

Navigating Grief: The Resilience of Single Mothers in Facing Life Challenges After the Loss of a Spouse

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Abstract

The death of a spouse is an event that not only causes deep grief but also forces women to undergo a role transition as single mothers who must cope with various demands simultaneously. This study focuses on the dynamics of resilience among single mothers as they navigate the grieving process and rebuild their lives following the death of their spouse. The objective of this study is to understand how single mothers make sense of their loss, adapt to life changes, and develop strategies to cope with the various challenges following their husband's death. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design involving one single mother and two significant others selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed six main themes: (1) complex emotional dynamics in coping with the loss of a spouse; (2) challenges and coping strategies in managing the family's finances; (3) social conflicts and their impact on family relationships; (4) the role of social and family support in building resilience; (5) the transformation of the single mother's role in the life changes following her partner's death; and (6) hopes and motivations for building a future for her children. The novelty of this study lies in the finding that single mothers' resilience is a dynamic process that emerges through the management of grief, the reframing of life, and the transformation of their identity as heads of household. Resilience is formed through the acceptance of loss, religious and social coping mechanisms, and support from family and the community, enabling single mothers to bounce back, maintain their parenting and economic roles, and rebuild a sense of purpose in life.

Keywords: Husband's death; Resilience; Single mother.

How to Cite: Apriliani, R. N. & Maghfiroh, F. (2026). The Navigating Grief: The Resilience of Single Mothers in Facing Life Challenges After the Loss of a Spouse. *Jurnal Socius: Journal of Sociology Research and Education*, 13(1), 85-96.



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Introduction

The death of a spouse constitutes one of the most distressing life events, as it can significantly alter the emotional, social, and economic conditions of the surviving individual. For women who subsequently assume the role of single mothers, the loss of a partner signifies not only the absence of a companion but also the loss of a primary source of emotional and economic support within the family. This condition compels women to undertake dual roles as both caregivers and breadwinners. Research indicates that single mothers following the death of a spouse are vulnerable to experiencing profound grief, stress, depression, economic uncertainty, as well as various difficulties in fulfilling caregiving functions (Yuliani, 2024). Such circumstances render resilience a crucial capacity in enabling single mothers to adapt and maintain functional well-being despite being in highly stressful conditions (Arsa, 2024).

The phenomenon of women assuming the role of household heads in Indonesia has also shown a continuous upward trend. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS) indicate that approximately 12.72% of household heads in Indonesia are women, largely due to divorce, the death of a spouse, or situations in which husbands are no longer able to fulfill their role as primary breadwinners (BPS, 2025). Furthermore, demographic data reveal a consistent increase in the number of female-headed households in recent years, indicating that more women are required to independently shoulder family responsibilities. This condition demonstrates that women not only face emotional loss but also encounter

heightened economic demands, caregiving responsibilities, and social pressures following the death of a spouse. Therefore, it is essential to understand how single mothers develop resilience in order to adapt and sustain their life functioning amid various post-loss challenges. Resilience is understood as an individual's capacity to adapt positively when confronted with adversity, stress, or traumatic life events. Masten (2001) conceptualizes resilience as "ordinary magic," referring to an adaptive capacity that enables individuals to continue developing despite facing significant challenges. Tugade & Fredrickson (2004) define resilience as the ability to cope with, overcome, and recover from life's adversities. Meanwhile, Reivich & Shatté (2002) emphasize that resilience involves the ability to respond to adversity in healthy and productive ways through emotional regulation, impulse control, optimism, causal analysis, empathy, self-efficacy, and the capacity to seize positive opportunities. Thus, resilience is not merely about survival but also encompasses the ability to reconstruct one's life and find new meaning after experiencing loss.

Numerous studies have examined resilience among single mothers following the death of a spouse. Afdal (2022) found that the majority of single mothers exhibit relatively low levels of resilience and continue to face difficulties in the adaptation process. Bimantara (2022) demonstrated that single mothers experience various emotional impacts, including sadness, anxiety, fear, and difficulties in managing daily life after losing their spouse. Lefia (2023) highlighted the importance of both internal and external factors such as education, family communication, religiosity, social support, and economic conditions in fostering family resilience following the husband's death. Meanwhile, Sukmana (2023) found that the mental health of single mothers is influenced by self-acceptance, social support, employment conditions, social stigma, and children's future orientation.

