

THE DYNAMICS OF THE GRIEVING PROCESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE LOST A PARENT, BASED ON THE KUBLER-ROSS THEORY

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Abstract

The death of a parent is an event that has a deep traumatic impact on a child, especially in emotional and psychological aspects. This grieving experience is a complex and different process for each individual, especially when experienced at the adolescent development stage which is full of personal changes. This research aims to explore the dynamics of the grieving process in adolescents who experience the loss of a parent based on Kubler Ross's theory. The method used is a qualitative method with a case study approach. The data collection process was carried out through observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation in the form of voice recordings and photo elicitation which lasted for three months until data saturation was reached. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling with the criteria of female teenagers who had experience of losing their parents, and were willing to become respondents. The respondents consisted of 3 participants. The data analysis technique goes through four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The research results showed that all participants experienced emotional and psychological responses when going through Kubler Ross's five stages of grief, namely denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The grief process experienced by participants is complex, does not run linearly, and is influenced by various personal and contextual factors. Acceptance is not a final, final stage, but rather an ongoing process that continues to transform according to the individual's psychological condition, the social support received, and the way the teenager interprets the loss.

Keywords: Grief, Teenagers, Trauma, Loss of a Parent, Kubler Ross

Abstrak

Kematian orang tua merupakan peristiwa yang membawa dampak traumatis mendalam bagi seorang anak, terutama dalam aspek emosional dan psikologis. Pengalaman berduka ini melalui proses yang kompleks dan berbeda bagi setiap individu, terutama ketika dialami pada tahap perkembangan remaja yang penuh dengan perubahan diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dinamika proses berduka pada remaja yang mengalami kehilangan orang tua berdasarkan teori Kubler Ross. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Proses pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dokumentasi dalam bentuk rekaman suara dan elisitasi foto yang berlangsung selama tiga bulan hingga mencapai saturasi data. Pemilihan partisipan dilakukan dengan purposive sampling dengan kriteria remaja perempuan yang memiliki pengalaman kehilangan orang tua, serta bersedia menjadi responden, responden terdiri dari 3 partisipan. Teknik analisis

data melalui empat tahap yaitu pengumpulan data, reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan seluruh partisipan mengalami respons emosional dan psikologis saat melalui lima tahap duka Kubler Ross yaitu penyangkalan, kemarahan, tawar-menawar, depresi, dan penerimaan. Proses duka yang dialami partisipan bersifat kompleks, tidak berjalan secara linier, serta dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor personal maupun kontekstual. Penerimaan bukanlah tahap akhir yang bersifat final, melainkan proses yang berkelanjutan dan terus bertransformasi sesuai dengan kondisi psikologis individu, dukungan sosial yang diterima, dan cara remaja memaknai kehilangan tersebut.

Kata kunci: Berduka, Remaja, Trauma, Kehilangan Orang Tua, Kubler Ross

INTRODUCTION

Death is an inevitable part of the human life cycle, an event that every individual will eventually experience, either directly or indirectly through the loss of a loved one. As explained by [author], death is a natural condition that is inseparable from the human experience, yet its consequences often have complex emotional impacts on those left behind. The process of coping with loss involves not only the passing of the deceased individual but also the psychological dynamics of the family and immediate social circle. It is emphasized that the grief experienced following a loss often manifests as deep sorrow, emotional distress, and even prolonged stress. These effects are felt most acutely by the immediate family, who share the strongest emotional bond with the deceased. The emotions that arise can include feelings of despair, loss of hope, and even psychological trauma requiring specialized care

During adolescence, the loss of a parent has a far more significant impact than at other stages of development. Adolescents are in a critical phase of self-identity formation and are striving to build independence, yet at the same time still have an emotional dependence on parental figures. It is explained that adolescents are in a transitional phase toward adulthood marked by challenging biological, psychological, and social changes. When loss occurs in the midst of this developmental process, their emotional stability can be seriously disrupted. Research has found that the loss of a parental figure significantly impacts the formation of self-concept, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships in adolescents. This view is reinforced by studies stating that the loss of a parental role is one of the most stressful life events for adolescents, thus requiring major adjustments in various aspects of their psychosocial well-being. Reactions can vary widely, ranging from deep sadness to deviant behavioral responses, depending on the level of resilience and available environmental support.

The impact of parental loss on adolescents is not limited to emotional aspects but also affects their physical and spiritual well-being. It is noted that adolescents who experience loss often exhibit symptoms of trauma resulting from unresolved grief. Such trauma can result not only from death but also from divorce or other forms of separation that make adolescents feel they have lost a parental figure. This situation becomes increasingly complex because adolescents are not yet fully capable of identifying or expressing their

feelings appropriately. It is emphasized that adolescents often face barriers in openly expressing their emotions, making them more vulnerable to psychological stress. Compounded by adults' limited understanding of the emotional dynamics of grieving adolescents, the support provided often fails to meet their needs. This ultimately increases the potential for prolonged trauma if not properly addressed.

