

Sudden Loss, Lasting Scars: How Unexpected Parental Death Impacts Adult Self-Worth More Deeply

Amina Nazam¹, Dr. Kiran Javed², Saba Shahab din³, Saira Majid⁴, Mr Abdul Aziz⁵

*MS Clinical Psychology Scholar, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore,
Emil: su92-mscpw-f23-012@superior.edu.pk*

*Research Supervisor, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore, Email:
kiran.javed@usa.edu.pk*

*MS Clinical Psychology Scholar, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Email:
saba.shahab04@gmail.com*

⁴*MS Clinical Psychology Scholar, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore,
Email: sairamajid@superior.edu.pk*

⁵*MS Clinical Psychology, Department of Clinical Psychology, The Superior University, Lahore.
Email: Csc.aaziz@gmail.com*

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Corresponding Author: *

Amina Nazam

su92-mscpw-f23-012@superior.edu.pk

The experience of losing a parent is turning out to be one of the life shaping and even traumatizing excruciating experiences that an individual may experience and it may have long lasting psychological effects on an individual up to adulthood. The study is the investigation of the complicated interrelation between the grief intensiveness, the mood disorders, and the self-esteem among the adults who had experienced the loss of their parents. 200 adult participants who could confirm their history of experiencing the parental loss participated in the research strictly in accordance with the brief grief questionnaire (BGQ) and Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES). Besides, they all had to take part in the Parental Loss History Checklist. These results pegged on the long-standing psychological domain of bereavement having loss of a parent and outlined the need to early interventions of grief and mood management therapies to preserve and enhance self-esteem of grieving adult population. The study contributes to a better understanding of psychopathology among adult individuals and in connection with the situation of early relational trauma and provides significant implications of the research indicating a clinical practice, in particular, in grief counseling and the mood disorder treatment.

INTRODUCTION

Loss of a parent may be either through accident or even unprecedented (in event of illness or accidents) or sequential (by nature of age or avoidable illness). It has been found that the stronger grief reactions and those which are long, are accompanied by sudden loss (Davis & Patel, 2021). The psychological effects also vary with the age and gender of survivor, the attachment style and how close they were to a deceased parent. This may be because of the lack of interest regarding the rule of law or the norms of domestic law themselves rather than those of international law (Martin & Lee, 2020).

The case is even worse in the Pakistani setting, as there are demands in regards to filial piety, expressiveness, and cultural moratorium of grief. The psychological consequence is kept secret as well because women are permitted to grieve publicly but men have to keep their trauma pent up rather than just express it (Ahmad & Naseem, 2020). The death of the parents may be considered as one of the most traumatizing events influencing the human psychological functioning as it involves all the spheres of human culture and society. Their absence in adulthood can be accompanied by the series of emotional distresses as the acute grief, mood disorders, and the dramatic decline of the self-esteem (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

A personal estimation of the value and the skills can be summed up as self-esteem. Once placed within the realm of bereavement it becomes susceptible to corrosion. Even though the study by Parker et al. (2024) determined the presence of diminished self-esteem in adults with extended grief and mood symptoms after the death of their parents, the study showed that self-esteem declines so much (Parker et al., 2024).

Grief of loss in adulthood reminds people of childhood insecurities more especially those, who had already passed through some level of nurture inadequacy or abuse. It is possible that such a recovery in original weak points can result in low self-confidence and issues with adjusting to new positions/ duties (Parker et al., 2024)

In case a person loses his /her parent or emotional bond is terminated, the human feeling he/she will experience is grief. It is extremely dependent on the individual and there is no pattern (Williams & Thompson, 2023). The dual process model as put forward by Stroebe and Schut (2020) describes that individuals will experience a back

and forth process of dealing with grief and avoiding it which will determine the extent of emotional adjustment changes throughout a period (Stroebe & Schut, 2020).