Other studies indicate that the resilience of single mothers is shaped by a combination of risk and protective factors. Ladiba (2020) found that self-acceptance, religiosity, gratitude, coping strategies, and social support play significant roles in the resilience process following the loss of a spouse. In addition, Sudrajat (2023) revealed that individual, family, and community factors constitute primary sources that support the processes of adaptation and resilience among single mothers in facing various life challenges. Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into the factors influencing the resilience of single mothers, most research has primarily focused on levels of resilience, determinants of resilience, or psychological well-being after spousal loss. These studies have not extensively examined how resilience evolves throughout the grieving process, how single mothers construct meaning from the loss of a spouse, and how transformations in identity and roles occur during recovery. In other words, the dynamics of resilience as an ongoing process from the initial experience of loss to the reconstruction of a new life remain underexplored.

Based on this gap, the present study offers novelty by conceptualizing resilience as a dynamic process within the context of "navigating grief," rather than merely as an outcome of adaptation. This study posits that grieving, meaning-making, identity transformation, and role adjustment as a single mother occur simultaneously and interactively. Furthermore, this research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the subjective experiences of single mothers in depth, thereby capturing emic dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through the measurement of resilience levels alone. Accordingly, the research question guiding this study is: how do the dynamics of resilience unfold among single mothers in facing life challenges following the death of a spouse? This study aims to understand the forms, processes, and dynamics of resilience among single mothers after spousal loss, including emotional dynamics, coping strategies, economic challenges, social conflicts, social support, role transformation, and future-oriented hopes that motivate them to rebuild their lives. Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the advancement of family psychology and positive psychology by enriching the understanding of resilience in the context of spousal loss. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing psychosocial support services and family- and community-based support programs for single mothers following the death of a spouse.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was selected as the research focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of resilience in a single mother following the death of her spouse. The case study design enables the researcher to comprehensively explore subjective experiences, constructed meanings, and adaptation processes within real-life contexts. The study was conducted in Surabaya City, East Java, which is the residence of the research subject. The selection of this location was based on considerations of researcher accessibility and the participant's willingness to take part in the study. The research involved one primary informant and two supporting informants (significant others), resulting in a total of three participants. This number of informants is consistent with the case study design, which emphasizes in-depth exploration of the resilience experience of a single mother following the

death of her spouse. The primary informant was a single mother who had lost her husband and had assumed the role of head of the household for more than ten years. The participant was selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) a woman who lost her spouse due to death, (2) has undertaken the role of a single mother for at least five years, (3) has children who are currently or were previously dependent on her after the spouse's death, and (4) is willing to openly share her life experiences. To enrich the data and obtain broader perspectives, the study also involved two significant others, namely the biological children of the subject who directly observed the life processes and changes experienced by the subject following the spouse's death.

Data were collected from February to March 2025 through observation and in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the research focus, including experiences of loss, grieving processes, economic challenges, social conflicts, social support, role changes, and resilience processes. Each interview session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was conducted more than once when necessary to deepen the data obtained. All interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile device with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate analysis. In addition to interviews, observations were carried out during interactions with the subject to examine emotional expressions, behaviors, interaction patterns, and life situations relevant to the research focus. Field notes were used to document observational findings and the researcher's reflections throughout the research process.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage involved transcribing all interview data and repeatedly reading the transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject's experiences. The second stage involved generating initial codes by identifying significant statements related to experiences of loss, coping strategies, social support, role changes, and adaptation processes. The third stage consisted of grouping similar codes into broader categories. These categories were then reviewed and developed into main themes that represent patterns in the resilience experiences of the single mother. The final stage involved reviewing the consistency of the themes with the entire dataset, defining and naming the themes, and interpreting their meanings in relation to the concept of resilience and the subject's life context. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the primary subject with that from significant others. Technique triangulation was achieved through the use of in-depth interviews, observations, and field notes to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. In addition, member checking was conducted by confirming interview results and data interpretations with the subject to ensure the accuracy of meaning. All research processes were systematically documented through interview transcripts, field notes, and coding procedures, allowing for auditability and enhancing the dependability of the study.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study on the resilience of single mothers in facing life challenges following the death of a spouse are presented and discussed in this section. Through comprehensive in-depth interviews, several themes and categories emerged, illustrating how these mothers navigate emotional, social, and practical challenges in their daily lives. These findings provide an in-depth understanding of the adaptation processes, sources of strength, and strategies employed to foster resilience and maintain optimism in the face of adversity. The following section outlines the key themes and relevant categories identified in this study.