In understanding the grieving process in adolescents, Kubler-Ross's Grief Theory provides a relevant and widely used theoretical framework in studies on grief. This theory explains that there are five stages of the grieving process: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Each stage describes the emotional responses commonly experienced when an individual faces a loss. Although these stages are not always experienced sequentially or with the same intensity by every individual, Kubler-Ross remains one of the most widely used frameworks for understanding emotional dynamics in the context of loss. This framework also helps explain the variation in grief experiences among individuals, including adolescents, who may move between stages depending on their psychological condition and the social support they have.

Previous studies have examined the grieving process using Kubler-Ross's theoretical framework. These studies have focused on the stages of grief in adolescents and the use of grief counseling techniques to help them cope with their grief. However, these studies were limited to literature reviews and lacked field research providing empirical insights into adolescents' direct experiences. Meanwhile, a study conducted by [author] also utilized Kubler-Ross's five stages, but its primary focus was on anxiety arising post-loss, rather than on the deep-seated trauma dynamics experienced. On the other hand, the study found that the loss of a parent has far-reaching psychological impacts on adolescents, encompassing profound sadness, psychological trauma, negative emotions such as loneliness and despair, and the emergence of emotional and behavioral disorders. Nevertheless, this study has limitations in data triangulation and does not deeply explore adolescents' subjective experiences, thus limiting the generalizability of the findings. Based on previous studies, it can be concluded that although research on grief and Kubler-Ross's theory has been extensive, there remains a lack of research that comprehensively describes the trauma experiences of adolescents who have lost a parent.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how adolescents express grief and how they navigate the grieving process within the Kubler-Ross framework, particularly in the context of emotional trauma. It emphasizes that the public's limited understanding of the trauma experienced by adolescents is one of the factors exacerbating their psychological condition. Adolescents' expressions of grief are often misinterpreted as part of the emotional turbulence of puberty, preventing them from receiving adequate psychological support. It adds that grieving adolescents are at risk of facing social stigma, which further exacerbates their psychological condition. A lack of an appropriate response to adolescent grief can lead to more serious mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the grieving process in adolescents, including how they make sense of

loss and how they develop coping mechanisms to deal with trauma. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of developmental psychology and trauma psychology, particularly regarding the dynamics of grief in adolescents. Meanwhile, practically, the research findings can serve as a guide for educators, counselors, psychologists, and parents in designing psychological interventions tailored to the needs of grieving adolescents. Such interventions may include counseling services, group support programs, or specialized education for parents and teachers regarding the importance of understanding the grieving process in adolescents. With the findings of this study, it is hoped that new approaches will emerge that are not only curative but also preventive and supportive in addressing the trauma of loss in adolescents.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method using a case study approach. The qualitative method was chosen to gain an in-depth and detailed understanding of an issue through descriptive analysis. The case study approach was used to examine a specific phenomenon or event comprehensively. This study involved three adolescent female participants. Participants were selected using purposive sampling; this selection was based on specific objectives or characteristics desired by the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. Purposive sampling was conducted among adolescent females who had experienced the loss of a parent, with criteria including an age range of 10 to 19 years. This study was conducted in compliance with applicable research ethics guidelines and was approved by the participants prior to the start of the study; pseudonyms were also used in this study to protect the participants' privacy. Data collection was conducted through observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation in the form of audio recordings, and photo elicitation. The data collection phase lasted three months because the collected data was deemed saturated. The collected data was then analyzed through several stages based on the Miles and Huberman analysis framework: data reduction was performed to focus on data relevant to the defined scope. The data that underwent reduction was subsequently presented in a descriptive format to facilitate understanding and interpretation of the research findings. Finally, the researcher drew conclusions based on the analyzed data.

Table 1. Participant Profile

VARIABLE	ERLIN	DINA	SINTA
AGE	19 Years	14 Years	18 Years
GENDER	Female	Female	Female
CAUSE OF THE PARENT'S DEATH	Sick	Sick	Sick
DURATION OF GRIEF	18 Month	7 Month	24 Month
STATUS	School & Work	School	Graduate from

As one of the data collection methods, this study used photo elicitation. Relevant photos were shown to participants to prompt and help them recount their experiences. The following photos were used as visual stimuli to help participants recall and describe their experiences and emotions related to the loss of a parent.

Figure 1. Photo Elicitation



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study comprehensively examines the dynamics of trauma and the grieving process among adolescents who have lost a parent, drawing on Kubler-Ross's theory. It highlights how adolescents experience and express their grief through the five stages identified in the theory: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although Kubler-Ross's theory provides a useful framework for understanding the grieving process, the findings of this study also indicate that the grieving experience among adolescents is individual and complex, and is influenced by factors such as social support, coping mechanisms, and spiritual beliefs.