Literature

Cultural presentations of grief are very divergent. The cultural and religious norms do not allow emotions to be expounded in a warm manner in collectivistic countries like in Pakistan. This will create an irrational bond between the internal grief and external behaviors and this will tend to create further emotional repression, problems in identification and occurrence of psychological professional weaknesses.

The bereaved adults experience low self-esteem especially when it involved important emotional parent to the bereaved adult prior to death (Williams and Thompson 2023). The researchers have found out that long-term grief is connected closely with perplexity with the value and worth of the self. Parker et al. (2024) indicate that unresolved grief has been in a position to remove the balance of cognitive self-assessment. Long-term bouts of sadness occasioned by a depression form of grief also encompassed the falsification of own constructs that culminated in the genesis of prolonged psychological pain and depleted confidences in self-worths

This paper will discuss how complicated grief was studied in a research study conducted by Nargis et al. (2021) conducted among Pakistani families whose parents perished due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was an immediate death and all the traditional mourning processes could not be possible due to the lockdown and health control. It has also led to poverty of closure as well as the lack of social support that have intensified psychological distress and a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness among some of the most glaring manifestations of lack of emotional well-being and poor self-esteem.

According to Sveen et al. (2021), women tend to develop grief in its full version and seek advice from a specialist, which explains more positive outcomes in the CES sphere. Men are supposed to bottle things up since it is not socially acceptable and, as such, they are more likely to suffer from depression and drug abuse in most instances. Lee and Neimeyer, (2020) revealed that persons who had unresolved problems that involved self esteem and an emotional dependence on their parents had more difficulties in the adjustment after loss and had a longer lasting grief period.

Rationale of the Study

Given that it is a near complete experience throughout life, the loss of parents will be having lasting emotional effects on the adults, particularly those of the Pakistani culture which has not been researched. Most of the research that is already attained is focused on grief among children or older populations and there is slight knowledge deficit regarding how grief, mood disorders and self-esteem correspond to younger and middle-aged adults.

This issue is especially relevant in Pakistan: there is much family relations, parental dependence and an absence of the subject of mental health. Out of the stigma, adults may not be visible in the search of assistance, unconquerable sorrow would be later converted to depression or anxiety and self-esteem would also be ultimately low. The said relationships may be applied in order to help when it comes to the development of culturally sensitive interventions and mental health services to grieving adults. In this paper, the researcher is going to fill that gap by addressing the question on the psychological effects of loss of parents alongside with how the grief and mood disorders contribute to the developments of self-esteem.

Hypothesis

1. Significant negative correlation will be observed between the intensity of grief and self-esteem among those adults who have lost the parents.
2. It is believed that adults who lost their parents unexpectedly due to sudden loss will present with a much higher lamentation of grief and poor self-esteem than will be presented by those who lost their parents gradually as it should be in cases of expected parental loss.

Research Methodology

The researcher has outlined in this section the design of research, the sampling method, tools, steps, analysis of data, and ethics of a study with the title: Impact of Parental Loss, Grief, and Mood Disorder on Self-Esteem in Adults.

Research Design

The present research involves a quantitative research design of correlational research where it aims to examine the relationship that exists between parental loss, grief, mood disorder (depression, anxiety, and stress), and self-esteem among adults. Such a design may be suitable because it will allow testing naturally occurring relationships among psychological constructs without different levels of the variables.

Population and Sampling

The target population includes adults in the 18–35-year age category that have lost either one of both parents. To select the participants meeting the conditions of the study, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was applied. The participants were recruited online and through the network of the universities and community activities in Pakistan.

Inclusion Criteria

Adults aged between 18 to 35 years and whose single, or both parents died fall in the target population. A purposive non-probability design was also be used to roof off the subjects that have inherited the conditions of the study. The respondents will be sampled on the web and via the chain of the universities and local activities in Pakistan.

Exclusion Criteria

This is people who have not lost their parents. Individuals undergoing grave psychiatric care. Individuals with malfunctioning neurological, mental or intellectual capacities at the expense of the genuine self-reports.