The complex emotional dynamics involved in coping with the loss of a life partner

Table 1. Dynamics of complex emotions in coping with the loss of a life partner

Category	Amount
Complex Emotions	14
Reception	13

Based on in-depth interviews with the primary subject (S1) and two significant others (SO1 and SO2), the subject experienced complex emotional dynamics during the initial phase of loss following the death of her spouse. The subject described that the death of her husband evoked profound grief accompanied by confusion in facing life changes. In addition to coping with emotional loss, the subject also experienced pressure as she had to assume her husband's occupational responsibilities and manage various matters previously handled by him. Nevertheless, over time, the subject gradually learned to accept the reality and

began to let go of her husband's passing as part of the recovery process. This was expressed by the subject as follows:

“At the moment I learned that my husband had passed away, I felt deeply saddened and confused because I did not know how to continue my life after losing him. I also experienced pressure when I had to take over his work and deal with various responsibilities and clients that he previously handled. During the early period, I tried to calm myself, and after forty days, I chose to begin learning to let him go. I kept convincing myself to accept sincerely so that I could continue living and remain strong for my family.” (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This statement is supported by findings from significant others. SO1 explained that during the early period of loss, the subject experienced intense grief, often crying in private and even fainting on several occasions due to the emotional impact of her husband's death. According to SO1, although the subject attempted to appear strong in front of her family, she frequently concealed her sadness and occasionally relived memories of her late husband (relapse). This is illustrated as follows:

“When my father passed away, my mother was truly devastated. She often went into her room and cried, and several times she even fainted because she could not bear the grief. She also cried quietly without sharing everything with us. Even now, sometimes she still remembers and imagines my late father, and the sadness occasionally returns.” (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

Similarly, SO2 revealed that the subject's sadness was not solely caused by the loss of her spouse but was also triggered by recollections of past life struggles and the treatment she had received from extended family during difficult times. This was expressed as follows:

“In my opinion, my mother's sadness is not only because of losing my father, but also because she often recalls how difficult her past struggles were and how she was treated by relatives at that time. Those memories sometimes make her feel sad again.” (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings indicate that although the subject appeared capable of regulating her emotions at certain times, grief could re-emerge intensely and become overwhelming at particular moments. Furthermore, significant others observed that the subject frequently concealed her emotional distress. The interview results also suggest that acceptance plays a crucial role in shaping the emotional dynamics of individuals experiencing spousal loss. The subject expressed:

“I realize that this is part of God's will. The only thing I can do is learn to accept it sincerely, truly sincerely. At first, I often cried, felt angry, and was frustrated with the situation. But over time, I began to think, ‘Oh God, if my late husband were still here, he might have experienced the same condition.’ From that point, I started to accept and tried to let go as sincerely as possible.” (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This statement is further supported by SO2, who noted that a particular turning point strengthened the subject's acceptance of her husband's death. After observing various events affecting people around her, the subject began to realize that each individual has their own life path. Since then, she repeatedly expressed to her family her intention to no longer remain immersed in grief and to sincerely accept her husband's passing.

“At that time, several incidents occurred within the family, and since then my mother often said that she did not want to continue crying. She expressed her desire to learn to accept everything and to sincerely let go of my father's passing.” (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

This statement reflects an emerging acceptance of the reality of loss, as the subject comes to recognize that individuals cannot alter the course of their life circumstances. When the subject encountered additional adversities following her husband's death such as a drug-related case involving a family member and her late husband this sense of acceptance became increasingly reinforced. This suggests that the subject reinterpreted her husband's death as a form of protection from potential future suffering. The account provided by significant other 2, which highlights the presence of a serious family issue, further strengthens this interpretation. Such conditions appear to have facilitated the subject's acceptance of her spouse's death.

These findings align with the “Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement,” which posits that bereaved individuals dynamically oscillate between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping, emphasizing not only the experience of grief but also the need to adapt to new life demands (Stroebe, 2021).

The suppression of emotions observed in this study indicates a form of ambivalence in acceptance, whereby the subject attempts to present herself as strong for her family while internally retaining feelings of grief. Consistent with [Rokach \(2021\)](#), women who lose their spouses tend to conceal their grief in order to maintain family stability. Moreover, the recurrence of sadness in the form of memories and mental imagery of the deceased spouse suggests that acceptance and complex emotional responses can coexist simultaneously. This supports the notion that grief is cyclical and non-linear in nature ([Eisma, 2020](#)). Thus, in this study, complex emotions and acceptance cannot be clearly separated. While intricate emotional experiences remain an integral part of the subject's psychological journey as a single mother after spousal loss, acceptance serves as a foundational mechanism that enables adaptation and resilience.

