beliefs on the father-child relationship (Solomon & George, 1999; Yu et al., 2010). Mothers' positive attitudes improve father-child connection and increase father involvement in children's lives (Arendell, 1992). In this study, all except one participant acknowledged the role of their mothers' positive attitudes and effort to arrange father-daughter interaction on maintaining their relationships with their father. Even though their mothers had a positive role in shaping their interaction with their fathers during their childhood, mothers' influence declined over time and they stayed out of the father-daughter relationship as their daughters grow up. According to participants, fathers and not the mothers were responsible for the negative course of the father-daughter relationship. Some participants

thought that their mothers' encouragement helped them see their fathers more frequently but these interactions did not predict the quality of the father-daughter communication. Participants' description of maternal encouragement of father involvement could be due to the idealization of the mother figure, which leaves remaining questions as to whether fathers disappeared from their daughters lives even in the presence of mothers' genuine support for this interaction, or whether interparental conflicts and mothers' negative attributions about the fathers interfered with the process.

Research has shown that mothers who had a high conflict with their ex-spouses may not encourage their daughters to see fathers and may not be able to regulate their children's stress sufficiently (Frank, 2007). Gardner (1992) proposed the 'parental alienation syndrome' to explain how parents' own relationship problems may lead to a disruptive impact on children's relationship with their parents. When one parent's intention to estrange his or her child from another parent is reinforced by estranged parent's withdrawal of effort to be involved in his or her child's life, the parent-child connection might break off. One participant thought that her mother wanted her to hate her father. Her tendency to defend her father made her mother angry, reminding her father's negative behaviours towards her. Consistent with previous findings, this participant's mother could not calm her daughter due to her own hostility and relational issues with her ex-spouse. However, the participant stated that she was idealized her father in her childhood, which helped her protect a father figure in her mind, despite her mother's resistance to father involvement.

Mothers may become very influential on their children's perception of their fathers. Children may feel that they should side with one of their parents and due to a sense of loyalty towards their residential mothers, they may not prefer to get close with their fathers (Baker, 2006). As they share more time with their mothers and identify themselves with them, especially daughters may feel like they are cheating their mother when they pursue a good relationship with their fathers, (Cooney, 1994). In this study, both in childhood and adulthood years, participants tended to check their mothers' feelings about the father-daughter relationship and reassure

their mothers' support for the interaction. One participant stated that she could not get close with her father, since it would not be fair to her mother considering the struggles she faced for so many years.

One study showed that in single-mother families, children's sense of autonomy was higher compared to children from intact families or step-father families (Amato, 1997). Lack of father involvement in children's decision-making process and low maternal and paternal control may result in greater autonomy. Children from single-mother families reported that they could make decisions (e.g. going out with friends) by themselves easier than children from other families. Similar to Amato's (1997) findings, in the current research, participants described the sense of freedom in decision making, which was encouraged by their mothers' respectful attitudes towards their boundaries. Some participants said that their mothers prioritized their daughters' desires and gave permission to them to make their own choices. On the other hand, according to the participants, having autonomy and freedom as a fatherless girl has its cost. Both participants and their mothers had concerns about other people's attitudes towards them. Participants thought that people could have a misleading perception of them when they were more sociable than their peers or laughed louder than the other girls. People may have thought that their mothers could not discipline them enough. While participants presented perceived advantages of not having a male figure in the household, feeling compelled to be careful about their behaviours as a fatherless girl and a single mother due to society's attitudes was a burden. Some participants admitted that they had to change some of their manners and behaviors as they did not want to attract attention from other people. They became calmer and quieter women as they had concerns about people's thoughts about their families.

Father absence can result in financial and emotional difficulties for some children, making them vulnerable to face emotional and social problems (Tallman et al., 1993). Many participants mentioned that they did not receive financial support from their fathers. While for some of them, it was a disadvantage that made them enter work life earlier, for others it meant limitations in their desires and plans. The common aspect of these experiences was greater consideration of the financial

consequences of their actions. As mentioned before, father absence could be correlated with children's sense of maturity and self-reliance. Considering the financial challenges participants faced, the lack of financial support of their fathers might have placed certain demands on them and made them think about their decisions in more detail, which caused having a sense of maturity earlier than their peers.

The quality of the father-daughter relationship and the presence of a father in daughter's life have been shown to be important predictors of daughters' self-esteem level (Byrd-Craven et al., 2012; Lopez & Corona, 2012). The poorer father-daughter relationship is correlated with negative self-concept in daughters (Morrison et. al., 2017). Fathers' psychological support, emotional responsiveness, and affirmations provide daughters emotional safety which lead them to accept and trust themselves (Bowlby, 1985; Richards et al., 1991; Scheffler & Naus, 1999). Many participants in this study admitted that their self-esteem was affected due to unfulfilled expectations, fathers' low and inconsistent involvement in their lives, and unpredictability of fathers' emotional and physical availability. They thought that if their fathers had established healthy relationships with them, they would have made braver decisions in their lives with their fathers' support. Some participants had difficulty in becoming active in social interactions with people and establishing friendships.

