





Ambiguous Losses and Their Traumatic Effects: A Qualitative Synthesis of the Research Literature

Muğlak Kayıplar ve Bunların Travmatik Etkileri: Alan Yazının Nitel Bir Sentezi

Sayfa | 721

Hadiye KUCUKKARAGOZ , Assoc. Prof. Dr., Aydın University, hadiyekucukkaragoz@aydin.edu.tr

Rusen MEYLANI , Assist. Prof. Dr., Dicle University, rusen.meylani@dicle.edu.tr

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Abstract: This paper presents a comprehensive review of the research literature on ambiguous losses, focusing on the psychological impact of uncertainty and the associated unresolved circumstances. The research method
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involves synthesizing data from various sources, including academic articles, books, and case studies, accessed through databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO. The study underscores the need for specialized therapeutic methods and comprehensive support systems to improve the resilience and psychological health of those experiencing ambiguous loss. Effective coping strategies include seeking social support, engaging in meaning-making activities, and using therapeutic interventions like resilience training and narrative therapy to improve the psychological health of those experiencing ambiguous loss. Healthcare providers should integrate narrative therapy and resilience training techniques, while social workers should enhance support systems involving community networks. Further research is urgently advocated to expand the understanding of ambiguous loss across various contexts and cultures, leading to more effective, tailored interventions. The study's contributions are significant, as it elucidates the complex dynamics of ambiguous loss and identifies effective coping mechanisms and therapeutic interventions. By highlighting how ambiguous loss differs from other losses in closure and resolution, the paper offers new insights into the tailored approaches necessary to support affected individuals. The study consolidates diverse aspects of ambiguous losses and reiterates unique suggestions for policy and practice, providing practical guidance for healthcare providers and social workers dealing with ambiguous loss.

Keywords: Ambiguous Losses, Traumatic Effects, Coping Mechanisms, Resilience Training, Family Therapy, Narrative Therapy, Psycho-social Interventions

Özet: Bu makale muğlak kayıplara ilişkin araştırma literatürünün kapsamlı bir incelemesini sunarak, belirsizlik ve bunlarla ilişkili çözümlenememiş durumların psikolojik etkisine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma yöntemi, betimsel, yenilikçi sistematik taramadır. Veriler, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science ve PsycINFO gibi veri tabanları aracılığıyla erişilen akademik makale, kitap ve vaka çalışmaları dahil olmak üzere çeşitli basılı ve görsel kaynaklardan elde edilmiştir. Veriler içerik analizi yoluyla analiz edilerek sentezlenmiştir. Veri analizi sonuçları, muğlak kayıplar yaşayanların dayanıklılığını ve psikolojik sağlığını iyileştirmek için özel tedavi yöntemlerine ve kapsamlı destek sistemlerine duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. Muğlak kayıpla etkili başa çıkma stratejileri arasında sosyal destek, anlam oluşturma faaliyetleri, dayanıklılık eğitimi ve anlatı terapisi gibi müdahaleler yer almaktadır. Psikolojik danışma ve diğer psiko-sosyal destek hizmeti sağlayıcıları, anlatı terapisi ve dayanıklılık eğitimi gibi yöntem ve tekniklerini entegre ederek, çeşitli toplulukları içeren destek sistemleri geliştirilmelidir. Muğlak kayıplarla ilgili anlayışı, farklı bağlam ve kültürler arasında genişleterek etkili, özel müdahale yöntemleri geliştirebilmek için daha fazla araştırma yapılmasının acilen gerektiği de savunulmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın, muğlak kayıpların karmaşık dinamiklerini açıklayarak etkili başa çıkma mekanizmalarını ve müdahale yöntemlerini tanımlamakta olması nedeniyle alan yazına katkılarının önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, muğlak kayıpların, çözümlenme ve kabullenme açısından diğer kayıplardan farklı olduğu vurgulanmakta, etkilenen bireyleri desteklemek için gereken özel yaklaşımları geliştirmek üzere yeni bakış açıları sunulmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu makalede, alanda yapılan farklı çalışmalar da ele alınarak muğlak kayıpların çeşitli yönleri bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla irdelenmekte, ruh sağlığı uygulamacılarına ve politika yapıcılara yenilikçi önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Muğlak Kayıplar, Travmatik Etkiler, Başa Çıkma Mekanizmaları, Direnç Eğitimi, Aile Terapisi, Anlatı Terapisi, Psiko-sosyal Müdahaleler

