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Lived Experiences of Parental Bereavement in Early Adulthood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study in Gresik, Indonesia

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Abstract

Parental bereavement may unsettle emotional security, everyday routines, and the meanings through which young adults understand family relationships. This study explores how five bereaved young adults in Ngembung Village, Cerme District, Gresik, Indonesia, described the death of a parent and their subsequent adjustments. A qualitative phenomenological design informed by interpretative phenomenological analysis was applied to reported in-depth interview accounts; participants were purposively selected and were aged 20-25 years. The accounts suggest four interconnected experiential patterns: acute disbelief and continuing longing; reconstruction of parental absence as a change in safety and belonging; divergent behavioral responses and support-seeking; and negotiated acceptance through social relationships and, for some participants, Islamic practices. Contrasting accounts show that apparently calm religious acceptance can coexist with loss, whereas perceived improvement does not necessarily indicate that grief has ended. These findings illuminate the relevance of nonjudgmental bereavement support and client-led spiritual resources in Islamic guidance and counseling. Interpretations are limited by the small, single-community sample and the absence of a documented full transcript-level analytic audit trail.

Keywords: Parental Bereavement; Young Adults; Phenomenology; Islamic Coping; Grief Counseling

Abstrak

Kehilangan orang tua dapat mengguncang rasa aman, rutinitas, dan cara individu dewasa awal memaknai hubungan keluarga. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman lima dewasa awal yang kehilangan orang tua di Desa Ngembung, Kecamatan Cerme, Kabupaten Gresik, serta penyesuaian yang mereka ceritakan setelah peristiwa tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan desain fenomenologis kualitatif yang diinformasikan oleh interpretative phenomenological analysis, berdasarkan laporan wawancara mendalam yang tersedia. Lima partisipan berusia 20-25 tahun dipilih secara purposif. Narasi partisipan memperlihatkan empat pola pengalaman yang saling berkaitan: keterkejutan dan kerinduan yang berlanjut; pemaknaan ketiadaan orang tua sebagai perubahan rasa aman dan tempat bergantung; respons perilaku dan pencarian dukungan yang beragam; serta negosiasi penerimaan melalui relasi sosial dan, pada sebagian partisipan, praktik keagamaan Islam. Perbedaan pengalaman menunjukkan bahwa penerimaan religius tidak selalu menghapus kesedihan, sedangkan perasaan membaik tidak berarti proses berduka telah berakhir. Temuan ini memberi dasar bagi pendampingan duka yang empatik, tidak menghakimi, dan menghargai pilihan sumber daya spiritual klien dalam Bimbingan dan Konseling Islam. Interpretasi dibatasi oleh jumlah partisipan, lokasi tunggal, dan belum tersedianya jejak audit analisis transkrip secara lengkap.

Kata kunci: Duka Kehilangan Orang Tua; Dewasa Awal; Fenomenologi; Koping Islami; Konseling Duka

INTRODUCTION

Parental death can alter the emotional and practical coordinates of early adulthood. Young adults may be pursuing education, work, financial independence, and intimate relationships while still relying on parents for affection, advice, and a sense of home. Bereavement therefore involves more than an acute emotional reaction: it may prompt changes in social roles, everyday routines, identity, and expectations about the future. Research on parental bereavement has documented both distress and attempts to regain continuity, without establishing a universal course of adjustment (Chater et al., 2022; Bonanno, 2004). Bereavement research also emphasizes that social circumstances can condition distress and access to support, although pandemic-specific comparisons cannot be directly generalized to this village (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020).

Bereavement refers to the circumstance of losing someone through death; grief refers to the varied psychological, bodily, social, and spiritual responses associated with that loss; and mourning includes ways people express and accommodate grief in personal and cultural practices. Such distinctions matter because sadness, disbelief, yearning, withdrawal, and efforts to return to daily activity do not necessarily occur in a fixed sequence. The dual process model conceptualizes coping as movement between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented demands (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Worden (2018) similarly describes tasks of mourning as adaptive challenges rather than compulsory stages that everyone must complete in the same order.

Studies of meaning reconstruction offer a further explanation for why bereavement may continue to matter after the immediate shock. People may reinterpret what the deceased represented, renegotiate their relationship with memories of that person, and reassess personal priorities (Neimeyer, 2001; Hibberd,

2013). In a study involving bereaved young adults, ongoing bonds with the deceased were linked to grief experiences in ways that depended on the person's ability to make sense of the loss (Neimeyer et al., 2006). Meaning making is therefore not equivalent to the disappearance of sadness (Park, 2010).