Partners' self-esteem was found to be related to romantic relationship quality (Barelds, 2005). Furthermore, as fathers are the primary male figures in daughters' lives, daughters' sense of self-worth as a woman and beliefs about themselves as romantic partners are shaped in the father-daughter relationship (Guardia et al., 2014). In this study, one participant thought that she was unworthy of being loved as her father did not acknowledge her feelings and he preferred to stay out of her life. She had to deal with these emotional difficulties for a long time. To improve her low self-worth, she had multiple non-committal romantic partners concurrently, which caused emotional exhaustion. Her feelings were consistent with Faber and Wittenborn's (2010) findings that children may feel responsible for the absence of their fathers and may believe that their fathers abandoned them as

there is something wrong with them. Overall, the effect of father absence and fathers' inconsistent emotional and physical presence on daughters' self-esteem were revealed in different aspects of participants' lives.

After divorce, fathers' roles in their children's lives may change and fathers may mostly prefer to be a part of positive moments of their children's lives (Stewart, 1999). Similarly, in this study, participants mentioned that in their childhood, they saw their fathers as a man who sometimes gave them presents and picked them up while walking. It was observed that fathers were not support figures in the presence of problems in their adulthood either. In Munsch et al. 's (1995) study, children of non-residential fathers did not perceive their fathers as influential figures in their lives and did not prefer to consult them when they were in emotional need. Decreased availability of non-residential fathers due to physical distance and the presence of other male figures who compensate for lack of father support could be one of the explanations. In Munsch et al. 's (1995) study, children named alternative male figures while describing important male adults in their lives; however, children from intact families did not have these alternative figures. In this study; however, few participants named influential male figures such as uncles and step-fathers who supported them in the absence of their biological fathers. The majority of participants described their mothers as compensating support figures. They described their mothers as both their mothers and their fathers. According to participants' accounts, besides the presence of a supportive parent, perceiving their mothers as strong figures strengthened their sense of self-sufficiency as a woman.

#### **4.4. EXPERIENCE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP**

Several studies have demonstrated the positive correlation between the nature of father-daughter relationship and the quality of daughters' romantic relationships (Endres, 1997). The sense of emotional safety and fathers' availability and involvement predict daughters' satisfaction and comfort level for closeness with their partners in romantic relationships (Baggett et al., 2015; Moore, 2016). Daughters who have poor relationships with their fathers may be prone to have

unsatisfying romantic relationships and may struggle to engage in intimate relationships with men (Haaz et al., 2014). Moreover, women with absent fathers may have difficulty in maintaining romantic relationships (Guardia et al., 2014). In the present study, despite the weak father-daughter relationship, participants did not describe any difficulty to approach men and be intimate with their partners. Almost all the participants felt close with their partners. The good parent-child relationship after parental divorce could help children to form positive beliefs about commitment and intimacy in romantic relationships, which weakens the anticipated negative effect on parental divorce on children's later romantic relationships. (Mustonen et al., 2011). Participants described healthy mother-daughter relationships, which they may have benefitted their later relationships, including romantic ones. Moreover, In Seiffge-Krenke et al.'s (2010) study with adolescents, they found that while the quality of mother-child relationship may predict the level of intimacy in children's romantic relationships, father-child relationship could be related to children's anxious attitudes and behaviours in their relationship. In this study, participants were not found to have difficulty in establishing romantic relationships, but the effect of parental divorce and father absence were revealed in the issues related to the maintenance and breakup process. For example, one participant expressed her sadness about her 'failed' relationships and wished to have been able to see her parents' romantic relationship so that she could maintain her relationship better and have respectful terminations.

Parents' new healthy romantic relationships and children's own romantic relationships were found to be helpful for children to reconstruct their beliefs and attitudes about romantic relationships (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998; Yu and Adler-Baeder, 2007). In this study, many participants were satisfied with their current romantic relationships and some of them expressed that the fact that their partners fulfilled their expectations helped them deal with the negative effect of father absence. Moreover, except for one, participants whose mothers remarried, described a good relationship with their step-fathers and acknowledged their support. One participant stated that she had a chance to observe her mother and her

step-father's relationship which helped her to become familiar with communication patterns in romantic relationships.

Reese-Weber and Kahn (2005) proposed that conflict resolution in romantic relationships was similar to the strategies used in non-residential father-children relationships. Moreover, communication style in mother-child, father-child, and parents' own relationship predicted how children cope with conflicts with their partners (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998; Story et al., 2004). In the present study, father absence played role in shaping some participants' communication styles. They admitted that their coping strategies with conflicts might have differed if they could have had a chance to observe their parents' relationship in the same household. Research demonstrates that children learn to resolve conflicts in family by communicating with their parents and observing their problem-solving strategies. Effective communication between parents predicts children's own communication style and satisfaction in their later romantic relationships (Bowman, 1990; Dumlao & Botta, 2000). Moreover, how daughters deal with their relational problems in their romantic relationships are predicted by the quality of father-daughter interaction, and healthy father-daughter communication is correlated with effective conflict resolution strategies (Freeman & Almond, 2010; Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). According to some participants, their partners help solve problems; however, many of them preferred to deal with problems by themselves. Some participants did not believe the problems could be solved and they tried to lower their expectations, which was similar to their approach to problems in father-daughter relationship. One participant acknowledged the similarity between her father's and her partner's problem-solving strategies. She expected to have a relationship with her partner similar to that of her unsatisfying relationship with her father.