Challenges and survival strategies of single mothers in managing the family economy

Table 2. Challenges and survival strategies of single mothers in managing the family economy

Category	Amount
Economic Issues	25
Survival Strategies	4
Coping Strategies	9

The findings indicate that economic hardship constitutes the most significant challenge faced by the subject following the death of her spouse. The fulfillment of basic needs, particularly those related to household income and family sustenance, was directly affected by the loss of the primary breadwinner. This is reflected in the statement of the primary subject and supported by the significant others:

“The most difficult thing after my husband passed away was the issue of housing and income, because at that time I was not working. I was truly confused about how to meet my family's needs. I did whatever I could to earn money. I worked helping others sell goods, and I also tried running a small business from home. At one point, I even considered working abroad, because the only thing on my mind was ensuring that my family could eat and that my children's needs were fulfilled.” (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This statement is reinforced by significant other 1 (SO1), who explained that the family's economic condition declined drastically after the father's death, resulting in severe financial hardship. Financial issues and housing concerns became the most burdensome challenges faced by the subject:

“After my father passed away, our family's economic condition dropped drastically. There was almost nothing at home, and my mother had to start everything from the beginning. In my opinion, the most difficult problem was financial, especially since at that time my mother also had to deal with housing issues.” (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

Despite these economic constraints, the subject did not surrender to her circumstances. She engaged in various forms of work without regard to job type, as long as they contributed to meeting the family's basic needs. This finding suggests that the subject's survival strategies were flexible and primarily oriented toward fulfilling essential family needs. In addition to pursuing income-generating activities, the subject also developed coping strategies to maintain her psychological well-being and continue managing daily life. The interviews reveal that religious practices and recreational activities were the most frequently employed strategies to alleviate emotional distress following the loss of her spouse. The subject stated:

“I always try to draw closer to Allah through prayer. Besides that, I keep myself busy so that I don't remain immersed in sadness. Sometimes I also go out or spend time healing with friends so that my mind feels calmer and I don't keep thinking about things that make me sad.” (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This statement is supported by SO1, who noted that the subject often spent time outside the home, socializing with friends or engaging in activities that helped her maintain emotional stability:

“My mother often goes out or spends time with her friends. I think that is her way of preventing herself from constantly thinking about my father and the sadness she experienced. Through that, she appears calmer and gradually able to carry out her daily activities as usual.” (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

These findings demonstrate that the subject's resilience process is supported not only by efforts to meet the family's economic needs but also by coping strategies centered on spiritual strengthening, engagement in daily activities, and support from the social environment. The combination of these strategies enables the

subject to maintain psychological functioning while fulfilling her role as a single mother after the loss of her spouse. The findings within this theme indicate that the loss of a spouse results not only in emotional distress but also in significant financial difficulties. This is consistent with previous studies showing that spousal death often leads to a decline in household economic conditions, particularly among women who were previously dependent on their husband's income (Chaudhry, 2020). Two primary stressors that hinder adaptation are income uncertainty and housing instability. In response to these challenges, the subject developed various survival strategies by utilizing flexible and informal employment opportunities. This aligns with Bradshaw (2021), who found that single mothers tend to rely on the informal sector as a rapid means of generating income amid limited access to formal employment.

However, prolonged economic pressure may lead to psychological distress. Consequently, the subject also developed coping strategies to preserve her mental health. Emotion-focused adaptive coping strategies included religious coping, distraction through activities, and social recreation (Park, 2021). Social support and religious coping have been identified as crucial factors in strengthening resilience among single mothers experiencing economic stress (Walsh, 2020). Thus, the findings in this theme support the notion that the resilience of single mothers is derived not only from economic capability but also from psychological capacity to manage stress and regulate emotions.

Social conflict and its impact on family relationships

Table 3. Social conflict and its impact on family relationships

Category	Amount
Social Conflict	12
Family Relationships	4

The interview findings indicate that following her husband's death, the participant encountered various forms of social conflict originating from both her in-laws and the surrounding community. These conflicts did not always manifest as direct confrontations but were primarily experienced through subtle forms of social rejection, strained interpersonal relationships, and negative gossip within her social environment. Such circumstances contributed to feelings of discomfort and increased psychological burden during the early stages of bereavement. As the participant explained:

"After returning to Surabaya, I lived with my parents-in-law. At that time, the atmosphere was really unpleasant and uncondusive. I felt as though they were hostile toward me, even though no one expressed it directly. The situation made me feel uncomfortable and made it even more difficult to cope with life after my husband passed away." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This account was corroborated by Significant Other 1 (SO1), who explained that, in addition to experiencing an uncomfortable family environment, the participant also became the subject of neighborhood gossip. SO1 stated:

"There were several neighbors who used to talk about my mother behind her back. However, whenever she experienced pressure or problems from the community, she would usually approach the people involved directly to resolve the issue. She is not the type of person who remains silent when facing problems." (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

These findings suggest that social conflict constituted one of the major challenges the participant faced following the loss of her spouse. Nevertheless, rather than avoiding conflict, she adopted an active approach by confronting and resolving emerging problems as part of her adjustment process.

