

Growing Through Loss: Social Support and Resilience in Adolescents Facing Parental Death

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ABSTRACT

Adolescents who experience parental bereavement are at increased risk for emotional and psychological difficulties, making it essential to identify factors that support their adaptive functioning. The loss of a parent is a critical life stressor that can interfere with the achievement of developmental milestones, but the empirical focus on social support as a protective factor for resilience in Indonesian youth remains limited. This study examined the association between social support and resilience among adolescents who had lost one or both parents. Participants were 232 adolescents aged 18–22 years recruited through purposive sampling. Data were collected using the Social Support Scale and the Resilience Scale and analyzed with Spearman's rho. Results indicated a small but significant positive association between social support and resilience ($\rho = .146$, $p = .027$). Social support accounted for 1.8% of the variance in resilience. Practically, these findings underscore the need for targeted social interventions and peer-support programs to bolster resilience during the bereavement process. This study contributes to clinical psychology by highlighting that even modest external support can serve as a foundation for psychological recovery in bereaved adolescents.

Keywords: social support, resilience, adolescents, loss a parents, death

Introduction

Adolescence is a phase of significant change in life due to physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes (Papalia et al., 2008). Musyirifin (2020) states that during this period of adolescent change, adolescents experience vulnerability in their lives. Therefore, parents play a major role in the development of their children, both socially, emotionally, and cognitively (Apriani & Listiyandini, 2019). However, some adolescents experience a tragic event in their lives, namely the loss of a parent due to death (Nurhidayati & Chairani, 2014). The loss of parents in adolescence not only affects them biologically, but also has a psychosocial impact (Nurhidayati & Chairani, 2014). According to UNICEF data, there are 153 million adolescents worldwide who have lost one or both parents due to death (Elya & Widyanto, 2022). Apelian and Nesteruk (2017) explain that adolescents who lose their parents will experience several pressures and difficulties in their lives, such as changes in their daily activities, a decline in their economic situation, and not having a place to live permanently.

Additionally, according to Andriessen et al. (2018), adolescents grieving the loss of a parent explain that teenagers who experience it the loss of a parent due to death not only face feelings of grief but also potentially experience difficulties in the adjustment process, making

it challenging for them to adapt. The feelings of grief experienced by adolescents depend on the relationship between the adolescent and their parents during their lifetime (Nurhidayati & Chairani, 2014). In this condition, adolescents need support and strength to get out of prolonged sadness (Fadhil & Mardianto, 2024).

Calsum and Purwandari (2024) state that when adolescents experience difficulties in coping with grief due to the loss of a parent, they must learn to adapt and adjust to the pain, which is referred to as resilience. Puspasari (2020) states that adolescents who possess high resilience within themselves can gradually think positively about their experiences of loss and actively and adaptively solve the problems they face. Connor and Davidson (2003) explain that resilience is an individual's ability to control the stress that arises and how individuals can overcome depression and anxiety that arise within themselves. The four aspects of resilience according to Connor and Davidson (2003) are 1) Personal competence; high standards and tenacity, which is the individual's ability to achieve dreams even though 3 facing failure, 2) Trust in one's instincts; tolerance of negative affect; strengthening effect of stress, which means that individuals have the ability to maintain calm and awareness in difficult situations, 3) Positive acceptance of change and secure relationships, which means that individuals can overcome obstacles calmly and maintain harmonious interactions with others even in difficult situations, and 4) Control and factors, and Spiritual influence, which reflect an individual's ability to regulate themselves and focus on achieving their dreams.

However, the level of resilience among adolescents who have lost their parents varies, as shown in a study conducted by Harjuna and Rinaldi (2022) on the resilience of adolescents after the death of a parent, which found that the resilience of adolescents tended to be good. This also shows that the majority of adolescents in the study were able to cope with stress and accept loss, but not to the maximum extent and were still vulnerable. Additionally, the results of interviews conducted by Apriliza (2022) indicate that some adolescents experience prolonged grief after losing their parents, but gradually come to terms with it, even though the feeling of not accepting the loss will always remain in their hearts.

According to Grotberg (1996), there are three factors that influence resilience, namely I Have, I Am, and I Can. Factor 1) I Have relates to external resources available in the surrounding environment, factor 2) I Am relates to the strengths that individuals possess within themselves, factor 3) I Can relates to interpersonal skills interpersonal skills, social skills, and problem-solving abilities in life (Grotberg, 1996). From these factors, the researcher chose social support to investigate whether there is a relationship with resilience. Sarafino and Smith (2011) define social support as a form of comfort, attention, assistance, or appreciation received from others. Sarafino and Smith (2011) define four aspects of social support, namely 1) emotional support is support given in the form of attention, empathy, concern, and positive appreciation, 2) instrumental support is the most practical form of support, in the form of direct physical or material assistance, 3) informational support is support that includes providing important information and suggesting options, and 4) friendship support is support related to providing a feeling of acceptance and belonging to a group through interaction. In

the context of loss, social support is a key factor in the development of resilience in adolescents when facing obstacles during grief (Calsum & Purwandari, 2024).