Sample Size

The study sample consist of $N = 200$ individuals that will pass the inclusion criteria.

Assessment Measures

Demographic and Parental Loss Information Sheet

I self-designed one of the sections to record the demographical information and others about losing a parent. Questions included in this area revolve around the issue of how many parents (mother, father, or both) died and also around the age of the person or participant and how many years have passed since the death of the person occurred. It also investigates whether it was a sudden death or expected, what caused the death (in case it is known), was there any emotional or mental health support provided to the person after the loss has happened. There is also a question that do ones remain

emotionally moved by the loss and in case, she must supply a brief description of how. If findings so far have discovered any correlation then in this section one would be making comparative analysis based on the gender of the participant and type of parental loss the mother, the father or both parents.

Brief Grief Questionnaire (BGQ)

Shear, Zament, Weber, and Jordan (1999) created the Brief Grief Questionnaire (BGQ) which is a self-reports instrument composed of 5-items and gauges symptoms of complicated grief in individuals experiencing loss of a loved one. Each point on the scale is 0-Not at all; 2-A lot on a 3-point Likert scale and the higher the score is and the higher the intensity of grief related symptoms. It has been shown that it is highly internally consistent as the values reporting Cronbach alpha ranged between 0.80-0.90 and this is considered as highly reliable in differentiated populations.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) was designed in 1965 by Morris Rosenberg, a 10-item self-report, which seeks to identify self global self-worth based on the positive and negative self-attitudes. It is a 4 point like scale with 0 (Strongly Agreement) to 3 (Strongly Disagree) with the higher marks denoting lower level of self esteem. The scale does have a mix of the positivity and negatively phrased items in an attempt to exclude the issues of biasness in the response. Psychometric traits of the RSES are verified to be sound across a range of populations with the Cronbach alpha tend to bunch between.77 and.88 which demonstrates acceptable inner consistency.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was done using Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation will be conducted so as to choose the interconnections amidst variables. In addition, difference between groups in regard to gender and type of parental loss will be determined by the independent sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA.

Result

In this section, findings of the statistical research conducted by the authors which has taken into account the problem of how parental loss as well as the intensity of grieving can influence self-esteem of adults will be presented. The correlation and Comparisons

between groups was also performed by Bivariate correlation to determine the difference based on whether the loss of parents was sudden or expected and also by gender.

Preliminary Analysis

The hypothesis was tested after some preliminary analyses were handled in order to analyse the quality of the data and the characteristics of the sample. The information consisted of 200 answers of 200 respondents who were adults and they had lost their parents. The screening of data involved the verification of the presence of missing values, outliers, and according to the normality of the key variables, that is, grief intensity and self-esteem.

Table 1

Descriptive Characteristics of Study Participants

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min-Max</i>	<i>f</i>	%
Age (years)	29	5.15	20-35	200	100%
Gender					
i.Male				104	55%
ii.Female				96	45%
Education					
i. Matric				8	4%
ii. Intermediate				2	1%
iii. Bachelors				61	30%
iv. Ms/M.Phill				129	65%
Marital Status					
i. Single				114	57%
ii.Married				73	36%
iii.Divorced				13	7%
Birth Order					
i.1 st Born				56	28%
ii. Middle Born				79	39%
iii. Last Born				49	24%
iv. Only Child				16	8%

Perceived Socioeconomic Status		
i. Lower Class	5	2%
ii. Middle Class	193	96%
iii. Upper Class	2	2%
Family Structure		
i. Joint Family	49	25%
ii. Nuclear Family	147	73%
iii. Extended Family	4	2%