In addition to social conflict, the findings also revealed changes in family relationships following the death of the participant's spouse. Based on the interviews, her relationship with the extended family, particularly her husband's relatives, was characterized as formal and emotionally distant. She perceived her involvement within the family as limited, fulfilling only specific responsibilities without developing meaningful emotional closeness. She described this experience as follows:

"My relationship with the extended family is just ordinary; we're not particularly close. Whenever there are family matters, I simply carry out my responsibilities, such as collecting my child's report card or helping with tasks that are my responsibility." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This perspective was also supported by Significant Other 2 (SO2). According to SO2, the father's death brought significant changes to the family's living arrangements, including a period of physical separation

among family members, which reduced emotional closeness within the family. SO2 further acknowledged uncertainty about how to provide appropriate emotional support to the participant during that period:

"At that time, I was sent to live somewhere else, so I didn't really know what my mother was going through. Even now, I sometimes feel unsure about how I should support her because I still don't know what she needs most." (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings indicate that the loss of a spouse affected not only the participant's emotional well-being but also altered family relationship dynamics. Limited emotional support from the extended family, together with changes in the mother-child relationship, became part of the adaptive process through which the participant sought to rebuild her life after bereavement.

The findings related to the themes of social conflict and family relationships demonstrate that social conflict represents a significant challenge for single mothers following the death of their spouses. Family members may become sources of social pressure through unfriendly attitudes and gossip, reinforcing the persistent stigma attached to widowhood. This finding is consistent with [Yadav \(2023\)](#), who reported that women who lose their spouses are particularly vulnerable to negative social judgments, especially in collectivist societies. Nevertheless, the primary participant demonstrated an active response to social conflict by confronting social pressures directly. According to [Walsh \(2020\)](#), the ability to establish personal boundaries and maintain self-worth constitutes an important component of post-bereavement adaptation. This perspective reflects a problem-focused coping strategy, which is widely recognized as an indicator of resilience.

The participant's relationship with her extended family was primarily functional rather than emotionally supportive. Her involvement in family decision-making was relatively limited, while the support she received was largely instrumental, particularly in meeting her children's educational needs. This finding is consistent with [Kaur \(2022\)](#), who argued that instrumental assistance without corresponding emotional support may contribute to relational stress among single mothers. Furthermore, the mother-child relationship was influenced by changes in family structure following the spouse's death, particularly during periods of physical separation. This situation illustrates the reorganization of family roles and boundaries after bereavement, which subsequently affects emotional closeness among family members ([Titelman, 2021](#)).

The role of social and family support in building resilience among single mothers

Table 4. The role of social and family support in building resilience among single mothers.

Category	Amount
Social Support	9
Family Support	8

The interview findings indicate that social and family support played a crucial role in helping the participant navigate life after the loss of her spouse. Such support not only assisted her in coping with economic hardship but also provided emotional strength during the bereavement process. The participant received support from friends, colleagues, immediate family members, and several relatives who remained attentive throughout her adjustment period. As the participant explained:

"I received support from my friends, especially my junior high school alumni. They often encouraged me and helped me whenever I was facing difficulties. Their support made me realize that there were still people who cared about me, and it gave me the strength to keep going." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This account was reinforced by Significant Other 1 (SO1). According to SO1, the support received by the participant extended beyond emotional encouragement to include financial assistance during periods of economic hardship. Family members and friends also helped care for the participant's children and provided information about employment opportunities. Nevertheless, some of the participant's expectations remained unmet, particularly regarding support from her late husband's former colleagues. SO1 stated:

"My mother received a great deal of support, both emotional and financial. My aunt also helped take care of me and my two siblings while my mother was struggling to earn a living. In addition, my mother once found a job through one of my father's friends. However, she had hoped that more of my father's former colleagues would help her continue his work or provide greater support after he passed away." (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

These findings suggest that the participant's social support network, consisting of friendships and work-related relationships, provided both emotional and instrumental assistance. However, not all expected

forms of support were fulfilled, leaving important needs unmet, particularly those related to employment continuity and the family's long-term economic stability.