Religious language and practices may become relevant to this reconstruction. Prayer, remembrance, belief in divine decree, and acts performed in honor of deceased relatives may offer some individuals a framework for understanding loss. Yet religious coping can take supportive or distressing forms, and its effects should not be presumed from affiliation alone (Pargament et al., 2000; Koenig, 2012). Qualitative studies of Muslim bereavement have demonstrated the complexity of faith-based narratives: Islamic beliefs may sustain agency and continuity, while particular losses can also intensify tensions surrounding the idea of accepting God's will (Kristiansen et al., 2016; Frei-Landau et al., 2023; Çınaroğlu, 2024).

The present study concerns five young adults in Ngembung Village, Cerme District, Gresik Regency, Indonesia. The source study documents contrasting accounts of the death of one or both parents, including early disbelief, longing for a lost sense of protection, changes in social engagement, religious practices, and attempts to articulate a changed future. Unlike broad assertions that grief research is uniformly quantitative, the relevant gap is more specific: closer attention is needed to how the meanings of parental absence, relational support, and Islamic practices interact within individual accounts from this community. A phenomenologically informed case-level reading is therefore warranted (Smith et al., 2022; Chater et al., 2022).

This article addresses two questions: (1) How do young adults in Ngembung describe and interpret their emotional, relational, and behavioral experiences following parental death? (2) How do the available accounts depict meaning making, social support, and religious practices in everyday adjustment? The contribution is an interpretative comparison of five reported experiences and a cautious account of their

implications for Islamic guidance and counseling; the study does not test a treatment or estimate the prevalence of grief-related disorders.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bereavement as a non-linear process

The dual process model characterizes adaptation as oscillation between confronting reminders of death and attending to practical demands such as study, work, and family duties (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Emotional expression and temporary distancing are not mutually exclusive indicators of progress or failure. Worden's (2018) tasks—acknowledging the loss, processing pain, adjusting to a changed world, and sustaining an enduring connection while moving forward—are best used as sensitizing concepts rather than predetermined categories that interviewees must confirm. Bonanno (2004) emphasizes heterogeneous adjustment pathways after loss, including relatively stable functioning and more prolonged distress.

Meaning making, attachment, and religious coping

The death of a parent may unsettle assumptions about safety, continuity, and identity. Meaning reconstruction refers to efforts to integrate the death into a coherent, though potentially unfinished, life narrative (Neimeyer, 2001; Park, 2010). Both ongoing attachment and a shifting sense of life's significance may be present (Neimeyer et al., 2006; Hibberd, 2013). Religious interpretations are one possible component of this process, but neither acceptance nor faith should be treated as proof that emotional suffering has ended. Scholarship on religious coping identifies possible support as well as religious struggle (Pargament et al., 2000; Frei-Landau et al., 2023).

Interpretative phenomenology and Islamic counseling

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) attends to lived experience, the meanings participants attribute to it, and the researcher's interpretative engagement with those meanings. Its idiographic commitment requires careful

attention to individual cases before tentative cross-case claims are advanced (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2022). For Islamic guidance and counseling, this perspective encourages practitioners to understand what prayer, patience (sabr), reliance on God (tawakkul), or acceptance (riḍā) actually mean to each client, rather than assuming that spiritual vocabulary necessarily implies emotional resolution. Cultural sensitivity involves making space for grief, ambivalence, and client-defined resources (Koenig, 2012; Kristiansen et al., 2016).

METHOD

Design and setting

The original study describes a qualitative phenomenological design employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The study is situated in Ngembung Village, Cerme District, Gresik Regency, Indonesia, where family and religious relationships form part of the reported social context. In this revised presentation, the analysis remains anchored to the case descriptions and interview extracts contained in the source manuscript; no new interviews, observations, or data collection are claimed. IPA is used as an interpretative orientation, while the evidential limits of the available reporting are acknowledged (Smith & Nizza, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

Participants and data sources

Five individuals aged 20–25 years were purposively selected after the death of at least one parent, with a reported minimum interval of six months since the loss. The manuscript identifies them only as SB, SU, NS, MD, and AK. The provided record identifies SB as bereaved of a mother; SU, NS, and MD as bereaved of a father; and AK as bereaved of both parents. Individual ages, dates of parental death, gender, and detailed recruitment procedures are not available in the reviewed manuscript and are therefore not specified here.