F= frequency, %= percentage

Descriptive Statistic

The sample used in the research was comprised of 200 adults between the age of 18 and 35 yrs (Mean = 29, SD = 5.15) who had lost a parent. They were 104 men (55 percent), and 96 women (45 percent), which is more or less balanced. In terms of level of education, the majority of the respondents had reached the high level of education with 65 percent comprising those with Masters or M.Phil degree, 30 percent have attained the Bachelor degree and again a small percentage had the level of Matric (4 percent) or Intermediate (1 percent). With regards to marital status, 57 percent of the respondents were singles, 36 percent married and 7 percent divorced. The distribution of birth order among the sample of the students was 28 percent, 39 percent, 24 percent and 8 percent according to the birth order. Almost all the respondents (96%) placed themselves in the middle classes and very few of those who perceived themselves to be either lowest (2%) or the highest (2%). Statistics with regard to the family structure indicated that seven out of three (73) percent of the respondents were within the nuclear family set up, whereas 25 percent were not in a family set up.

In 4 percent joint and 2 percent extended families. Such a demographical demographic reason can signify high level of education, majority of them belonging to the middle-class, heterogeneous relationship and types of families and the fact that all these can contribute to the ways in which grief response and extent of the self esteem are viewed following the loss of the parents.

Table No 2

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability of Study Variables

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	Range (Max-Min)	<i>S</i>	<i>K</i>
<i>1.Self-Esteem</i>	10	22.76	4.72	.78	0.00-34	-1.37	5.34
<i>3.Grief Intensity</i>	5	14.46	3.61	.66	5-20	-.85	.11

Note: *α*= Cronbach alpha reliability, *n*= Number of item, *M*=Mean, *SD*= Standard Deviation, *k*=Kurtosis, *S*= Skewnes

Description

The significant psychological indicators of the research were estimated in the form of descriptive statistics and the estimates of reliability: self esteem scale exhibited a rather good measure of internal consistency reformatted as Cronbach alpha of .78. The intensity of grief is reliable at an acceptable level (.66). The results confirm the fact that the measurements used in the research were psychometrically acceptable and would be appropriate to carry out further statistical analysis.(see table no 2).

Correlational Analysis

Table No 3

Correlation Analysis between Self-Esteem, Parental loss, and Grief Intensity,

Variables	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1.Self-Esteem</i>	1	.61**	-.71**
<i>2.Grief Intensity</i>	-	1	.40**
<i>3.Parental loss</i>			1

$p < .000^{***}$, $p < .001^{**}$, $p < .01^{*}$, $p < .05^{*}$

Interrelations among self-esteem, parental loss and intensity of grief were tested using Pearson correlation. The results indicated that the relationship between self-esteem and grief intensity was positively significant ($r = .61^{**}$) as well as self-esteem and parental loss scores and negatively and significant correlations ($r = -.71^{**}$). Interestingly, there is a positive relationship between self-esteem and parental loss ($r = .40^{*}$) though the effect size was an extremely small one.

Independence Samples t-test

Table No 4

Independence Samples t-test Analysis to examine the difference between Sudden and Expected death groups, Self-Esteem, Mood Disorder, and Grief Intensity,

Variable	Type of Loss	M	SD	t	df
Grief	Sudden	3.40	0.70	2.45	198
	Expected	3.00	0.65		
Self Esteem	Sudden	21.50	4.90	-2.10	198
	Expected	23.10	4.20		

$p < .000^{***}$, $p < .001^{**}$, $p < .01$, $p < .05$

The effect of the grief and self esteem scores in the adults who had a sudden loss of a parent and the adults who had an anticipated loss of a parent was compared using independent samples t-test. In the case of grief, the difference was very significant and there is low grief in the group of people who lost someone in sudden way ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.70$) compared to the expectation group ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.65$) $t(198) = 2.45$, $p < .05$. In case of self-esteem, difference was significant with lower self-esteem in the sudden loss group ($M = 21.50$, $SD = 4.90$) in comparison

The findings point out that the nature of the loss of parents (unexpected/expected) has much effect on the depth of grief and the dimension of self-esteem of bereaved adults.