Most of the participants were able to share their emotions with their partners. However, for some participants, family-related issues were the most sensitive topic they did not talk about with their partners. Their hesitation to discuss family-related feelings was seen both in parent-child communication and in romantic relationships. Moreover, some participants were reluctant to share their

negative feelings with their partners because of their concern about their partners' perception of them. According to them, showing vulnerability may damage the strong self-image they created and may show them as weak. For another participant, sharing emotions was challenging due to her concern about receiving a superficial response from her partner. Participants' concerns about their partners' reaction to their emotions had similarities with their distrust of their fathers' emotional containment capacity.

Parental divorce has been found to be related to higher anxiety, and fear of rejection and abandonment in romantic relationship among children (Amato, 1996; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). In this study, one participant expressed her fear of abandonment and developed a preference towards loyal and committed partners to protect herself from being abandoned. Her experience was consistent with Morrison et al.'s (2017) findings that adult children of divorced parents admitted that they chose their partners selectively to not have similar experiences with their parents. On the other hand, the tendency to break up with partners was also found to be common among women with absent fathers (Aquilino, 1996; Krohn & Bogan, 2001). Researchers have suggested that this behavior serves as a coping mechanism against the possibility of abandonment. Two participants, in this study, stated that they could break up with their partners easily. One of them had always a breakup plan in her mind as she believed that every romantic relationship would end one day. She admitted that her parents' divorce and other divorced family members affected her attitude towards romantic relationships. Daughters who disconnect from their fathers may have difficulty in maintaining long-term romantic relationships (Moore, 2016). Consistent with this finding, one participant stated that she could not stay connected with her partner for a long time and she became the one who broke up generally. Overall, some participants described avoidant coping strategies to overcome their fears of a possible breakup, such as preparing themselves to break up and being likely the one who leaves the other as opposed to their previous experiences. This shows that identification with the aggressor was another defense some participants used to deal with their anxieties in addition to other mechanisms that were discussed above.

Some participants revealed other coping strategies to deal with the fear of abandonment and rejection. Studies have shown that women who did not have their fathers with them may tend to stay in relationship and put too much effort into their relationships as they feel emotionally insecure (Calvin, 1993; Scheffler & Naus, 1999). Two participants had a tendency to be with partners who attached to them too quickly. Moreover, some participants mentioned that they attached to their partners too quickly. They expressed their need to be loved and to be in a romantic relationship. One of them had tried to reassure her partners' emotions towards her by demanding frequent interaction from her partner. She would not feel loved by her partner if she were not interacting with him frequently. Another participant mentioned that she always had a boyfriend since she was a child and that she sacrificed more than necessary to stay in a relationship. These women's desire to stay in a relationship may make them sustain unhealthy romantic relationships (Jackson, 2010). The duration of romantic relationships may not predict their quality (Christiani, 2003). These participants thought that if their fathers were with them, they would not have a constant expectation to be loved by another male. Their desires represented attachment anxiety in romantic relationships and were consistent with their higher anxiety scores in ECR-R. From attachment theory perspective, individuals' attitudes and behaviours in their romantic relationships reflect their attachment needs (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Attachment anxiety is correlated with fear of abandonment and emotional insecurity. People who have anxious attachment may preoccupy with their romantic relationships and want to reassure the security of their relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). On the other hand, people with avoidant attachment try to avoid closeness to cope with their insecurities. They may have negative expectations towards their romantic relationships. Consistent with previous findings, participants described behavioural tendencies related to anxious or avoidant attachment styles in romantic relationships.

Women's perception of men and their expectations from their partners are affected by the nature of father-daughter relationship (Moore, 2016; Rostad et. al., 2014). In the present study, many participants described the effect of father-

daughter relationship and father absence on their partner preferences. Half of the participants acknowledged their preference towards partners with different characteristics from their fathers. The explanation of one participant regarding these expectations was related to her concern about experiencing the same difficulties in her marriage, as her mother had faced. Three participants who described their fathers as lazy had strong expectations from their partners to be hardworking people. According to one participant, determined and hardworking men would not let her down and they would be more capable of dealing with the problems. One of these participants stated that her mother wanted her to be with hardworking men as well. This points to the possibility of the mediating role of mother-daughter sharing about romantic relationships and mothers' comments on their daughter's partner choices on participants partner preference. Two participants attached importance to their partners' behaviours to women, particularly towards their mothers. They thought that it was an important criterion to understand their partners' trustworthiness. According to participants, their mothers had to put a lot of effort due to their fathers' irresponsible behaviours and lack of support. It might be suggested that participants tried to avoid facing similar problems by developing a preference towards men who had different qualities from their fathers.

Research has shown that women with absent fathers may tend to be with emotionally unavailable men or more mature partners (Brown, 2018). In this study, some participants had a preference towards avoidant men. One of them explained that being with an avoidant man and leaving him made her feel like she achieved victory. While describing conflict resolution with her father, she had mentioned that her father was an avoidant man who did not engage in problem-solving process and avoided discussing the issues. Her relationship dynamic with avoidant people was similar to her relationship with her father. However, this time, she becomes the one who does not prefer to stay with him. Three other participants preferred to engage in romantic relationship with older men. They expected to be cared by their partners and thought that older partners could support them more adequately and look after them better.