From the results of the photo elicitation used during the interviews with the three participants regarding a family photo depicting a warm, gathered atmosphere in the living room, each participant expressed deep yet distinct emotions. Erlin viewed the photo as a symbol of past happiness when she could still gather with both her parents, who are no longer with her; family gatherings in the living room, eating moon cakes, and sharing laughter and jokes became images of happiness in her memory, though accompanied by sadness because she cannot relive those precious moments. Meanwhile, Dina responds to the photo with feelings of sadness and a sense of injustice because she longs for the warm family atmosphere depicted in the photo. However, at her young age, she feels she has not received enough attention from her mother, who should have been the supportive figure and source of warmth she needed. The photo serves as a reflection of unfulfilled desires regarding her relationship with her parents. The third participant, Sinta, felt happy upon seeing the photo because it reminded her of the past when her mother was still alive

and she experienced the same family warmth; she even wished to turn back time and relive those moments together. However, her emotions were too overwhelming, leaving her unable to continue sharing her story and causing her to cry, which revealed the depth of her longing for the person she loved. In general, the photo served as a medium capable of triggering various emotions related to each participant's experiences and relationships with their families, demonstrating the significant power of visual imagery in evoking memories and personal meaning.

Based on the results of the research conducted, the grieving process experienced by these three participants can be interpreted through Kübler-Ross's Grief Theory. This theory outlines five stages of loss: *denial*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression*, and *acceptance*, which can be described as follows.

Denial: All three participants exhibited initial grief reactions characterized by denial mechanisms. Erlin revealed that she cried only one day after her mother's death, then withdrew and shared her story only with her partner, as an attempt to suppress the intensity of her pain. Dina, on the other hand, responded with silence upon hearing the news of her mother's death, as if feeling nothing, which illustrates a state of emotional numbness as a defense mechanism. Meanwhile, Sinta initially stated she was "fine," but later expressed deep sorrow, even wishing she could take her mother's place, indicating a form of refusal to accept the reality of the loss. The responses of these three participants align with research findings that identify how adolescents who lose a parent often go through a phase of denial—ranging from disbelief regarding the death, feelings of emptiness, to withdrawal from their environment. Another study also found that adolescent girls who lost a parent due to COVID-19 exhibited an initial phase of denial, characterized by acting as if nothing had happened despite actually being in mourning. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta reflect the natural mechanisms of the early stages of grief commonly observed within the Indonesian cultural context, while reinforcing the understanding that denial is part of the psychological adaptation process to loss.

Anger: All three participants exhibited anger dynamics that tended to be internalized and were closely linked to feelings of guilt and a sense of injustice. Luna directed her anger inward, blaming herself excessively because she felt her negative thoughts toward others had contributed to her mother's condition. Dina also expressed anger toward herself for failing to bring happiness to her parents and felt envy toward others with intact families. Meanwhile, Sinta directs her anger more toward life's injustices when she witnesses others being neglectful toward their parents, even though she herself deeply misses that figure. This pattern aligns with findings emphasizing that adolescents in Indonesia tend to suppress expressions of anger as a form of adjustment within a collectivist culture. Furthermore, research indicates that envy and a sense of injustice arise from social comparison, which can intensify both anger and frustration. Studies also confirm that guilt frequently arises in the context of a child's filial duty toward parents, so that failure to fulfill this role can lead to self-directed anger. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and

Sinta illustrate the dynamics of repressed anger characteristic of Indonesian culture, where guilt, envy, and social comparison are key factors shaping emotional responses to loss or experiences of injustice.

Bargaining: All three participants exhibited dynamics of regret closely linked to the bargaining phase in the grieving process. Erlin expressed implicit regret by stating that if she hadn't wished for bad things to happen, her mother might still be alive. Dina also showed a desire for things to be different by hoping her mother could have lived longer, though she was more inclined to accept reality. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed explicit regret regarding past behaviors perceived as hurting her parents, as well as imagining alternative actions that might have prevented her current guilt. This pattern is consistent with findings showing that adolescents in Indonesia often express regret in the form of "*if only*" narratives as part of a cognitive effort to renegotiate the reality of loss. The study confirms that the bargaining phase in adolescents is not merely characterized by irrational hopes but is also accompanied by guilt that intensifies the depth of regret. It also found that an appreciation for life among adolescents who have lost a parent often begins with a phase of regret and deep reflection before eventually evolving into acceptance. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta demonstrate that guilt, regret, and the desire to change the past are key factors in the adaptation process following loss.