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Giriş. Bu araştırmada muğlak kayıplara ilişkin alan yazın incelenerek, belirsizlik ve bunlarla ilişkili çözümlenmemiş durumların psikolojik etkisi, başa çıkma stratejileri, yaklaşımlar ve çözüm önerileri belirlenerek, bunların tartışılması amaçlanmıştır. Muğlak kayıp, belirsizlik ve sonuçsuzluk ile karakterize edilir ve ölüm gibi kesin bir sona ulaşmış kayıplardan farklıdır. Bu tür kayıplar, kaybolmuş kişilerin yanı sıra Alzheimer hastası bireyler gibi, fiziksel varlığı olan ancak duygusal olarak var olmayan ve etkisi hissedilen durumlarda belirginleşir. Muğlak kayıp, kaybı yaşayan birey ve ailelerin hayatlarına devam etmelerine ve ilerlemelerine engel olan sürekli bir kafa karışıklığı ve duygusal sıkıntıya yol açar. Bu durum, çeşitli adaptif-uyumsal ve maladaptif-uyumsal olmayan fantezi-stratejiler kullanılarak yönetilir. Bu süreçte direnç ve uyum sağlama çok önemlidir.

Psiko-sosyal ve sağlık hizmeti veren profesyoneller, muğlak kaybı travmatik bir olay olarak değerlendirerek, stres ile duygusal acıyı hafifletmek için müdahaleler geliştirmişlerdir. Muğlak kayba uyum (adaptasyon) sağlanabilmesi için etkili terapiler arasında psikolojik dayanıklılık eğitimi ve anlatı terapisi bulunmaktadır. Bunların yanı sıra, sağlanan rehberlik ve destek, bu kayıplardan etkilenen bireylerin içinde buldukları durumlarla daha etkili başa çıkmasına yardımcı olmaktadır. Sosyal destek ağlarının rolü de hayati önem taşımaktadır. Bu nedenle ruh sağlığı profesyonelleri arasında kapsamlı bir iş birliğine ihtiyaç olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Muğlak kayıpların doğal afetlerle örtüşen özellikleri vardır; her iki durum da belirsizlik içerir ve genellikle sevilenlerin ve mülkiyetlerin kaybı gibi günlük yaşamda ciddi aksamalarla sonuçlanır. Örneğin, 2005 Katrina Tayfunu, 2011 Büyük Doğu Japonya Depremi ve Tsunamisi ve 06 Şubat 2023 Türkiye depremleri, bu tür olayların yarattığı etkileri açıkça göstermiştir. Bu olaylardan etkilenen bireylerin uzun bir iyileşme sürecine ve bu süreç boyunca kayıpların fiziksel ve duygusal boyutlarıyla başa çıkmak için kapsamlı destek sistemlerine ihtiyaçları olduğu görülmüştür. Doğal afetler ve benzeri veya başka nedenlerle oluşan muğlak kayıpların bireyler üzerindeki uzun vadeli duygusal ve psikolojik etkileri, etkili bir iyileşme süreci için hem fiziksel altyapının yeniden inşasına hem de duygusal ve psikolojik hasarların giderilmesine yönelik çift yönlü bir yaklaşımı gerektirir. Bu yaklaşım, bireylerin ve toplulukların normal hayatlarına dönmeleri ve iyileşmelerini sağlamak için temel bir öneme sahiptir.