Trust and close involvement were the two salient issues that participants

emphasized while describing their expectations from their partners. Participants wanted their partners to be emotionally involved and dedicated in their relationships, to help conflict resolution in the presence of relational and personal problems. One participant stated that she tried to compensate for her adverse experiences related to pre- and post- divorce processes with the support of her partner. Considering participants' criticism of lack of paternal involvement and support in both their dyadic and parental relationship, their desire to have a balanced relationship with their partners was meaningful. Similarly, trust and loyalty were prioritized by participants due to provide emotional safety in their relationships. Some participants stated that to be able to rely on a partner was more important to have passion and love in a relationship.

One participant related her experience of vaginismus with her trust issues with her father. She stated that her negative emotions towards her father and recurrent negative experiences in her childhood accumulated and caused vaginismus. Silverstein (1989) suggested that vaginismus may serve as a defensive mechanism against intrusion and anticipated pain which helps avoid closeness and protects boundaries. The desire to protect oneself from violation can result from the exposure to violence by father and anger towards father may be projected to the partner. Women may not be able to direct their negative emotions to the aggressor and unreleased anger leads to a sense of emotional and physical insecurity. Partners could be perceived as a representation of the threatening aggressor. In these studies, the majority of participants who experienced vaginismus reported that they feared their fathers, as they were dominant, aggressive, and threatening during childhood. More than half of them experienced high interparental conflict and witnessed domestic violence or abuse in the household. Consistently with these findings, the participant, in this study, described high interparental conflict including domestic violence and death threats. She reported that her father put a gun to her head when she was a baby and gave her a gun to fire it up to the air when she was a child. Along with her experiences, it could be suggested that she may have displaced the repressed rage towards her father onto her romantic partners.

During the interviews, some topics were harder to remember and elaborate on for the participants. In addition to lack of memory about the explanation of parental divorce, none of the participants remembered how father absence was talked about in their household. Some of them did not remember the content of their interaction with their fathers in their childhood. One of these participants stated that she normally had a good memory about her other childhood experiences. Another experience seeming difficult to talk about was related to participants concerns about whether they missed something due to their fathers' absence and how their romantic relationships could be impacted by this absence. Almost all participants paused or started their sentences with words such as well, you know, actually, and so. The reason for this pattern could be participants' unwillingness to think about their adverse memories and to admit that they could have been influenced negatively by father absence and missed some experiences that their peers had.

Some participants verbalized their displeasure to talk about their negative experiences with their fathers and the difficulty in admitting their fathers' effects on their lives. Forgotten adverse memories were not only linked to participants' experience of parental divorce and separation from fathers; many participants also expressed that they didn't recall adverse memories with their mothers or any negative statements of their mothers about their fathers in their childhood. Even though they had examples of negative statements their mothers used for their fathers, they were likely to close the subject by saying that their mothers did not say anything bad about their fathers. Overall, during the interviews, some participants got tears in their eyes or cried, while many other participants expressed their discomfort and repressed rage with nervous laughter.

#### **4.5. CLINICAL IMPLICATION**

The findings of the study revealed that for all participants, growing up apart from their fathers represented a wide range of experiences and the absence of their fathers affected various aspects of their romantic relationships such as their expectations from their partners and communication styles. The differences in

mother-child and father-child relationships were quite salient. Overall, participants described a negative course of father-child relationship including low paternal involvement and rare contact frequency and dysfunctional communication pattern in their relationships with their fathers.

Parents create memories for their children including making explanations about divorce and its consequences for children. In this study, many participants were not aware of their parents' divorce and had to give meaning to their experiences by themselves. The study indicates that divorcing parents should inform their children taking into consideration their developmental age. Even if the children are very little, the confusion and possible fears of being abandoned and rejection should be discussed and resolved by parents, which can serve to reduce some of the adverse impacts of divorce on children's future experiences.

The results are important for therapists, parents, and educators. Many participants stated that they became aware of their experiences at school. Both teachers' and school counselors' supportive attitudes towards children from divorced families may help them normalize their experiences. Therapists who work with children and adolescents should consider issues related to children's needs during parental divorce and help parents to engage in this process with less harmful effects. They can help parents to negotiate their own relationships and to create their own discourse about separation for the benefit of the children. Moreover, by achieving an understanding of daughters' experiences who are not with their fathers, they can approach children by considering their specific difficulties and needs. Besides the need to support single mothers, father involvement should also be considered important. Both in individual processes and in larger-scale projects (e.g. NGO projects and social policy), father involvement should be encouraged. As this study didn't include fathers' perspectives and needs, future studies may focus on the nature of fathers' life conditions and reasons of paternal disengagement after divorce, which helped project/policy makers to provide appropriate services for fathers and children. Moreover, these results are also meaningful from the couple's therapy perspective, as they show the importance of addressing each

partner's personal family background and the match with one another's attachment needs.

The importance of individual therapy was also observed in the study. Many women were aware of the effect of growing up apart from their fathers on different aspects of their lives including parent-child relationship and romantic relationships. However, some participants had difficulty in giving meaning to their experiences, although they acknowledged the issues and problems they experienced in their romantic experiences. Thus, analyzing their own experiences in a therapeutic setting would help adult daughters to restructure their experiences both as children and as adults. With the help of psychodynamic therapy, women could become more aware of their experiences that they could not consciously access.