Depression: All three participants exhibited significant symptoms of depression following the loss of a parent. Erlin expressed feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts, "*I once considered drinking Baygon,*" indicating deep despair. Dina even reported "*several suicide attempts, such as trying to drink poison, wrapping a towel around my neck, and swallowing large quantities of medication,*" which illustrates severe depression and difficulty carrying out daily activities. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed feelings of loneliness, emptiness, and a strong emotional dependence on her mother: "*I can't even take care of myself—I can't do anything on my own; my mother has to do everything for me,*" which indicates impaired adaptive functioning following the loss. This pattern aligns with research finding that adolescents who lose a parent due to an accident exhibit depressive symptoms such as a sense of emptiness, hopelessness, and changes in daily routines. Another study also indicates that the loss of a parent can trigger deep grief and even suicidal ideation in adolescents. And research from confirms that children and adolescents in Indonesia who experience loss are at high risk of depression and require early intervention to prevent suicidal behavior. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta illustrate the dynamics of severe depression among Indonesian adolescents following the loss of a parent, characterized by feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, suicide attempts, and impaired adaptive functioning.

Acceptance: The three participants demonstrated distinct yet interconnected processes of acceptance, all centered on rebuilding their lives after the loss. Erlin stated that she "*has come to accept the reality*" despite still being overwhelmed by grief, and is trying to shift her focus toward the future by caring for her younger sibling while working amidst ongoing school exams. Dina emphasized that she "*has begun to accept that reality, even*

though I sometimes feel envious when my friends are driven to school by their parents,” strengthening herself through patience and meditation as coping strategies. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed acceptance by keeping herself busy, managing household chores, and cooking for herself—as if taking on her mother’s role—which reflects both her efforts toward independence and the social support she receives from her partner and friends. These dynamics of acceptance align with findings emphasizing that acceptance is a crucial stage in the self-healing process for adolescents following a loss, marked by reframing the experience of grief and an orientation toward the future. In line with this, the research underscores that coping strategies rooted in spirituality and mindfulness can help adolescents manage grief and strengthen emotional acceptance. Additionally, the study indicates that social support plays a crucial role in accelerating psychological adaptation, particularly among adolescents who have lost a parent, by fostering resilience and post-traumatic growth. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta illustrate that acceptance is not an endpoint but a gradual process influenced by spirituality, functional independence, and social support within the Indonesian cultural context.

Acceptance Is Not the Final Stage

During the denial stage, all three participants exhibited distinct forms of emotional resistance. Erlin expressed denial subtly by holding back her tears just one day after her mother’s death and tended to withdraw from her family. Dina demonstrated passive denial through silence and an inability to process emotions, reflected in her quiet demeanor upon receiving the news of the death. Sinta initially appeared calm but later displayed deeper emotional reactions, including a desire to take her late mother’s place, signaling a conflict between reality and hope. Such denial patterns are found in research stating that denial is a common early psychological defense mechanism that emerges when facing loss.

During the anger stage, all three participants displayed different yet equally intense emotional expressions. Erlin directed her anger inward by blaming herself for the harsh words she had once hurled at the person who had hurt her mother: *“I’m angry at myself because my mother was once wronged by someone, so because I was angry, I spoke, wishing bad things upon that person. A few days later, my mother was hospitalized and her condition worsened, and I blamed myself for why I spoke that way, why I wished harm upon others. And I remember someone once saying that if we pray for bad things to happen to others, 70 angels will grant those wishes upon ourselves. That’s when I blamed myself—if only I hadn’t wished for that bad thing, maybe my mother would still be alive today,”* a pattern known in psychological theory as internalized anger, or a condition where someone suppresses their anger. Dina experienced a more complex mix of anger—not only directed at herself but also accompanied by envy toward those who still have intact families, reflecting what the literature refers to as displaced anger, or directing emotions toward the wrong target. Meanwhile, Sinta projects her anger externally by questioning life’s injustices—a response explained by the “just world hypothesis” as a common reaction to traumatic events perceived as irrational.

The bargaining stage manifests as regret and hope to alter the past. At this stage, all three participants demonstrate emotional efforts to “negotiate” with the reality of the loss they have experienced. Erlin is trapped in a cycle of regret, constantly imagining alternative scenarios where she could have changed her words or actions in the past to prevent her mother’s death. This “what-if” mindset is a common coping mechanism that emerges when someone tries to find meaning in a traumatic event. Dina expresses a refusal to accept the finality of time through the fantasy that her mother should still be alive. This response reflects what is known as protest behavior, in which an individual unconsciously resists the finality of loss by clinging to irrational hope. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed regret focused more on specific past actions she believed had hurt her mother. Her desire to “rewind time” and act differently—where the brain naturally creates alternative scenarios to reduce feelings of helplessness—was evident.

The depressive phase became a particularly prominent stage for all three participants. Erlin expressed extreme despair, even entertaining suicidal thoughts. Dina experienced deeper depression, even attempting to end her life on several occasions. Sinta also struggled to adapt to her new life without her mother, feeling unable to be emotionally or practically independent. The acceptance phase began to develop in each participant, though at different paces. Erlin started accepting reality and redirected her life toward caring for her younger sibling and building a better future. Dina tried to accept her situation by practicing meditation and cultivating patience. Sinta appeared to adapt the fastest, demonstrating independence through daily activities and relying on support from her immediate social circle.