The source manuscript reports in-depth interviewing, observation, and documentation. Its traceable findings, however, rely on interview-based narrative summaries and short quotations dated May 17, May 19, and June 8, 2026. Because observation notes and documentary excerpts are not reproduced or linked to specific claims, they are not presented as corroborating evidence in this revised analysis. Interview extracts are identified by pseudonym; English renderings of Indonesian quotations are labeled as author translations. The interviewer-participant relationship, recording arrangements, and interview length also remain undocumented in the material available for revision.

Analytic approach and trustworthiness

The reported accounts were organized idiographically by participant before cross-case comparison. Attention was directed to how each person described the absence of a parent, the meanings attached to that absence, and the responses that appeared important within their account. Four interpretative groupings were then used to present recurring and contrasting material: (a) disbelief and enduring longing, (b) altered safety and belonging, (c) divergent daily responses and support, and (d) negotiated acceptance and meaning. These are interpretative summaries of the material shown in the source report, not a claim that a complete transcript-by-transcript IPA coding audit has been independently verified. Contemporary IPA guidelines emphasize the importance of transparent links from data excerpts to interpretations (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith, 2011).

As a reporting safeguard, claims are attributed to named pseudonymous cases rather than generalized automatically to all five participants. The present manuscript does not supply a verifiable record of full transcripts, independent coding, reflexive diary entries, participant feedback, or triangulation procedures; no such steps are asserted as completed. Transparent reporting is consistent with established qualitative reporting criteria (Tong et al., 2007).

Ethical considerations

Bereavement narratives can involve identifiable family histories and sensitive mental health information. Accordingly, this revised text minimizes identifying details, avoids diagnostic labels, and does not reproduce unnecessary treatment information. The source file does not provide an ethics-review identifier or documentation of consent to publish translated quotations. These elements require confirmation from the original investigators before submission; ethics approval and consent cannot be inferred retrospectively from the existence of interviews.

RESULTS

The source narratives support four connected interpretative patterns, with important contrasts between participants. Table 1 summarizes the case-level material reported in the original account. Terms such as 'more stable' and 'better' represent participants' retrospective appraisals and not longitudinally measured outcomes.

Table 1. Participant-level summary of the available interview accounts

Case	Reported loss	Account as described in the source manuscript
SB	Mother	Shock; prayer and family contact; greater appreciation of time together.
SU	Father	Disbelief; loss of protection; later reported coming to terms with grief.
NS	Father	Shock; changes in social behavior; later reported improvement.
MD	Father	Absence despite composed narration; prayer, tahlil, charity, religious meaning.
AK	Both parents	Intense distress, sleep disruption and withdrawal; later felt more stable.

Disbelief, shock, and enduring longing

SB described an intense reaction to the news of her mother's death: 'When I first learned that my mother had died, I was very shocked ... I cried and felt as though I could not believe what had happened' (SB, interview, May 17, 2026; translated from Indonesian). The statement conveys the clash between factual information and the participant's immediate capacity to assimilate its personal meaning. It does not

establish a discrete 'denial stage'; rather, shock was part of this account of a meaningful relationship suddenly altered by death.

SU initially experienced the announcement of his father's death as 'like false news' and described hoping that the death had not really occurred (SU, interview, May 17, 2026; paraphrased from the Indonesian source report). NS also described initial shock after losing a father, followed by periods of reduced sociability and irritability (NS, interview, June 8, 2026). These cases contain comparable disbelief, but the available report does not establish identical intensity, duration, or coping trajectories across participants. The absence continued to be felt after the immediate announcement of death.

Parental absence as altered safety and belonging

The death was not narrated only as the loss of a person but also as the disruption of relational functions. SU described his father as 'a protector and a place to return to' (SU, interview, May 17, 2026; translated from Indonesian), making the grief experience intelligible as a changed sense of refuge. MD, by contrast, articulated a calmer theological interpretation while still reporting the absence of a father's attention and prayers. The contrast illustrates that visible composure and continued longing are compatible rather than contradictory experiences.