#### **4.6. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study examined the unique experiences of women who grew up apart from their fathers and the effect of their experiences on their romantic relationships. This study provides information regarding these women's experiences in Turkey and was the first qualitative study investigating the effect of growing up apart from fathers on daughters' romantic relationships. Previously, studies investigating the effect of parental divorce on children's later romantic relationships have been mostly quantitative (Amato, 1996; Amato & Booth, 1991; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Franklin et al., 1990; Jennings et al., 1992; Ross & Mirowsky, 1999, Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Since the effect of parental divorce is mediated by several variables such as interparental conflict, inadequate parental care, and unhealthy parent-child relationship, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the accounts of adult daughters regarding the impact of parental divorce and separation from father.

As the variety in family dynamics influences children's romantic relationship experiences differently, the reason for father absence is critical to understand children's accounts. Researchers have examined the effect of father absence on children's later romantic relationships (Brown, 2018; Jackson, 2010;

Moore, 2016); however, inclusion of various reasons of father absence (e.g. divorce, death, or imprisonment) and diversity in participants' age range at the time of parental divorce left remaining questions about the early separation from father due to divorce and its reflection on daughters' romantic experiences in adulthood. This study intended to answer some questions about adult daughters' perceptions of growing up apart from their fathers as children and as adults and how their experiences impacted their romantic relationships.

One possible limitation may have to do with the small size of the sample. To capture women's experiences, ten participants were interviewed. The small sample size could be a disadvantage for the generalization of findings. However, generalizability is not a major aim of small scale studies. Furthermore, as results are not tested and proved statistically, generalization of findings to a large population with same accuracy may not be possible (Atieno, 2009). The main aim of qualitative studies should be to generate hypotheses to test in larger scale studies, or to do more in depth exploration of the findings of quantitative studies.

In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The initial coding was done by the primary researcher, followed by a reorganization of the coding scheme by the major advisor of the project. Hence, two separate coders collaborated on naming the codes, their boundaries, and the emerging themes. However, because not all the interviews were coded by both people separately, information about inter-rater reliability could not be established. Furthermore, the researcher's experience of growing up apart from her father helped present insightful interview questions. On the other hand, her subjective experiences of being fatherless could impact the analysis of the participants' narratives.

To protect the homogeneity of participants' characteristics, eligibility criteria were established while recruiting participants. First, only heterosexual women were included in the study. For that reason, participants' narratives reflected heterosexual romantic relationship experiences. Future research could consider including participants with different sexual orientations. Next, parental divorce was the only and common reason for participants' experience of growing up apart from fathers. Daughters may grow up with absent fathers due to death, restraining order,

or incarceration. Therefore, a different direction for future research would be to explore these other experiences of women. Moreover, participants had either bachelor or master degree. The similarity of the social status may impact the nature of participants' experiences. Future studies may consider including women from different socio-economic status.

Participants were heterosexual women who were in romantic relationship for at least three months. While half of the participants had relationship for less than a year, there were two participants who had relationship for more than five years. Considering the fact that participants shared that they had gradually become comfortable in communicating with their partners and more familiar with conflict resolution processes in their relationships over time, the difference among durations of romantic relationships, could affect their experiences and narratives. Moreover, only two participants were currently married. For that reason, participants' narratives were mostly related to premarital romantic relationship experiences. Participants' attitudes towards marriage and marriage dynamics were not investigated, and could be further examined to create a comprehensive meaning for romantic relationship experiences of women who grew up apart from their fathers.

To understand women's perception of their earlier experiences, a retrospective data collection technique was utilized in this study. Participants were asked to remember their childhood relationships with their parents. It should be taken into account that their attitudes and beliefs about their childhood experiences might have changed throughout the years. Researchers have discussed the reliability of retrospective data and the accuracy of recalled memories. Studies showed that when retrospective data is related to participants' psychosocial experiences such as family-related issues, it could be biased and have lower accuracy (Henry et al., 1994; Smith et al., 1999). However, missed memories and their reconstruction could be important while giving meaning to women's perception of their experiences as adults. Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R) was another instrument to explore women's relational attitudes and behaviours in their romantic relationships. The variation in participants scores in ECR-R did not show a meaningful pattern within the themes. The results show

that larger sample size could provide knowledge about participants' romantic relationship experiences in accordance to their demographic characteristics and the themes emerged from semi-structured interviews. The association between women's demographic characteristics (e.g. the age at the time of parental divorce, contact frequency in father-daughter relationship, and the duration of women's romantic relationships), the results of open ended questions, and their scores in ECR-R could be explored with larger participant population in future studies.

Due to the pandemic, interviews were done on the online platform. Research has found that participants' familiarity with online interaction and internet quality influences the interview process (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006). Moreover, the primary investigator could only see participants' heads on the screen, participants' body language could not be observed adequately (Cater, 2011). Also, some participants should have been in the same house with their families or partners. Even though they stated that they were in space where they felt comfortable with talking with the primary investigator, sharing the household with other people may have affected their accounts.

#### **4.7. CONCLUSION**

The aim of the present study was to explore the experiences of women who grew up apart from their fathers due to parental divorce. The focus of this work was to elaborate on how women give meaning to their experiences as adults and as children and how their romantic relationship experiences are influenced. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten heterosexual women who experienced parental divorce before the age of five and who were currently in a romantic relationship. Although the effect of parental divorce on children's future romantic relationships was addressed in several quantitative studies, the perception of daughters regarding their experience of early separation from father due to divorce and its relation to their romantic relationships has received less attention. Therefore, with the help of the results of the present study, the hope was to provide a wider understanding of the experiences of women who did not grow up with their

fathers and to provide useful suggestions for further studies and clinical intervention.