For participant Erlin, the acceptance phase is marked by caring for her younger sibling, attending school, and working, yet remains accompanied by residual grief that surfaces in traumatic dreams about her mother. This aligns with the critique that acceptance in adolescents is provisional, not a final resolution. Erlin’s case reveals a critical paradox in the classical model of grief: the functional acceptance demonstrated through caring for her younger sibling does not guarantee emotional resolution. Although externally she appears to have adapted to her new role, internally Erlin experiences residual grief that continues to haunt her. Its manifestation appears in the form of recurring traumatic dreams about her mother. These dreams are not merely memories but expressions of unprocessed fear embedded in her emotional memory. Additionally, Erlin exhibits specific physical reactions such as insomnia and nausea as the anniversary of her mother’s death approaches (anniversary reaction), as well as avoidance of memory triggers, such as refusing to open the family photo album. This pattern indicates that her acceptance is temporary and prone to regression.

For these three adolescents, depression emerged not merely as a temporary phase of grief, but as an emotional storm that transformed their entire psychological landscape. Erlin, Dina, and Sinta each experienced a unique form of depression, yet all demonstrated how profound grief can morph into a threatening existential crisis. For these three adolescents,

depression emerged not merely as a temporary phase of grief, but as an emotional storm that transformed their entire psychological landscape.

One key finding of this study is that acceptance is not the end of the grieving journey, but rather an ongoing process that can be influenced by various factors. This aligns with recent research showing that grief can persist for a long time after a loss, and that individuals may experience “residual grief” even after reaching the acceptance stage. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of social support in helping adolescents cope with loss. Adolescents with strong social support tend to be better able to adapt to loss and experience fewer mental health issues.

Protective and Risk Factors

Based on the discussion of the Kübler-Ross stages presented earlier, each of the three participants exhibits distinct protective and risk factors. Erlin faces several significant risk factors during her grieving process. One of these was initial denial, manifested by withdrawing into herself and confiding her feelings only to her partner; this can hinder healthy emotional regulation. Additionally, she experienced repressed anger that led to excessive guilt stemming from linking her negative thoughts about others to her mother’s death, further exacerbating her psychological burden. She also went through a severe depressive phase, which manifested as feelings of emptiness and loneliness, leading to thoughts of ending her life, along with physical symptoms such as difficulty sleeping and avoiding memories like family photo albums. Although the responsibilities she had to fulfill—caring for her younger sibling, working, and completing her education—could add to the pressure and slow down her healing process. However, there were also protective factors that helped her adapt, including her ability to gradually accept reality and focus on the future by caring for her younger sibling—an act that gave new meaning to her life after the loss. Additionally, support from her partner played a crucial role as a social resource for sharing feelings and preventing deeper emotional isolation. Her commitment to completing her studies and working also demonstrates resilience and a focus on personal growth as a foundation for building a better life after the loss.

Meanwhile, Dina faces high psychological risks during the grieving process. She exhibits passive denial by remaining silent and losing emotional sensitivity upon hearing the news of her mother’s passing, which hinders the timely acceptance of the loss. There was also pent-up anger and a sense of injustice stemming from the feeling that she had not yet been able to bring happiness to her parents, as well as envy toward friends with intact families, which deepened her feelings of worthlessness. The depressive phase he experienced was severe, leading him to attempt suicide on several occasions—such as ingesting poison, wrapping a towel around his neck, and overdosing on medication—indicating a very high level of despair and difficulty in performing daily activities. He also felt a lack of attention from his mother while she was alive, which served as an additional emotional burden, further intensifying his unmet desires. However, on the other hand, she also began to develop protective factors over time, such as a willingness to accept reality, even though

she still sometimes felt jealous of others. She employed spiritual and mindfulness-based coping strategies, such as meditation and patience, which helped her manage her grief and strengthen her emotional acceptance. Compared to before, she now realizes the importance of continuing to fight and not giving in to her circumstances, which allows her to begin rebuilding her life in a more adaptive way. Her ability to recognize her envy and keep trying also reflects a growing self-awareness, which is a crucial foundation for the healing and growth process following trauma.