Yöntem. Araştırma yöntemi, betimsel, sistematik alan yazın taramasıdır. Veriler, muğlak kayıplar üzerine çalışmaları saptamak üzere PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO ve Google Scholar gibi veri tabanları aracılığıyla erişilen akademik makale, kitap ve vaka çalışmaları dahil olmak üzere basılı ve görsel çeşitli kaynaklardan elde edilmiştir. Taramada 'muğlak kayıp', 'kaybın travmatik etkileri', 'psikolojik travma', 'aile dinamikleri', 'kayıp kişiler' ve 'kayıpla başa çıkma' gibi anahtar kelimeler kullanılmıştır. Boolean operatörleri "VE" ve "VEYA" kullanılarak arama terimleri birleştirilmiş ve arama sonuçları hassaslaştırılmıştır. İncelemede, seçim kriterleri, muğlak kayıp üzerine güncel çalışmaların dahil edilmesini sağlamak amacıyla, Ocak 2000 ile Aralık 2023 yılları arasında yayımlanan İngilizce çalışmaları kapsam içine almıştır.

Araştırmada kullanılan dahil etme/içerme ve hariç tutma/dışlama kriterleri şu şekildedir: Dahil edilen çalışmalar, muğlak kayıp ve bu kaybın sonuçlarına ilişkin ampirik ve nitel araştırmalar; muğlak kayıp yaşayan bireyler için tasarlanmış çeşitli başa çıkma mekanizmaları ve müdahaleler ile muğlak kayıp için oluşturulmuş teorik çerçeveleri içermektedir. Hariç tutulan çalışmalar ise, ampirik kanıtlara dayanmayan, kişisel görüşler sunan makaleler, insan katılımcıları olmayan çalışmalar ve direkt olarak muğlak kaybı ve etkilerini araştırmayan çalışmalardır.



Belirlenen çalışmalar nitel analiz tekniklerinden tematik analiz ile incelenmiştir. Diğer taraftan, seçilen çalışmaların kalitesi, araştırmanın amaçlarına ve metodolojisine uygunluk açısından değerlendirilerek, sadece belirlenen kriterleri karşılayan çalışmalar analize tabi tutulmuştur. Bu süreçte, veriler, belirlenen duygusal ve psikolojik etkiler, direnç faktörleri, başa çıkma teknikleri ve destek müdahaleleri gibi alt temalara göre sınıflandırılmıştır. Bu temalar kapsamında oluşturulan kodlamalar ile makalelerin amaçları, metodolojileri ve sonuçları değerlendirilmiştir. Söz konusu sınıflandırma, muğlak kaybın ve sonuçlarının anlaşılmasını sağlayan farklı faktörleri ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Bulgular. İncelenen çalışmaların tematik analizinden elde edilen bulgular, muğlak kayıp yaşayanların dayanıklılığını ve psikolojik sağlığını iyileştirmek için özel tedavi yöntemlerine ve kapsamlı destek sistemlerine duyulan ihtiyacın vurgulanması, muğlak kayıpla etkili başa çıkma stratejileri arasında sosyal destek, anlam oluşturma faaliyetleri, dayanıklılık eğitimi ve anlatı terapisi gibi müdahalelerin yer aldığı, muğlak kaybın anlaşılması, fiziksel ve psikolojik belirsizlik olarak iki temel biçimde ortaya çıkarak, muğlak kayıpların bireyler üzerinde derin duygusal etkiler yarattığı şeklinde özetlenebilir. Bunların yanı sıra, fiziksel belirsizliğin, özellikle savaş veya doğal afetler sonucu, sevilenlerin fiziksel olarak yok, ancak psikolojik olarak var olması durumundan kaynaklanan sıkıntılar olduğu, psikolojik belirsizliğin ise, kişinin fiziksel olarak mevcut ancak duygusal olarak uzak olması durumu ile tanımlandığı ve bu durumun genellikle sağlık sorunları veya değişen ilişkiler sonucunda ortaya çıktığı belirlenmiştir. Fiziksel ve psikolojik muğlak kayıplarda, her iki durum da birey ve ailelerin önemli duygusal ve psikolojik zorluklar yaşamasına neden olmakta ve bu farklılıkları tanımlayarak, etkilenenler için özel müdahale ve destek stratejileri geliştirmenin önemi vurgulanmaktadır.