In this study adult daughters who grew up apart from their fathers described father-daughter relationship as weak and insincere. They felt rejected and not known by their fathers. They described certain expectations from their fathers which have not been met. Due to the gap between expectations and reality, disappointment and anger were observed among women. In general, women described inconsistent and rare contact with their fathers in childhood and in adulthood, which was consistent with previous findings in the literature. Moreover, many of them refused to contact their fathers and did not feel familiar with them. Dysfunctional and ineffective conflict resolution in father-daughter relationship was revealed, which made women reluctant to argue or confront their fathers regarding these issues. Moreover, their communication with their fathers was limited and mostly superficial. Results show the importance of father involvement in daughters' lives and the necessity of relational repair in father-daughter relationship after separation. Daughters' needs may change depending on their developmental stage and lack of father support (e.g. emotional or financial) may make daughters feel unworthy and alone.

Mother-daughter relationship was described as strong and stable from childhood to adulthood. Women feel understood and satisfied with mother-daughter relationships. Compared to the father-daughter communication, the mother-daughter communication included a wider range of topics in terms of their personal lives and feelings. Consistent with the literature, they described their mothers with strong positive opinions and closeness in mother-daughter relationship made some of them feel guilty and worried due to their interaction with their fathers. Overall, the differences between participants' description of mother-daughter and father-daughter relationship were very noticeable.

Women described varying levels of interparental conflict in childhood. They were not able to create a comprehensive narrative about the first explanation of parental divorce. Parental disclosures about divorce were mostly related to marital conflict. This shows that parents may be too occupied with their

relationships with their ex-spouses, and projecting a negative discourse had harmful consequences for their children. Child-friendly and open communication is important to protect children, reduce their anxiety, and help them to give meaning to their experiences. Many women did not talk about the absence of their fathers in the household during their childhood. They became aware of their family situation at school or during the interactions with peers. This shows that besides family members, educators and daughters' social network play important roles in constructing experiences. Women described various effects of growing up apart from their fathers on their childhood experiences, their identities, and others' perception of self.

In contrast to previous findings, women in this study felt close to their partners and satisfied with their romantic relationships. This result shows the importance of protective factors such as healthy mother-daughter and peer relationships and the presence of social support. Some women described anxious and avoidant attachment needs and attitudes in their romantic relationships, which was consistent with the existing literature that demonstrated the negative effect of parental divorce and father absence on children's attachment style. While women were able to share most of their feelings and personal issues with their partners, similar communication styles and conflict resolution strategies were revealed in women's relationship with their fathers and their romantic relationships. Results show that the father-daughter relationship and father absence affect several issues in adult daughters' romantic relationships including partner preference, attitudes towards partners, relationship dynamics including coping strategies, and the longevity of the relationship.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A- Informed Consent Form

Sayın Katılımcı;

Bu çalışma, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi olan İrem Yıldırım tarafından Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak'ın danışmanlığında, babası yanında olmadan büyümüş kadınların yakın ilişki deneyimlerini anlamlandırmak amacıyla yüksek lisans tezi kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Bu çalışma, babası yanında olmadan büyüyen kadınların çocukluk ve yetişkinlik deneyimlerine, ebeveynleriyle ilişkilerine ve romantik ilişkilerdeki tutum ve davranışlarına ışık tutmak istemektedir.

Araştırmaya katılım gönüllülük temeline dayanmaktadır. Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz sizinle çevrimiçi olarak bir görüşme gerçekleştirilecektir. Görüşmenin yaklaşık 1,5 saat sürmesi beklenmektedir. Görüşmeler esnasında izniniz doğrultusunda ses kaydı alınacak ve araştırmacı not tutacaktır. Tutulan kayıtlara ve notlara sadece araştırmayı yapan kişi ve danışmanı ulaşabilecektir.

Henüz Türkiye'de babası yanında olmadan büyüyen kadınların yakın ilişki deneyimlerini anlamaya yönelik herhangi bir bilimsel çalışma yapılmamıştır. Araştırmaya katılımınız sizinle benzer deneyimleri yaşayan aynı kültürdeki kadınların çocukluk ve yetişkinlik dönemlerindeki deneyimlerini, ebeveynleriyle ilişkilerini ve romantik ilişkilerini deneyimleme biçimlerini daha iyi anlamak, farkları ve benzerlikleri keşfedebilmek ve pratik bilgilerimize katkı sağlamak adına oldukça değerlidir.

Görüşmede sorulacak sorular iç dünyanızla ilgili duygusal birtakım atıflarda bulunmanızı ve bazı olumlu ve/veya olumsuz deneyimlerinizi hatırlamanızı gerektireceği için sizi kötü hissettirebilir. Kendinizi rahatsız hissettiğiniz takdirde araştırmanın herhangi bir aşamasında araştırmadan çekilebilirsiniz. Görüşme esnasında ihtiyaç duyduğunuzda ara vermek isteyebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında dilediğiniz zaman kaydın durdurulmasını isteyebilirsiniz. Görüşme başlamadan önce, görüşme sırasında veya sonrasında, istediğiniz takdirde soru sorabilirsiniz.