AK's account involved the death of both parents and a pronounced sense of being without previously available protection. The source report also associates this case with disrupted sleep, withdrawal from social contact, and diminished motivation (AK, interview, June 8, 2026). These features indicate significant self-reported difficulty, but the interview summary cannot establish a psychiatric diagnosis or prove that the circumstances of parental death alone caused every reported change. Attention to AK's distinct circumstances is more informative than assigning the case to a universal trajectory of grief.

Divergent everyday responses and sources of support

The participants described different activities in response to loss. SB reported praying and maintaining more frequent contact with relatives and friends. MD described prayer, communal remembrance (tahlil), and charitable giving on behalf of the deceased father. For these participants, practice and relationships offered ways to remain connected with the deceased and with living communities. The source material does not determine whether these practices reduced symptoms or were already habitual before the loss.

NS recalled periods of behavior that the original report negatively labeled 'misconduct.' Because the specific actions and their context are not described sufficiently, this revision does not reproduce that judgmental classification. Instead, the account is understood cautiously as a participant's report of changes in peer interactions and self-regulation after bereavement. AK described more serious disruption and reliance on family support. Together, the accounts suggest heterogeneous support needs rather than a simple distinction between 'good' religious coping and 'bad' nonreligious coping.

Negotiated acceptance and the reconstruction of meaning

SB interpreted the loss partly as a reminder to value time with family. SU later described having 'made peace with myself, learned to accept and to be strong' (SU, interview, May 17, 2026; translated from Indonesian). The phrase communicates an appraisal made at the time of the interview; it does not prove that acceptance was permanent or that earlier distress had entirely disappeared.

MD offered a more explicitly spiritual account: “Loss does not mean disappearance; it means returning to the Creator” (MD, interview, May 19, 2026; translated from Indonesian). For this participant, faith language provided a way of giving death intelligible meaning alongside an acknowledged sense of absence. AK reflected that 'loss can greatly affect someone's mental condition' (AK, interview, June 8, 2026; translated from Indonesian) and later described feeling 'more stable than

before.' NS also reported being 'much better' at the time of the interview. Such remarks indicate perceived movement in personal meaning and day-to-day functioning, but the reported single interviews do not support a claim of objectively measured longitudinal recovery.

Across cases, meaning making was neither uniformly spiritual nor reducible to a single acceptance pathway. The available material instead depicts a negotiated relationship between continuing absence, remembered care, community practices, and personal appraisals of change. Some accounts emphasize family time or lost protection, others religious return or psychological vulnerability. This variation is itself an important interpretative finding.

DISCUSSION

A. Relational interpretation of parental bereavement

The central insight is that parental death was experienced partly as a reconfiguration of safety, belonging, and everyday orientation. SU's description of a father as a 'place to return to' conveys the loss of a relational anchor, while MD's continued recognition of absence complicates any assumption that a calm narrative equals emotional closure. Research on young people's retrospective experiences similarly documents emotional disruption, isolation, changed routines, and the enduring significance of support (Chater et al., 2022). The case material is compatible with these broader observations without making a prevalence claim.

The contrast between MD and AK further demonstrates why a single hierarchy of 'adaptive' responses would be misleading. MD's religious interpretation coexisted with longing. AK's narrative included substantial disruption and subsequent perceived stabilization. Bonanno (2004) cautions against treating heterogeneous grief patterns as deviations from one expected recovery route. In an IPA-oriented reading, such differences are not simply noise around an average experience; they are substantive features that help identify distinct meanings of loss (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

B. Meaning reconstruction without a compulsory sequence

The available accounts do not demonstrate a single progression from denial to acceptance. Rather, they show overlapping appraisals, occasional disbelief, continuing attachment, and efforts to live with the absence. The dual process model offers a useful interpretation: maintaining social ties and completing ordinary tasks may coexist with periods of intense attention to grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Similarly, Worden's (2018) tasks provide a vocabulary for adjustment but should not be mistaken for ordered stages or used to judge whether a participant is grieving 'correctly.'

The accounts also invite a distinction between making sense of death and finding a changed sense of purpose. SU's lost protector, SB's renewed valuation of family time, and AK's awareness of mental health concerns are different forms of reconstruction. This is consonant with work separating sense making, life significance, and identity change after loss (Hibberd, 2013; Park, 2010). Ongoing psychological pain need not invalidate meaning making, and finding some meaning should not be equated with proof of post-traumatic growth (Neimeyer et al., 2006).