Diğer bulgular arasında: muğlak kaybın ortaya çıktığı bağlamlarla ilgili, kayıp kişiler, kronik hastalıklar ve göç durumlarının yer aldığı vurgulanmaktadır. Bu temalar ile, kayıp kişilerle ilgili belirsizlik ve bu kişilerin durumu hakkında bilinmezliğin duygusal sıkıntı yarattığı, kronik hastalıkların ortaya çıktığı, bu tür hastalıkların belirtileri ve etkilerinin zaman içinde değişkenlik göstermesi nedeniyle psikolojik belirsizliklerin meydana geldiği hem bireylerin ve hem de ailelerinin etkilendiği ortaya konulmaktadır. Göç ise, kişilerin anavatanları ve kültürel kimliklerinden kopmasıyla ortaya çıkan psikolojik ve duygusal zorlukları oluşturmaktadır. Bulgular arasında muğlak kaybın travmatik etkileri, sürekli üzüntü ve stres gibi duygusal ve psikolojik zorluklar, bu durumlarda, bireylerin fiziksel ve zihinsel sağlığının olumsuz etkilendiği ve duygusal iyileşme sürecinin zorlaştığı ortaya konmuştur.

Etkili başa çıkma mekanizmaları ve dayanıklılık geliştirme stratejileri, muğlak kayıpla başa çıkmada önemlidir. Uyumsal- adaptif başa çıkma stratejileri, sosyal destek, olumlu çerçeveleme ve problem çözme gibi yöntemleri içerirken, uyumsuz olmayan- maladaptif stratejilerin duygusal sıkıntıları artırabildiği, bu nedenle, bireylerin duygusal iyi oluşlarını desteklemek ve muğlak kayıpla başa çıkmalarını sağlamak için adaptif stratejiler üzerinde durulması gerektiği belirlenmiştir. Analiz sonuçları ile terapötik müdahaleler ve profesyonel desteğin, muğlak kayıpla başa çıkmada kritik rol oynadığı göz önüne alınarak, anlatı terapisi ve direnç çözümlenmesi gibi yöntemlerle, bireylerin deneyimlerini yeniden çerçevelemelerine ve duygusal zorluklarla başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olunabileceği ve duygusal destek sağlama ve başa çıkma stratejileri geliştirmede psiko-sosyal ve sağlık hizmeti profesyonelleri tarafından, önemli katkılar sunulabileceği vurgulanmaktadır.

Tartışma, Sonuç ve Öneriler. Muğlak kayıp, çözümlenmemiş üzüntü ve belirsizlikle karakterize edilen, sonuçlandırılmayan bir kayıp türüdür. Fiziksel belirsizlik, kişinin fiziksel olarak yok ama psikolojik Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. *Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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olarak sevdikleri için hala mevcut olduğu durumları kapsar; bu genellikle savaşlar veya doğal afetler gibi durumlarda görülür. Psikolojik belirsizlik, kişinin fiziksel olarak mevcut ancak psikolojik veya duygusal olarak sevdiklerinden uzak olduğu durumlarda, ciddi zihinsel sağlık sorunları veya bilişsel düşüşle bağlantılı olarak ortaya çıkar. Her iki belirsizlik formu da açıklığın ve sonuçlanmanın olmaması nedeniyle önemli duygusal sıkıntılara neden olur. Muğlak kayıp, kaybolan kişiler, kronik hastalıklar ve göç gibi çeşitli bağlamlarda ortaya çıkabilir ve bunların her biri, bireylerin ve ailelerin karşılaştığı duygusal sıkıntıları şiddetlendiren benzersiz zorluklar sunar. Genellikle, doğal afetler veya çatışmalar sonucu kaybolan kişilerin aileleri, sevdiklerinin akıbeti hakkında hiçbir bilgiye sahip olmadan, derin üzüntü ve devam eden depresyon yaşar. Ortaya çıkan kronik hastalıklar, bir kişinin fiziksel ve psikolojik kapasitelerinde önemli değişikliklere yol açar ve bu hem hastayı hem de ailesini etkileyen psikolojik bir "yokluk" durumuna neden olur. Göç, bireyleri tanıdık sosyal ve kültürel bağlamlardan ayırır ve yeni ortamların belirsizliği, göçmenlerin karşılaştığı duygusal ve psikolojik zorlukları artırır. Bu ve benzeri senaryolar, her tür muğlak kaybın duygusal ve psikolojik zorluklarını tanıyan stratejilerin geliştirilmesinin gerektiğini vurgular.