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of social support in helping adolescents cope with grief and emotional distress after parental loss (Calsum & Purwandari, 2024; Fadhil & Mardianto, 2024), empirical evidence examining the *direct association* between social support and resilience remains limited, especially among emerging adults (ages 18–22) in Indonesia. Many existing studies focus on adolescents in orphanage settings (Apriani & Listiyandini, 2019; Ibda, 2023) or explore the emotional meaning of loss without quantitatively analyzing psychosocial protective factors (Nurhidayati & Chairani, 2014; Nurriyana & Savira, 2021). Research on bereaved adolescents has also tended to emphasize internal factors such as emotional regulation, optimism, or coping strategies (Puspasari, 2020; Tri & Harjuna, 2022), leaving external factors particularly social support that less examined. Therefore, there is a scientific need to investigate how perceived social support is associated with resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent outside institutional settings and within a broader developmental range. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between social support and resilience among adolescents aged 18–22 who have experienced parental bereavement.

Based on the above description, the researcher aims to examine the relationship between social support and resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. This study provides added value by shifting the focus from internal coping mechanisms to external psychosocial protective factors, specifically perceived social support, within a community-based sample of bereaved emerging adults in Indonesia. The theoretical benefit of this study is to contribute to knowledge in the field of Clinical and Social Psychology, particularly regarding the relationship between social support and resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. The practical benefit of this study is that it can be utilized by the community to increase awareness of the best ways to support adolescents who have experienced loss, and it can also be utilized by the subjects themselves to gain information about strategies for coping with problems.

Methods

This study is a quantitative study with resilience as the dependent variable and social support as the independent variable. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire with a social support scale modified by the researcher based on the scale developed by Handayani (2023) and a resilience scale, namely the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) 10 items. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) was employed in this study because it measures 'hardiness' and the individual's ability to adapt and thrive in the face of significant adversity. In the context of parental bereavement, which is a major life stressor, this scale effectively captures the psychological endurance and the capacity of adolescents to regain stability despite the profound emotional impact of their loss.

The social support scale modified by the researcher has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient value of 0.921. Meanwhile, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) 10-

item scale has a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient value of 0.829. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient value Alpha coefficient values indicate that both scales used have good internal consistency.

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling, which is a method of sampling with specific considerations (Sugiyono, 2019). The criteria for subjects in this study were 1) adolescents aged 18-22 years and 2) adolescents who had lost a parent due to death. There were 232 adolescents aged 18-22 years who met the characteristics of the study, including 60 males and 172 females. The data analysis technique used was Spearman's Rho correlation and was analyzed using SPSS software Ver. 27 For Windows.

Results

A total of 232 adolescents aged 18–22 years participated in this study. Most were female (74%), and the majority were 21–22 years old (76%). Regarding parental loss, 66% had lost their father, 22% their mother, and 12% both parents. More than half of the participants (56%) experienced the loss more than two years prior. Most adolescents lived with their mother (57%), followed by living with their father (16%) or siblings (10%). (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Data Description

Variable	Category	n	Percentage
Gender	Male	60	26%
	Female	172	74%
Age	18	11	5%
	19	15	6%
	20	29	13%
	21	80	34%
	22	97	42%
Parental Death	Father	153	66%
	Mother	50	22%
	Both parents	29	12%
Time Since Loss	< 6 months	37	16%
	6–12 months	26	11%
	1–2 years	39	17%
	> 2 years	130	56%
Current Living Arrangement	With father	38	16%
	With mother	131	57%
	With siblings	23	10%
	With grandparents	9	4%
	With relatives/guardian	6	3%
	Orphanage	1	0%
	Living alone	24	10%

Table 2. Normality and Linearity Tests

Test	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Social Support)	.083	< .001	Non-normal
Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Resilience)	.120	< .001	Non-normal
Linearity (ANOVA)	F = 4.201	p = .042	Linear relationship

The results of the normality test of the data distribution of the social support variable show a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value ($p < 0.001$). Meanwhile, the results of the normality test of the data distribution of the resilience variable show a Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value ($p < 0.001$). Based on the values obtained, it can be concluded that the data distribution of the social support variable and the resilience variable are not normally distributed (Tabel 2.). Therefore, Spearman's rho was used for the correlation analysis. Linearity testing indicated a linear relationship between the two variables ($F = 4.201$, $p = .042$). Based on the linearity test results Both variables have an F value of 4.201 with $p = 0.042$ ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the variables of social support and resilience have a linear relationship (Tabel 2).

Tabel 3. Hypothesis Testing

Variables	ρ (Spearman)	p-value	Interpretation
Social Support <-> Resilience	0.146	.027	Small, positive, significant

The results of the research hypothesis test show $(r_{xy}) = 0.146$ with $p = 0.027$ ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death (Tabel 3). The higher the social support received by adolescents who have lost a parent due to death, the higher their level of resilience. Conversely, the lower the social support received, the lower the resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. Furthermore, a coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.018 was obtained. These results indicate that the social support variable contributes 1.8% to the resilience variable, with the remaining 98.2% influenced by other factors.