C. Islamic practices as situated, not compulsory, coping resources

Prayer, remembrance gatherings, and charity emerged in the accounts of SB and MD. It is plausible to understand these practices as ways of sustaining bonds with deceased parents and participating in social relationships, while their effectiveness was not directly evaluated. Çınaroğlu (2024) illustrates how Islamic ideas such as tawakkul and qadar may feature in bereavement narratives. Kristiansen et al. (2016) likewise show the intertwined role of religion and social context in an individual Muslim bereavement account. These studies support a culturally sensitive interpretation, not a universal prescription.

It is equally important to acknowledge that religious language may coexist with unresolved suffering. Research among Muslim parents bereaved by homicide reported struggles with reconciling loss and divine will, underscoring that

spirituality can contain ambivalence (Frei-Landau et al., 2023). Broader religious-coping scholarship distinguishes potentially supportive responses from spiritual distress (Pargament et al., 2000; Koenig, 2012). Thus, counseling should never infer insufficient faith from grief, prescribe immediate acceptance, or frame continued longing as a moral failure.

D. Implications for Islamic guidance and counseling

The first practical implication is a nonjudgmental assessment of the client's own narrative. A counselor can invite the bereaved person to describe what has changed in daily life, what the deceased represented, where distress is most disruptive, and which relationships currently feel supportive. In this study, 'protection,' 'return,' and 'family time' are more case-sensitive openings for counseling than imposing a generic sequence of shock, anger, and acceptance. The approach is compatible with person-centered interpretation and the preservation of participant voice emphasized in IPA scholarship (Larkin et al., 2006).

Second, Islamic resources should be offered with permission and tailored to the client's preferences. When meaningful to the person, prayer, remembrance, charity, sabr, or tawakkul can be explored as personally defined practices of continuity and support. The counselor should also allow space for ambivalence, anger, fatigue, or uncertainty without moralizing. Community and family support may help, but the desired level of involvement must be negotiated individually (Walsh, 2020; Koenig, 2012).

Third, supportive religious counseling is not a substitute for clinical assessment when suffering is persistent, severe, or functionally disabling. Current diagnostic literature distinguishes normative grief from prolonged grief disorder using symptom pattern, duration, impairment, and cultural context (Prigerson et al., 2021; Maciejewski et al., 2016; Shear, 2015). No participant in the present material was assessed against those criteria. When appropriate, counselors should

collaborate with trained mental health professionals rather than assigning diagnoses from isolated interview statements.

E. Contribution and limitations

The article's context-specific contribution is a contrastive interpretation of five reported accounts of parental loss in a community where family and Islamic practices shape available vocabularies of meaning. It identifies relational absence, divergent coping choices, and negotiated faith-based interpretation as relevant issues for Islamic guidance and counseling. These are hypotheses for deeper inquiry rather than evidence of causal effects or intervention efficacy.

The study is limited by the small purposive sample, a single community, reliance on retrospective self-report, unknown time since death for individual participants, and limited disclosure of recruitment, interview context, ethics review, and researcher positionality. Most importantly, the source manuscript does not provide complete interview transcripts or a reproducible within-case/cross-case coding record. Thus, the four reported groupings should be read as provisional interpretative syntheses of available excerpts rather than as independently validated IPA themes. Future research should provide complete idiographic analyses, reflexive documentation, consent details, and, where feasible, follow-up interviews to examine changes across time (Smith et al., 2022; Tong et al., 2007).

CONCLUSION

The accounts of five young adults in Ngembung Village portray parental bereavement as a relational as well as emotional experience. Disbelief and longing were accompanied by changes in the perceived availability of protection, daily interaction, and sources of support. Participants differed meaningfully: some emphasized family connection, some interpreted death through Islamic practices, and others described substantial disruption followed by a sense of partial stabilization. The evidence does not support a universal stage model, a clinical diagnosis, or a claim that religion uniformly produces recovery.

For Islamic guidance and counseling, the findings favor attentive listening, nonjudgmental exploration of grief, respect for client-chosen spiritual practices, and referral when difficulties markedly impair functioning. A future full IPA study should document case-level analytic steps and revisit participants over time, allowing stronger conclusions about how the experience and meaning of parental absence evolve.

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