Beyond support from the broader social network, the findings also revealed that the family served as a particularly meaningful source of support throughout the participant's transition to single motherhood. This support was manifested through emotional encouragement, instrumental assistance, and acceptance of the life decisions she made following her husband's death. The participant explained:

"My second child eventually decided to work as a migrant worker in Taiwan with the help of my younger sister-in-law. The decision was made so that my child could contribute to the family's finances and help reduce the burden that I was carrying." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This perspective was supported by Significant Other 2 (SO2), who explained that family members stayed with the participant for several days following her husband's death so that she would not feel alone. SO2 further stated that, as a child, they supported every decision made by their mother, including the possibility of remarrying in the future. At the same time, SO2 acknowledged that the participant still hoped to receive greater financial assistance from her late husband's family, although this expectation had not been fully realized.

"Our family stayed with my mother for several days after my father passed away so that she would not feel alone. As her child, I have always supported whatever decisions she makes, including if she chooses to have another life partner in the future. However, she still hopes that my father's family will be able to provide greater support, particularly financial assistance." (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings demonstrate that family support functioned as an important protective factor in fostering the participant's resilience. Emotional encouragement, companionship, acceptance of her life decisions, and financial assistance from family members enabled her to cope with the multiple challenges associated with widowhood. Nevertheless, such support was not equally distributed, as some expectations regarding assistance from her late husband's extended family remained unmet. Consequently, her immediate family, close relatives, and friendship networks emerged as the primary sources of support that facilitated her adaptation and reconstruction of life as a single mother.

The findings underscore the critical role of social support in promoting resilience among single mothers following spousal loss. Financial assistance, emotional encouragement, and employment opportunities provided through friends and non-family networks functioned as protective resources that mitigated psychological distress and facilitated adaptation. This finding is consistent with the social support buffering hypothesis proposed by [Cohen & Wills \(1985\)](#), which posits that social support reduces the adverse effects of stressful life events. Similarly, [Zhang & Chen \(2022\)](#) found that social support protects individuals from the negative consequences of economic hardship and the demands associated with multiple social roles.

Family support also emerged as a central component of the participant's resilience. The decision of one of the participant's children to work abroad, the family's companionship during the immediate bereavement period, and their acceptance of the participant's potential remarriage reflect the importance of family cohesion, emotional support, and collaborative coping during times of crisis. These findings are consistent with Walsh's (2020) family resilience framework, which emphasizes shared meaning-making, mutual support, and adaptive family functioning following adversity. At the same time, the participant's continued expectation of greater financial assistance from her late husband's family illustrates that resilience was developed not only through the support that was available but also through her capacity to accept disappointment and adapt to incomplete or partial support systems, as similarly reported by [Muarifah \(2021\)](#).

The transformation of the single mother's role amidst life changes following the death of a partner.

Table 5. Transformation of the single mother's role amidst life changes following the death of a partner

Category	Amount
Adaptation and Resilience	25
Life Changes	9
The Role of a Single Mother	11

The interview findings indicate that, after navigating numerous challenges following the death of her spouse, the participant underwent a gradual process of role transformation accompanied by emotional adjustment and adaptation to everyday life. Over time, she came to accept her loss, embraced her new role as a single mother, and reconstructed her life. Although memories of her late husband continued to evoke

sadness, she no longer experienced the overwhelming grief that had characterized the initial period of bereavement. As she explained:

"Whenever I remember my late husband, I still feel sad. But I no longer remain consumed by that sadness. From 2013 until now, I have gradually become accustomed to this situation. I feel that I have sincerely accepted my husband's passing and have tried to continue living my life as usual." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This account was supported by Significant Other 1 (SO1), who observed substantial emotional changes in the participant. According to SO1, the participant no longer cried as frequently as she had during the early stages of bereavement and no longer appeared emotionally overwhelmed. Instead, she had begun to enjoy social activities with friends and seemed to live a more peaceful and balanced life.

"From what I see, my mother no longer cries as often as she used to. She enjoys life more now, often spends time with her friends, and seems much more at peace. Now that all of her children are working, she appears to feel much more relieved." (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

A similar perspective was expressed by Significant Other 2 (SO2), who noted that although the participant occasionally experienced sadness when remembering her late husband, these emotions no longer persisted for extended periods. According to SO2, the participant had reached a stage of acceptance and had come to terms with her husband's death.