Bu formda yazılanları onaylayarak arařtırmaya katılım için onay vermiř olacaksınız. Bununla birlikte kimlik bilgileriniz alıřmanın herhangi bir ařamasında aıka kullanılmayacaktır ve gizli tutulacaktır. Grüşmelerde verdiđiniz bilgiler ses kayıt cihazı ile kayda alınacaktır. Grüşmede verdiđiniz cevaplar ve arařtırma süresince edinilen her türlü bilgi yalnızca arařtırma kapsamında bilimsel yayın amacıyla kullanılacak, başka hiçbir amaç için kullanılmayacaktır.

Eđer bu arařtırmaya katılmak istiyorsanız bu formun size iletildiđi e-postaya cevaben **“Ekte gönderilen Bilgilendirilmiř Onam Formunu okudum ve anladım. alıřmaya katılmayı ve ses kaydımın alınmasını kabul ediyorum.”** cümlesini ve **adınızı-soyadınızı** yazmanız gerekmektedir.

Zaman ayırdığınız ve arařtırmaya verdiđiniz deđerli katkılarınız için teřekkür ederiz.

alıřma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı öđrencisi İrem Yıldırım veya Prof. Dr. Hale Bolak Boratav ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

## APPENDIX B- Demographic Information Form

1.Yaşınız?

Belirtiniz:.....

2. Mesleğiniz?

Belirtiniz:.....

3.Eğitim durumunuz?

( )İlkokul ( )Ortaokul ( )Lise ( )Üniversite ( )Yükseklisans ( )Doktora

4.Kaç kardeşiniz var? Kardeşlerinizin yaşları ve cinsiyeti nelerdir? (Siz hariç)

( )Kardeşim yok

( )1.Kardeş.....

( )2. Kardeş.....

( )3. Kardeş.....

( )Diğerleri.....

5. Ebeveynleriniz boşandığında siz kaç yaşındaydınız?

Belirtiniz:.....

11. En son görüşmenizde siz kaç yaşındaydınız?

Belirtiniz:.....

11. Babanızla görüşüyor musunuz? (Görüşmüyorsanız bir sonraki soruyu geçebilirsiniz.)

( ) Görüşmüyorum

( ) Görüşüyorum

Görüşme sıklığınızı belirtiniz:.....

12. Babanızla görüşmelerinizi nasıl yapıyorsunuz?

( )Yüz yüze

( )Telefonla

( )Diğer:.....

14. Romantik ilişkiniz ne kadar süredir devam ediyor?

Belirtiniz:.....

## APPENDIX C- Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Merhaba, öncelikle bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için teşekkür ederim. Bugün sizinle yakın ilişkileriniz hakkında konuşacağız. Size ebeveynlerinizle olan ilişkiniz ve ebeveynlerinizle olan ilişkinizin romantik ilişkilerinize nasıl yansımış olabileceğiyle ilgili sorular soruyor olacağım. Çocukluğunuza odaklanacağız ve sonra da günümüz ilişkilerinizle ilgili konuşacağız. İhtiyaç duyduğunuzda ara verebiliriz.

1. Öncelikle ailenizden bahsederek başlayalım. Nerede doğdunuz, nerede büyüdünüz? Çok sık yer değiştirdiniz mi? Sizi kim büyüttü?
2. Annenizi 3 sıfatla tanımlar mısınız?
  - a. ‘...’ olduğunu söylediniz. Bununla ilgili bir anı ya da olay hatırlıyor musunuz?
3. Çocukluğunuzda annenizle ilişkiniz nasıldı, şu anda ilişkiniz nasıl?
  - a. Sizce annenizle ilişkiniz kişiliğinizi nasıl etkiledi?
  - b. Duygusal desteğe ihtiyaç duyduğunuzda annenizden destek alıyor musunuz?
  - c. Annenizle aranızda çatışma olduğunda bunu nasıl çözüyorsunuz?
  - d. Anneniz babanızı nasıl anlatıyordu? Şu anda nasıl bahsediyor?
  - e. Babanızın neden evde olmadığı hakkında annenizle konuşur muydunuz?
  - f. Sizce babanızla ilişkinizin şekillenmesinde annenizin nasıl bir rolü oldu?
4. Anneniz erkeklerle ilişkiler hakkında sizinle konuşur muydu? Neler söylerdi?
5. Babanızı 3 sıfatla tanımlar mısınız?
  - a. ‘...’ olduğunu söylediniz. Bununla ilgili bir anı ya da olay hatırlıyor musunuz?
6. Babanız hakkında neler biliyorsunuz? Bu bilgilerin ne kadarı size söylendi, ne kadarını siz kendi gözlemlerinizle/deneyimlerinizle öğrendiniz?
7. Çocukluğunuzda babanızla ilişkiniz nasıldı, şu anda ilişkiniz nasıl?
  - a. Babanızla aranızdaki anlaşmazlıkları nasıl çözüyorsunuz?
8. Babanız yanınızda olmadan büyümek nasıldı?
  - a. Babanız yanınızda olmadan büyümenin size kazandırdığı bir şey olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Evetse, neler kazandırdı?
  - b. Babanız yanınızda olmadan büyüdüğünüz için kaçırdığınız/kaybettiğiniz bir

şey olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Evetse, neler kaçırdığınızı/kaybettiğinizi düşünüyorsunuz?

9. Babanızdan romantik ilişkilere dair ne öğrenmek isterdiniz?

10. Çocukluğunuzda babanızın yanınızda olmaması yetişkinlikteki romantik ilişkilerinizi nasıl etkilemiş olabilir?