Etkili başa çıkma stratejileri, muğlak kaybın etkilerini yönetmede kritik öneme sahiptir. Adaptif başa çıkma stratejileri, olumlu yeniden çerçeveleme, sosyal destek arayışı ve aktif problem çözme gibi yöntemler, bireylerin belirsizlikle ve sıkıntıyla olumlu bir şekilde başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olarak duygusal iyileşmeyi ve direnci teşvik eder. Diğer yandan, kaçınma, kendini suçlama ve inkâr gibi maladaptif stratejiler, duygusal sıkıntıyı şiddetlendirir ve uyumu zorlaştırır. Muğlak kayıp karmaşıklıklarıyla başa çıkmada bireyleri desteklemek için adaptif başa çıkma stratejilerini ve direnç geliştirmeyi teşvik etmek zorunludur. Muğlak kaybın derinlemesine incelenmesinin sonuçları, bu tür kayıpların fiziksel ve psikolojik belirsizlik olarak iki temel tezahürünü ve bireyler üzerinde yarattığı derin duygusal etkileri vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, kayıp kişiler, kronik hastalık ve göç gibi muğlak kayba neden olan özel bağlamları ve bunların her birinin etkilenen bireylerin yaşadığı sıkıntıları artıran benzersiz zorluklarını sunmuştur. İncelenen çalışmalarda, duygusal iyileşme ve uyumu kolaylaştıran başa çıkma mekanizmaları ve direnç stratejilerine de değinilmektedir. Böylece bu çalışma ile, muğlak kaybın karmaşıklığını yönetmede profesyonel ve topluluk desteğinin hayati rolleri ve terapötik müdahaleler gözden geçirilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın, muğlak kayıpların karmaşık dinamiklerini açıklayarak etkili başa çıkma mekanizmalarını ve müdahale yöntemlerini tanımlayıp alan yazına önemli katkılarının olduğu düşünülmektedir.

Elde edilen sonuçlara göre, muğlak kayıpların, çözümleme ve kabullenme açısından diğer kayıplardan farklı olduğu vurgulanarak, etkilenen bireyleri desteklemek için gerekli olan özel yaklaşımları geliştirmek üzere yeni bakış açıları sunulmaktadır. Bu kapsamlı analiz, muğlak kaybın çeşitli ve karmaşık senaryolarını etkili bir şekilde ele almak için hedeflenmiş müdahale stratejileri ve sağlam destek sistemlerine olan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. İncelenen çalışmalarda da belirtildiği gibi, muğlak kaybı yaşayan bireyler için psiko-sosyal profesyoneller tarafından, anlatı terapisi ve dayanıklılık eğitimi verilmesi gibi yöntem ve teknikler kullanılabilir. Bu tarz yenilikçi yaklaşım ve teknikleri entegre edilerek, etkili destek ve müdahale stratejileri ile çeşitli toplulukları içeren destek sistemleri geliştirilebilir. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışmada muğlak kayıpların çeşitli yönleri bütüncül bir bakış açısıyla irdelenerek, muğlak kayıplarla ilgili anlayış, farklı bağlam ve kültürler arasında genişletilmeli etkili, özel müdahale yöntemleri geliştirebilmek için daha fazla araştırma yapılması gerektiği önerilmektedir. Bu temelde, psiko-sosyal ve sağlık hizmeti teorisyen ve uygulayıcıları ile politika yapımcılarına yönelik yenilikçi önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