However, there are differences in protective and risk factors observed in Sinta. Although Sinta experienced grief as deep as Erlin's and Dina's, she demonstrated greater resilience in coping with the loss of her mother. Her primary strengths lie in how she manages her emotions, the support she receives from her environment, and how she interprets the loss. When grief arises, Sinta does not allow her emotions to overwhelm her without control. She has a habit of writing in a diary, a simple yet effective way to express feelings that might be difficult to verbalize. By writing, she seems to "release" the emotional burden from her mind, giving her space to breathe and see the problem more clearly. This process of emotional release through written expression has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation. This isn't merely an escape; it's a cognitive-affective strategy for understanding and managing her own emotions through effective *emotional coherence processing*. Furthermore, Sinta isn't alone in facing her grief. Her aunt visits regularly, bringing not only food but also a consistent presence—a reminder that there's someone who cares and is ready to support her. This presence gives her a sense of security, reducing the feeling of isolation that often exacerbates her grief. She knows that every week, on a specific day, someone will check on her, providing structure to a life that once felt chaotic. What is particularly interesting is how Sinta views her mother's passing. Rather than getting stuck in the idea that her mother is "gone forever," she constructs a new narrative: her mother has now become a "guardian angel." This is not merely a consolation, but a way to give meaning to that loss. With this belief, her grief no longer feels so overwhelming, but rather something she can face with greater calm.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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symbol of past happiness when she could still gather with both her parents, who are no longer with her; family gatherings in the living room, eating moon cakes, and sharing laughter and jokes became images of happiness in her memory, though accompanied by sadness because she cannot relive those precious moments. Meanwhile, Dina responds to the photo with feelings of sadness and a sense of injustice because she longs for the warm family atmosphere depicted in the photo. However, at her young age, she feels she has not received enough attention from her mother, who should have been the supportive figure and source of warmth she needed. The photo serves as a reflection of unfulfilled desires regarding her relationship with her parents. The third participant, Sinta, felt happy upon seeing the photo because it reminded her of the past when her mother was still alive and she experienced the same family warmth; she even wished to turn back time and relive those moments together. However, her emotions were too overwhelming, leaving her unable to continue sharing her story and causing her to cry, which revealed the depth of her longing for the person she loved. In general, the photo served as a medium capable of triggering various emotions related to each participant's experiences and relationships with their families, demonstrating the significant power of visual imagery in evoking memories and personal meaning.

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Anger: All three participants exhibited anger dynamics that tended to be internalized and were closely linked to feelings of guilt and a sense of injustice. Luna directed her anger inward, blaming herself excessively because she felt her negative thoughts toward others

had contributed to her mother's condition. Dina also expressed anger toward herself for failing to bring happiness to her parents and felt envy toward others with intact families. Meanwhile, Sinta directs her anger more toward life's injustices when she witnesses others being neglectful toward their parents, even though she herself deeply misses that figure. This pattern aligns with findings emphasizing that adolescents in Indonesia tend to suppress expressions of anger as a form of adjustment within a collectivist culture. Furthermore, research indicates that envy and a sense of injustice arise from social comparison, which can intensify both anger and frustration. Studies also confirm that guilt frequently arises in the context of a child's filial duty toward parents, so that failure to fulfill this role can lead to self-directed anger. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta illustrate the dynamics of repressed anger characteristic of Indonesian culture, where guilt, envy, and social comparison are key factors shaping emotional responses to loss or experiences of injustice.

Bargaining: All three participants exhibited dynamics of regret closely linked to the bargaining phase in the grieving process. Erlin expressed implicit regret by stating that if she hadn't wished for bad things to happen, her mother might still be alive. Dina also showed a desire for things to be different by hoping her mother could have lived longer, though she was more inclined to accept reality. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed explicit regret regarding past behaviors perceived as hurting her parents, as well as imagining alternative actions that might have prevented her current guilt. This pattern is consistent with findings showing that adolescents in Indonesia often express regret in the form of "if only" narratives as part of a cognitive effort to renegotiate the reality of loss. The study confirms that the bargaining phase in adolescents is not merely characterized by irrational hopes but is also accompanied by guilt that intensifies the depth of regret. It also found that an appreciation for life among adolescents who have lost a parent often begins with a phase of regret and deep reflection before eventually evolving into acceptance. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta demonstrate that guilt, regret, and the desire to change the past are key factors in the adaptation process following loss.

Depression: All three participants exhibited significant symptoms of depression following the loss of a parent. Erlin expressed feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and suicidal thoughts, "*I once considered drinking Baygon,*" indicating deep despair. Dina even reported "*several suicide attempts, such as trying to drink poison, wrapping a towel around my neck, and swallowing large quantities of medication,*" which illustrates severe depression and difficulty carrying out daily activities. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed feelings of loneliness, emptiness, and a strong emotional dependence on her mother: "*I can't even take care of myself—I can't do anything on my own; my mother has to do everything for me,*" which indicates impaired adaptive functioning following the loss. This pattern aligns with research finding that adolescents who lose a parent due to an accident exhibit depressive symptoms such as a sense of emptiness, hopelessness, and changes in daily routines. Another study also indicates that the loss of a parent can trigger deep grief and even suicidal ideation in adolescents. And research from confirms that

children and adolescents in Indonesia who experience loss are at high risk of depression and require early intervention to prevent suicidal behavior. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta illustrate the dynamics of severe depression among Indonesian adolescents following the loss of a parent, characterized by feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, suicide attempts, and impaired adaptive functioning.