Discussions

The accepted hypothesis in this study shows that social support can be considered an important factor in increasing resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. This result is in line with the theory mentioned by (Grotberg, 1996), which states that one of the factors in forming resilience is the source of power external from environment, referred to as the "I Have" factor. Cakar (2020) states that the social support received by adolescents will help the grieving process, recover from the sense of loss, and enable adolescents to adapt due to the social support received. The relationship between social support and resilience in this study also supports the results of previous studies. As in the previous study conducted by Manalu et al. (2025), the results showed a positive relationship between social support and resilience. Research conducted by Calsum and Purwandari (2024) even states that the greater the social support received, the higher the level of adolescents' ability to cope with the loss of a parent.

When adolescents experience the loss of a parent due to death, it has a profound emotional impact on them. Psychologically, this loss triggers reactions of grief such as anger, despair, anxiety, panic disorders, depression, and possibly post-traumatic stress disorder (Keyes et al., 2014). Based on research findings, adolescents who lose a parent due to death

exhibit a complex process of emotional and social adaptation. Adolescents who initially display psychological states of emotional instability progress toward a process of acceptance and adaptation. The majority of adolescents receive good social support from friends, family, and their surroundings, resulting in healthier psychological responses. Thus, the psychological dynamics that occur indicate that adolescent resilience is greatly influenced by the quality of social support received.

Therefore, while still in the grieving process, adolescents need social support from their environment so that they can eliminate feelings of helplessness and prevent psychological impacts (Nurriyana & Savira, 2021). Barbarosa, Putri, and Chusairi (2021) state that the social support received by adolescents during grief will shape their resilience, as evidenced by the results of their research showing that social support such as encouragement and attention received in orphanages is key to the formation of resilience in adolescents in orphanages, enabling them to overcome problems that arise. Sarafino and Smith (2011) also state that social support provides emotional and instrumental comfort, which can reduce psychological pressure and strengthen individual resilience.

The categorization results show that 53% of subjects are in the high social support category, 43% are in the moderate category, and only 4% are in the low category. Meanwhile, on the resilience, 79% were in the high category, 19% in the moderate category, and only 2% in the low category. This indicates that most of the adolescent respondents had adequate social support and also demonstrated high adaptive capacity. This is further supported by the characteristics of the subjects, most of whom were aged 21–22 years old and had experienced loss more than two years ago, giving them time to form coping strategies and make sense of their loss.

The results of the study also show a coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.018. This result shows that the social support variable contributes 1.8% to the formation of resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. Meanwhile, the remaining 98.2% is influenced by various other factors. The relatively small effect size (1.8%) implies that for adolescents facing parental death, social support serves more as a 'protective buffer' rather than the primary determinant of resilience. Critically, this suggests that the internal reorganization of the self and the individual's cognitive processing of grief are likely more influential. In this context, the high level of resilience among subjects may be attributed to a long-term natural adaptation process, where internal hardiness (as measured by the CD-RISC) develops independently of external social reinforcement over time. Other factors not examined by the researcher include self-concept, cognition or intelligence, coping strategies, and locus of control.

Given the high resilience scores observed, it is important to place these findings in the context of the specific experience of parental loss. Resilience in this study does not simply represent a general personality trait, but rather a functional adaptation to the profound disruption caused by grief. Items in the CD-RISC, such as 'ability to adapt to change' and 'staying focused under pressure', directly reflect the psychological demands faced by adolescents who must cope with the loss of a primary attachment figure while simultaneously

facing developmental transitions. High levels of resilience indicate that these adolescents have integrated the loss into their self-identity, a process often referred to as 'growing through loss'. This internal growth allows them to maintain academic and social functioning despite the void left by their parents, suggesting that their resilience is a specific coping response to the trauma of death rather than just a general outlook on life.

This study has several methodological limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional correlational design restricts conclusions about causality, meaning the findings represent associations rather than predictive effects. Second, the use of purposive sampling and self-report measures may introduce subjectivity and limit the generalizability of the results. The reliance on self-report measures specifically carries the risk of social desirability bias, where participants might provide responses they perceive as more resilient than their actual psychological state.

Furthermore, the subject characteristics, which predominantly consisted of older adolescents (21-22 years) who had experienced loss more than two years prior, may influence the results. These subjects might have already developed natural coping mechanisms over time, which could explain the high resilience scores and the relatively small association with external social support. Future research may benefit from using longitudinal designs to examine changes in resilience over time and to explore how social support functions across different phases of bereavement. Expanding the sample to younger adolescents and those experiencing more recent loss may also provide a broader understanding of developmental differences.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. The higher the social support, the higher the resilience in adolescents who have lost a parent due to death. Conversely, the lower the social support, the lower the resilience who have lost a parent due to death. The contribution of social support to resilience is 1.8%, meaning that 98.2% is influenced by other factors not examined by the researchers.

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