"In my opinion, my mother is no longer as sad as she used to be. She still remembers my father from time to time, but she doesn't dwell on those feelings anymore. She has sincerely accepted his passing." (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings suggest that the participant's emotional transformation occurred gradually over time. The intense grief that initially dominated her life evolved into acceptance and emotional reconciliation. This pattern demonstrates that resilience should not be understood as the absence of grief but rather as the capacity to adapt and continue functioning despite the enduring presence of loss and cherished memories. Beyond emotional adaptation, the findings also revealed a significant transformation in the participant's family role following her husband's death. The loss of her spouse required her to transition from the role of homemaker to assuming dual responsibilities as both the primary caregiver and the family's main financial provider. This transition reshaped not only her daily routines but also her self-perception and long-term planning for her family's future.

This interpretation was reinforced by Significant Other 1 (SO1), who observed that following her husband's death, the participant became increasingly independent in making decisions and gained greater autonomy in determining the direction of her life.

"In my view, my mother has changed tremendously. In the past, many decisions were made together with my father, but now she has to make all of them on her own. She now lives according to her own decisions and aspirations." (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

A comparable view was expressed by Significant Other 2 (SO2), who explained that the father's death fundamentally altered the family's circumstances, requiring previously established plans to be reconsidered and adjusted to their new reality.

"Since my father passed away, there have been many changes in our family. My mother had to reorganize our future plans for me and my siblings because everything changed after he was gone." (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings indicate that the participant's role transformation extended beyond assuming greater household responsibilities. It also involved a reconstruction of personal identity, increased autonomy in decision-making, and the reorganization of family goals and future aspirations. This transformative process constituted an essential component of her resilience, enabling her not only to endure the loss of her spouse but also to establish a meaningful new life characterized by different roles, responsibilities, and personal agency. The findings demonstrate that the participant's journey as a single mother was marked by a progressive transition from profound grief to acceptance. Previous research has shown that acknowledging loss and integrating the bereavement experience are essential for maintaining psychological well-being and sustaining effective parenting among single mothers (Muarifah, 2021). The death of a spouse also precipitated substantial changes in family life, including shifts in caregiving responsibilities, decision-making processes, and long-term planning for the children's future. The significant others' observation that the participant now "lives according to her own decisions and aspirations" reflects a reconstruction of identity from wife to sole head of the household, consistent with the family role transition model proposed by Suryani (2025).

Overall, the participant experienced a comprehensive role transformation following her spouse's death, characterized by emotional adaptation, structural changes in daily life, and the assumption of new responsibilities as a single mother. Her emotional adjustment was reflected in greater acceptance of her husband's death and a reduced intensity of grief, while her structural adaptation involved increased independence and the reorganization of future family plans. These findings are consistent with qualitative studies on resilience among Indonesian single mothers, which identify three interrelated dimensions of resilient adaptation following widowhood: processing grief, reconstructing everyday life, and strengthening one's role as the primary figure within the family (Smith, 2020).

The hopes and motivations of single mothers in building their children's future

Table 6. Single mothers' hopes and motivations regarding their children's future

Category	Jumlah
Hopes and Motivation	3

The interview findings indicate that following the loss of her spouse, the participant's hopes and motivations shifted away from material achievement toward preserving the continuity and cohesion of family relationships. For the participant, success as a mother was no longer defined solely by her children's educational or economic accomplishments but by their ability to maintain harmonious relationships, support one another, and preserve strong family bonds even after her death. She expressed this perspective as follows:

"My hope is simple. I want my children to always live in harmony and never become hostile toward one another. If one of them experiences difficulties, I hope the others will be willing to help. That is how they have always behaved, and I hope that continues. I also do not want to become a burden to them. Most importantly, even when I am no longer here, I hope they will continue to support one another, work together, and maintain family harmony." (Interview with S1, October 13, 2025).

This perspective was supported by Significant Other 1 (SO1), who explained that before the father's death, both parents had developed long-term plans for their children's future, particularly regarding higher education. Following the loss of the family's primary provider, however, these aspirations had to be adjusted to accommodate the family's new circumstances.

"When my father was still alive, both of my parents had already planned for their children's future. They wanted all of us to pursue higher education and have better lives." (Interview with SO1, October 21, 2025).

A similar view was expressed by Significant Other 2 (SO2), who noted that the participant's greatest hope remained consistent with that of many parents: that her children would continue to live harmoniously, avoid conflict, and support one another whenever a family member encountered difficulties.