Acceptance: The three participants demonstrated distinct yet interconnected processes of acceptance, all centered on rebuilding their lives after the loss. Erlin stated that she “*has come to accept the reality*” despite still being overwhelmed by grief, and is trying to shift her focus toward the future by caring for her younger sibling while working amidst ongoing school exams. Dina emphasized that she “*has begun to accept that reality, even though I sometimes feel envious when my friends are driven to school by their parents,*” strengthening herself through patience and meditation as coping strategies. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed acceptance by keeping herself busy, managing household chores, and cooking for herself—as if taking on her mother’s role—which reflects both her efforts toward independence and the social support she receives from her partner and friends. These dynamics of acceptance align with findings emphasizing that acceptance is a crucial stage in the self-healing process for adolescents following a loss, marked by reframing the experience of grief and an orientation toward the future. In line with this, the research underscores that coping strategies rooted in spirituality and mindfulness can help adolescents manage grief and strengthen emotional acceptance. Additionally, the study indicates that social support plays a crucial role in accelerating psychological adaptation, particularly among adolescents who have lost a parent, by fostering resilience and post-traumatic growth. Thus, the experiences of Erlin, Dina, and Sinta illustrate that acceptance is not an endpoint but a gradual process influenced by spirituality, functional independence, and social support within the Indonesian cultural context.

Acceptance Is Not the Final Stage

During the denial stage, all three participants exhibited distinct forms of emotional resistance. Erlin expressed denial subtly by holding back her tears just one day after her mother’s death and tended to withdraw from her family. Dina demonstrated passive denial through silence and an inability to process emotions, reflected in her quiet demeanor upon receiving the news of the death. Sinta initially appeared calm but later displayed deeper emotional reactions, including a desire to take her late mother’s place, signaling a conflict between reality and hope. Such denial patterns are found in research stating that denial is a common early psychological defense mechanism that emerges when facing loss.

During the anger stage, all three participants displayed different yet equally intense emotional expressions. Erlin directed her anger inward by blaming herself for the harsh words she had once hurled at the person who had hurt her mother: “*I’m angry at myself because my mother was once wronged by someone, so because I was angry, I spoke, wishing bad things upon that person. A few days later, my mother was hospitalized and her condition worsened, and I blamed myself for why I spoke that way, why I wished harm*”

upon others. And I remember someone once saying that if we pray for bad things to happen to others, 70 angels will grant those wishes upon ourselves. That's when I blamed myself—if only I hadn't wished for that bad thing, maybe my mother would still be alive today," a pattern known in psychological theory as internalized anger, or a condition where someone suppresses their anger. Dina experienced a more complex mix of anger—not only directed at herself but also accompanied by envy toward those who still have intact families, reflecting what the literature refers to as displaced anger, or directing emotions toward the wrong target. Meanwhile, Sinta projects her anger externally by questioning life's injustices—a response explained by the “just world hypothesis” as a common reaction to traumatic events perceived as irrational.

The bargaining stage manifests as regret and hope to alter the past. At this stage, all three participants demonstrate emotional efforts to “negotiate” with the reality of the loss they have experienced. Erlin is trapped in a cycle of regret, constantly imagining alternative scenarios where she could have changed her words or actions in the past to prevent her mother's death. This “what-if” mindset is a common coping mechanism that emerges when someone tries to find meaning in a traumatic event. Dina expresses a refusal to accept the finality of time through the fantasy that her mother should still be alive. This response reflects what is known as protest behavior, in which an individual unconsciously resists the finality of loss by clinging to irrational hope. Meanwhile, Sinta expressed regret focused more on specific past actions she believed had hurt her mother. Her desire to “rewind time” and act differently—where the brain naturally creates alternative scenarios to reduce feelings of helplessness—was evident.

The depressive phase became a particularly prominent stage for all three participants. Erlin expressed extreme despair, even entertaining suicidal thoughts. Dina experienced deeper depression, even attempting to end her life on several occasions. Sinta also struggled to adapt to her new life without her mother, feeling unable to be emotionally or practically independent. The acceptance phase began to develop in each participant, though at different paces. Erlin started accepting reality and redirected her life toward caring for her younger sibling and building a better future. Dina tried to accept her situation by practicing meditation and cultivating patience. Sinta appeared to adapt the fastest, demonstrating independence through daily activities and relying on support from her immediate social circle.

For participant Erlin, the acceptance phase is marked by caring for her younger sibling, attending school, and working, yet remains accompanied by residual grief that surfaces in traumatic dreams about her mother. This aligns with the critique that acceptance in adolescents is provisional, not a final resolution. Erlin's case reveals a critical paradox in the classical model of grief: the functional acceptance demonstrated through caring for her younger sibling does not guarantee emotional resolution. Although externally she appears to have adapted to her new role, internally Erlin experiences residual grief that continues to haunt her. Its manifestation appears in the form of recurring traumatic dreams about her mother. These dreams are not merely memories but expressions of unprocessed

fear embedded in her emotional memory. Additionally, Erlin exhibits specific physical reactions such as insomnia and nausea as the anniversary of her mother's death approaches (anniversary reaction), as well as avoidance of memory triggers, such as refusing to open the family photo album. This pattern indicates that her acceptance is temporary and prone to regression.