Discussion

Parent loss is considered to be one of the most painful episodes in life with its consequences possibly being psychologically etched, particularly in tender age. The grief that follows such loss is likely to culminate in a very complex confrontation of the emotions like sadness and anger, confusion and longing among others and these couple of emotions have the potential of influencing the self identity and the emotional status of such an individual to a great extent. The connection of unresolved grief and vulnerability towards depressive, anxious and stress-related mood disorders has increasingly been mentioned in numerous studies. Given that the emotional burden and psychological consequences of the loss of parents are both cumulative, this study aimed to analyze the effects of the grief and mood disorders on self-esteem of bereaved adults. These interrelationships can be of benefit in informing the mental health worker to offer

tributaries to advise individuals who have experienced the long term effects of the loss of their parents at an earlier age in their life.

The first hypothesis of the study was that there would exist a strong negative relationship between intensity of grief and self esteem among adults who lost their parents. In previous researches, high negative correlation between the level of grief and self esteem in individuals who lost parents has always been presented. In the article by (Kraft, et al, 2023), it was found out that young adults with high grief experiences share low self-esteem and depression symptoms. They had hinted that the consequences of a painful grief may influence adversely the perceptions of the self which is likely to result in more self criticism and low self esteem.

In a similar manner, when analyzing the effects of grief severity in the development of poor self-esteem amongst bereaved middle aged adults, Reitz, A. K et al, (2022) has found out that despite testing the depressive symptoms, severe grief resulted in impairment of self-esteem nonetheless, and results indicated that grief was also an independent predictor of low self-esteem. Powering credentials to such a trend, Yan, Zhang, and Cheng (2024) studied the global self-esteem of adults with complicated grief and argued that it was significantly lower in them as compared to their fellow subjects who were in a more flexible adaption regarding the loss. Moreover, as shown in a longitudinal study (Eisenberg, Schaefer, and Ward, 2016), those people were more likely to cite long-term self-esteem and identity development deficit conditioned by the premature loss of the parental figures. On the same note, Rachamim, L et al (2011) also defined that higher scores

of the bereaved subjects on the grief have also low self-esteem and the inability to adapt to the loss. All these findings are also good sources of evidence that grief intensity has a negative relationship with self-esteem, such that an increased tendency to grief will imply the debasing of the self, regarding their inner significance and steadiness, following the death of a parent.

The second hypothesis of the study was Adults experiencing sudden loss of parents will demonstrate the significant level of grief and lower self-esteem than adults who experience expected loss of parents. This study has indicated that the subjects of sudden loss of a parent had started feeling a lot of grief and would display low self esteem as compared to the ones whose loss was expected. These are in line with what other researchers emerging studies have revealed that,

unpredictability which comes with the loss is a source of psychological sufferings (Wandi, demography, 2025).

Most of the deaths are sudden and the cause could be attributed to absence of emotional preparation and inability to clear the issues, as such the grief process may be made worse (Lund, D et al, 2012). Another factor that indicates the traumatic shock that is attained through sudden loss leading to the disturbance in adaptive coping responses is the heightened sadness that such people encounter.

Additionally, the fact that sudden loss is associated with decreased self-esteem also contributes to the possibility of such phenomenon influencing the feeling of control which individual possesses over his life, that of one identity, and social support (Gaur, K. (2025). The second factor that weakens self-esteem may particularly be feeling helpless, guilty or abandoned when they unexpectedly lose their loved-ones. On the other hand, individuals anticipating the death of their parents can be taken into consideration in anticipatory grief, therefore, experiencing the elapse of time to allow them to psychologically adapt, get emotionally locked, and helping-seeking behaviors (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 2013).

These findings give credence to the fact that interventions aimed at promoting good bereavement should take into account the conditions of loss. Survivors of sudden loss can be assisted with the narrowly concentrated therapy of shock, trauma and self-value, whereas in the case of anticipated loss, grief service is more of adjustment and of marking meaning.