"My mother's hopes are actually the same as those of most mothers. She wants her children to stay united, avoid conflicts, and always help one another whenever someone in the family needs support." (Interview with SO2, October 21, 2025).

These findings suggest that the participant's future orientation underwent a significant transformation following her husband's death. Whereas family aspirations had previously focused primarily on educational attainment and long-term life goals that had been planned jointly with her spouse, her priorities gradually shifted toward preserving family cohesion and interpersonal solidarity. Values such as harmony, mutual assistance, care, and reciprocal support became the most important legacy she wished to pass on to her children. Consequently, these aspirations functioned not only as future goals but also as enduring sources of motivation that strengthened her resilience throughout the process of adapting to life as a single mother. The participant's aspiration for her children to maintain harmonious relationships, support one another, and avoid conflict demonstrates that family cohesion and mutual cooperation became more important than material success following the loss of her spouse. This finding is consistent with Walsh's (2020) family resilience framework, which emphasizes that families confronting adversity often strengthen emotional connectedness, shared values, and reciprocal support as protective resources. Within single-parent families, fostering family solidarity and emotional interdependence is frequently prioritized as a strategy for promoting children's long-term well-being, a pattern similarly identified in Smith's (2020) study of family resilience.

The findings also reveal a shift in parental aspirations over time. Prior to the husband's death, both parents had emphasized structural goals such as higher education and future occupational success for their children. Following widowhood, however, the participant increasingly prioritized the cultivation of family

values, interpersonal solidarity, and mutual care. This transition is consistent with Muarifah (2021), who found that single mothers experiencing economic uncertainty often place greater emphasis on strengthening family values, internal social support, and children's character development as essential resources for navigating adversity. From a motivational perspective, the participant's desire not to become a burden to her children and her hope that they would continue to "work together" and support one another reflect a resilience-oriented and altruistic approach to parenting. Rather than defining success in terms of individual achievement, she viewed her children's future as a shared family accomplishment sustained through strong sibling relationships and collective responsibility. This perspective aligns with recent research demonstrating that children whose parents emphasize education, family togetherness, and mutual support are more likely to develop resilience and experience their family as a secure emotional base, even after the death of a parent (Zahra, 2024).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that resilience among single mothers following the death of a spouse is a dynamic and evolving process rather than an immediate outcome of bereavement. The findings reveal that resilience develops through the gradual regulation of grief, acceptance of loss, adaptation to new responsibilities as the sole head of the household, and the reconstruction of meaning after the death of a life partner. Throughout this process, participants encountered multiple challenges, including emotional distress, financial hardship, social conflict, and changes in family structure. Despite these adversities, resilience emerged through their ability to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining psychological well-being and family functioning. The participant's resilience was reflected in her transition from prolonged grief toward acceptance, her capacity to sustain caregiving and economic responsibilities, her effective utilization of social and family support, and her reconstruction of identity as an independent single mother. Equally important, her future aspirations centered on preserving family harmony, mutual support, and sibling solidarity rather than material achievement. These family-oriented values served as enduring sources of motivation that strengthened her resilience. The findings therefore suggest that resilience following spousal loss is not solely an individual psychological attribute but is co-constructed through social relationships, family support, and shared collective values. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on resilience in the context of spousal bereavement by demonstrating that grief processing, meaning reconstruction, and identity transformation are interrelated dimensions of resilient adaptation. These findings extend current understandings of resilience by highlighting its relational and developmental nature, particularly within the experiences of single mothers navigating widowhood. From a practical perspective, the findings provide evidence to support the development of psychosocial interventions tailored to widowed single mothers. Such interventions should extend beyond grief counseling to include the strengthening of social support networks, family-centered assistance, and economic empowerment programs that address the multifaceted challenges encountered following the loss of a spouse. Several limitations should be acknowledged. This study involved a single primary participant supported by two significant others within a specific sociocultural context; therefore, the findings are intended to provide an in-depth understanding of lived experience rather than to produce statistically generalizable conclusions. Furthermore, the study focused on a participant who had already demonstrated substantial resilience, and thus does not capture the diverse experiences of widowed single mothers with different social, economic, cultural, or psychological backgrounds. Future research should include participants with more diverse demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including variations in age, educational attainment, economic status, duration since bereavement, and geographical setting. Further studies may also examine the influence of religiosity, coping strategies, community support, and cultural values on resilience following spousal loss. Expanding these perspectives would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of resilience among widowed single mothers and provide a stronger empirical foundation for the development of culturally responsive and needs-based psychosocial interventions.

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