For these three adolescents, depression emerged not merely as a temporary phase of grief, but as an emotional storm that transformed their entire psychological landscape. Erlin, Dina, and Sinta each experienced a unique form of depression, yet all demonstrated how profound grief can morph into a threatening existential crisis. For these three adolescents, depression emerged not merely as a temporary phase of grief, but as an emotional storm that transformed their entire psychological landscape.

One key finding of this study is that acceptance is not the end of the grieving journey, but rather an ongoing process that can be influenced by various factors. This aligns with recent research showing that grief can persist for a long time after a loss, and that individuals may experience "residual grief" even after reaching the acceptance stage. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of social support in helping adolescents cope with loss. Adolescents with strong social support tend to be better able to adapt to loss and experience fewer mental health issues.

Protective and Risk Factors

Based on the discussion of the Kübler-Ross stages presented earlier, each of the three participants exhibits distinct protective and risk factors. Erlin faces several significant risk factors during her grieving process. One of these was initial denial, manifested by withdrawing into herself and confiding her feelings only to her partner; this can hinder healthy emotional regulation. Additionally, she experienced repressed anger that led to excessive guilt stemming from linking her negative thoughts about others to her mother's death, further exacerbating her psychological burden. She also went through a severe depressive phase, which manifested as feelings of emptiness and loneliness, leading to thoughts of ending her life, along with physical symptoms such as difficulty sleeping and avoiding memories like family photo albums. Although the responsibilities she had to fulfill—caring for her younger sibling, working, and completing her education—could add to the pressure and slow down her healing process. However, there were also protective factors that helped her adapt, including her ability to gradually accept reality and focus on the future by caring for her younger sibling—an act that gave new meaning to her life after the loss. Additionally, support from her partner played a crucial role as a social resource for sharing feelings and preventing deeper emotional isolation. Her commitment to completing her studies and working also demonstrates resilience and a focus on personal growth as a foundation for building a better life after the loss.

Meanwhile, Dina faces high psychological risks during the grieving process. She exhibits passive denial by remaining silent and losing emotional sensitivity upon hearing the news of her mother's passing, which hinders the timely acceptance of the loss. There was also

pent-up anger and a sense of injustice stemming from the feeling that she had not yet been able to bring happiness to her parents, as well as envy toward friends with intact families, which deepened her feelings of worthlessness. The depressive phase he experienced was severe, leading him to attempt suicide on several occasions—such as ingesting poison, wrapping a towel around his neck, and overdosing on medication—indicating a very high level of despair and difficulty in performing daily activities. He also felt a lack of attention from his mother while she was alive, which served as an additional emotional burden, further intensifying his unmet desires. However, on the other hand, she also began to develop protective factors over time, such as a willingness to accept reality, even though she still sometimes felt jealous of others. She employed spiritual and mindfulness-based coping strategies, such as meditation and patience, which helped her manage her grief and strengthen her emotional acceptance. Compared to before, she now realizes the importance of continuing to fight and not giving in to her circumstances, which allows her to begin rebuilding her life in a more adaptive way. Her ability to recognize her envy and keep trying also reflects a growing self-awareness, which is a crucial foundation for the healing and growth process following trauma.

However, there are differences in protective and risk factors observed in Sinta. Although Sinta experienced grief as deep as Erlin's and Dina's, she demonstrated greater resilience in coping with the loss of her mother. Her primary strengths lie in how she manages her emotions, the support she receives from her environment, and how she interprets the loss. When grief arises, Sinta does not allow her emotions to overwhelm her without control. She has a habit of writing in a diary, a simple yet effective way to express feelings that might be difficult to verbalize. By writing, she seems to “release” the emotional burden from her mind, giving her space to breathe and see the problem more clearly. This process of emotional release through written expression has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve emotional regulation. This isn't merely an escape; it's a cognitive-affective strategy for understanding and managing her own emotions through effective *emotional coherence processing*. Furthermore, Sinta isn't alone in facing her grief. Her aunt visits regularly, bringing not only food but also a consistent presence—a reminder that there's someone who cares and is ready to support her. This presence gives her a sense of security, reducing the feeling of isolation that often exacerbates her grief. She knows that every week, on a specific day, someone will check on her, providing structure to a life that once felt chaotic. What is particularly interesting is how Sinta views her mother's passing. Rather than getting stuck in the idea that her mother is “gone forever,” she constructs a new narrative: her mother has now become a “guardian angel.” This is not merely a consolation, but a way to give meaning to that loss. With this belief, her grief no longer feels so overwhelming, but rather something she can face with greater calm.

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