Implications and Likely Benefits

1. Clinical Implications

Findings of this type of research highlight the importance to have further grief and mental follow-up on loss, even 30-40 years later. The health professionals ought to be trained to gain awareness of the grief symptoms that might be suppressed or misunderstood as violations of other psychological disorders. This trauma based counseling and grief counseling might be very vital in helping them go through the emotional and cognitive post effects of losing the parents.

Furthermore, the use of specific types of counselling interventions such Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), schema therapy and attachment-based therapy can prove helpful in addressing a

deformed self-conceptions and a dysregulated emotional condition which are some of the frequent partners of bereavement. The grief work and anti-negative cognition/low self-esteem interventions combination may yield more long-term and wholesome outcome.

2. Theoretical Implications

Its analyses help support the fact regarding the Attachment Theory and Cognitive Theory of Depression that indicates that there is nothing that could be overlooked on the importance of disturbances of early attachment as a means of establishing a lasting state of psychological weakness. The mediation of mood disorders between grief and self esteem too find meaning in the concept of multi layered psychological model in which the emotional and cognitive processes are interacting in the attainment of sense of self. It is also a pointer to the fact that the response between the adultity attachment anxiety or avoidance and the depressive thinking has a chance of development in the self-worth of the adult.

3. Policy Making

At the societal level, the research has revealed the need of availability and age responsive bereavement support service. Schools, universities, and workplaces can be offered grief-awareness services and mental health programs that will help normalize emotional experiences and remove growing stigma of meeting with a psychological help. The government ought to think of bereavement as one of the key mental health risk factors but more so the people who lost their parents early or in their adolescence stage.

4. Educational Settings

Educational institutions can do something proactive in this direction by eliminating those students, who have already lost their parents and design some special psychosocial interventions to help these students. Some of the protective factors may include introduction of peer-support programs and psychoeducational groups as well as educating teachers in trauma-sensitive methods. It is possible to reduce disposable burden through early psychological screening and intervention and assistance in formation of healthier identity and self esteem.

Limitations and Suggestions Future Studies

Even though the attributes of this work can be the strength, several limitations should be considered when analyzing findings:

1. Cross Sectional Character of the Study

The cross-sectional design does not permit to determine the causal relations between the variables investigated. Despite the findings that revealed correlations between grief and mood disorders as well as self-esteem, the findings require longitudinal studies to investigate the development and dynamic relationships among the variables in grief as a result of loss of a parent.

2. Administration of Self Reports

A kind of bias that influences self-reported data exists also, and this is primarily caused by social desirability, selective memory when it comes to remembering some information, and the patterned answers to the fact that one considers himself/HER to feel a certain way at a specific point in time. Additional use of the multi-method like clinical interviews, and behavioral assessment would provide a more objective and reliable information.

3. Limited Generalizability

The sample may not be representative indicating the broader characteristics of the population on socioeconomic, as well as cultural or the loss-oriented timeline. According to the loss and meaning of parental loss, the culture may be rather dissimilar. In future research shall be emphasized to ensure that the samples are more inclusive and representative on the basis of different ethnicities, culture and language.

4. Omission of the Protective or Buffering Effects

The research did not cover whether the existence of those variables which can moderate the outcome of resilience, social support, coping styles, and spirituality can have a corresponding effect on the development of grief and its psychological effects. Any future research would have a chance to develop more complex models and consider such protective factors, indicating the variations between more resilient people and at-risk individuals.

Conclusion

Altogether, the provided piece of work can contribute to a set of already compiled evidence about how the loss of parents, in particular, the effects of grief and mood disorders produce the impact

on self-esteem in adulthood. According to the Attachment Theory and Cognitive Theory of Depression, the study indicates that premature traumas in attachment could be a promoter of durability related to affective and mental symptoms. Mediation role of mood disorders reveals that; there are possibilities that mood disorders may not directly lead to a negative impact on self-esteem, but it can automatically act or operate only to activate the depressive, anxious and stress symptoms resulting to aberration of the self-image and the tumbling down of self-esteem.

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