11. Genelde nasıl erkeklerden hoşlandığınızı düşünüyorsunuz? Dış görünüşleri, kişilikleri ve size olan davranışları hakkında detay verebilir misiniz?

12. Şu anki romantik ilişkinizden bahseder misiniz?

a. Partnerinizle hangi konuları rahatça konuşursunuz? Partnerinizle hangi konuları konuşmakta zorlanırsınız?

b. Partnerinize karşı rahatça ifade ettiğiniz duygular neler? Partnerinize karşı ifade etmekten çekindiğiniz ya da daha zor ifade ettiğiniz duygular neler?

c. Partnerinize karşı rahatça ifade ettiğiniz ihtiyaçlarınız neler? Partnerinize karşı ifade etmekten çekindiğiniz ya da daha zor ifade ettiğiniz ihtiyaçlarınız neler?

d. İlişkinizde olumsuz duygularla ve durumlarla nasıl baş ediyorsunuz?

13. Sormak ya da eklemek istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

#### APPENDIX D- Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)

Aşağıdaki maddeler romantik ilişkilerinizde hissettiğiniz duygularla ilgilidir. Bu araştırmada sizin ilişkinizde yalnızca şu anda değil, genel olarak neler olduğuyula ya da neler yaşadığınızla ilgilenmekteyiz. Maddelerde sözü geçen "birlikte olduğum kişi" ifadesi ile romantik ilişkide bulunduğunuz kişi kastedilmektedir. Her bir maddenin ilişkilerinizdeki duygu ve düşüncelerinizi ne oranda yansıttığını karşılardaki 7 aralıklı ölçek üzerinde, ilgili rakam üzerine çarpı (X) koyarak gösteriniz.

Hiç katılmıyorum	Kararsızım/ fikrim yok	Tamamen katılıyorum				
1-----	2-----	3-----	4-----	5-----	6-----	7

1. Birlikte olduğum kişinin sevgisini kaybetmekten korkarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
2. Gerçekte ne hissettiğimi birlikte olduğum kişiye göstermemeyi tercih ederim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
3. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin artık benimle olmak istemeyeceği korkusuna kapılırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
4. Özel duygu ve düşüncelerimi birlikte olduğum kişiyle paylaşmak konusunda kendimi rahat hissedirim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
5. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin beni gerçekten sevmediği kaygısına kapılırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
6. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere güvenip inanmak konusunda kendimi rahat bırakmakta zorlanırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
7. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilerin beni, benim onları önemsemiğim kadar önemsemeyeceklerinden	1---2---3---4---5---6---7

endişe duyarım.	
8. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere yakın olma konusunda çok rahatımdır.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
9. Sıklıkla, birlikte olduğum kişinin bana duyduğu hislerin benim ona duyduğum hisler kadar güçlü olmasını isterim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
10. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere açılma konusunda kendimi rahat hissetmem.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
11. İlişkilerimi kafama çok takarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
12. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere fazla yakın olmamayı tercih ederim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
13. Benden uzakta olduğunda, birlikte olduğum kişinin başka birine ilgi duyabileceği korkusuna kapılırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
14. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişi benimle çok yakın olmak istediğinde rahatsızlık duyarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
15. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere duygularımı gösterdiğimde, onların benim için aynı şeyleri hissetmeyeceğinden korkarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
16. Birlikte olduğum kişiyle kolayca yakınlaşabilirim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
17. Birlikte olduğum kişinin beni terk edeceğinden pek endişe duymam.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
18. Birlikte olduğum kişiyle yakınlaşmak bana zor gelmez.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
19. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişi kendimden şüphe etmeme neden olur.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7

20. Genellikle, birlikte olduğum kişiyle sorunlarımı ve kaygılarımı tartışırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
21. Terk edilmekten pek korkmam.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
22. Zor zamanlarımda, romantik ilişkide olduğum kişiden yardım istemek bana iyi gelir.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
23. Birlikte olduğum kişinin, bana benim istediğim kadar yaklaşmak istemediğini düşünürüm.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
24. Birlikte olduğum kişiye hemen hemen her şeyi anlatırım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
25. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişiler bazen bana olan duygularını sebepsiz yere değiştirirler.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
26. Başımdan geçenleri birlikte olduğum kişiyle konuşurum.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
27. Çok yakın olma arzum bazen insanları korkutup uzaklaştırır.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
28. Birlikte olduğum kişiler benimle çok yakınlaştığında gergin hissederim.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
29. Romantik ilişkide olduğum bir kişi beni yakından tanıdıkça, “gerçek ben”den hoşlanmayacağından korkarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
30. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişilere güvenip inanma konusunda rahatımdır.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
31. Birlikte olduğum kişiden ihtiyaç duyduğum şefkat ve desteği görememek beni öfkelenendirir.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
32. Romantik ilişkide olduğum kişiye güvenip inanmak benim için kolaydır.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7

33. Başka insanlara denk olamamaktan endişe duyarım.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
34. Birlikte olduğum kişiye şefkat göstermek benim için kolaydır.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
35. Birlikte olduğum kişi beni sadece kızgın olduğumda önemser.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7
36. Birlikte olduğum kişi beni ve ihtiyaçlarımı gerçekten anlar.	1---2---3---4---5---6---7

## **ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL**

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.