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Introduction

Background

Ambiguous loss is uniquely characterized by uncertainty and a lack of closure, making it distinct from losses with a definite endpoint like death (Matsuda et al., 2021). This type of loss is particularly evident in situations involving individuals with Alzheimer's disease or those who are missing, where the physical absence of a loved one leads to a continuous emotional presence (Boss, 2016). Unlike the conclusive loss experienced through death, which allows for emotional processing and closure (Mechling, 2015), ambiguous loss results in ongoing confusion, emotional distress, and an inability for the affected individuals and their families to move forward (Powell & Sorenson, 2020).

The profound emotional and psychological impacts of ambiguous loss include symptoms like sadness, depression, stress, and anxiety, which are often associated with trauma (Knight & Gitterman, 2019; Kreutzer et al., 2016). Individuals coping with this type of loss employ various strategies, both adaptive and maladaptive, to manage the uncertainty and lack of resolution (Boss, 2016). Studies show that resilience and adaptation are crucial for those dealing with ambiguous losses, linking these responses to trauma-related growth (Kreutzer et al., 2016).

Healthcare providers view ambiguous loss as a traumatic event and, as such, develop targeted interventions to alleviate the associated stress and emotional pain (Solheim et al., 2016). Effective therapies like resilience training and narrative therapy have been shown to significantly aid individuals and families in mitigating the impacts of ambiguous loss (Knight & Gitterman, 2019). Additionally, guidance and support from healthcare providers and social workers are critical in helping those affected cope more effectively (Phillips, 2024). The role of social support networks is also vital, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive, collaborative approach among professionals to support affected individuals comprehensively (Solheim et al., 2016).

Treating ambiguous loss as a traumatic event involves recognizing its unique challenges and implementing supportive, therapeutic interventions that address the emotional and psychological strains on affected individuals and families. This approach helps mitigate the adverse effects and fosters an environment conducive to coping and resilience.

Context and relevance

Ambiguous losses share similar characteristics and effects with natural disasters such as earthquakes, which involve significant uncertainty and lack of clarity. Both scenarios typically result in the absence of loved ones, loss of property, and severe disruptions to daily life, leading to widespread emotional distress, including sadness, stress, and depression (Boss, 2002; Williams & Spruill, 2005).



Natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011, and the 2023 Turkey and Syria earthquake vividly illustrate these effects (Ahmed et al., 2023; Helps, 2023; Hikichi et al., 2016; Mavrouli et al., 2023; Rowe & Liddle, 2008; Tsuboya et al., 2016). Survivors often face a prolonged recovery period fraught with anxiety, uncertainty, and a profound sense of ambiguous loss, impacting their mental health and contributing to conditions such as depression and dementia (Ahmed et al., 2023; Helps, 2023; Hikichi et al., 2016; Rowe & Liddle, 2008; Tsuboya et al., 2016).

The emotional and psychological toll of these events underscores the necessity of comprehensive support systems to assist affected individuals in coping with both the tangible and intangible aspects of their losses. Research emphasizes the importance of well-coordinated care infrastructures that address the long-term psychological needs of disaster-affected populations (Helps, 2023). During such crises, healthcare professionals play a critical role not only in treating physical injuries but also in providing psychological support to help survivors manage the emotional consequences of their experiences (Hugelius et al., 2017). A recent study on the Syria earthquake highlighted the mental health challenges faced by survivors, stressing the need for tailored interventions that cater specifically to their unique conditions and experiences (Soqia et al., 2023).

The relationship between ambiguous losses and natural disasters reveals profound, lasting impacts on physical and emotional well-being. Effective recovery from these events requires a dual focus on rebuilding physical infrastructures and addressing the emotional and psychological damages to help affected individuals and communities regain a sense of normalcy and begin healing. This approach is essential for mitigating the profound sense of loss and facilitating a comprehensive recovery.

Theoretical perspectives

The Family Systems Theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of family units and their dynamics, suggesting that an individual's loss experience is influenced by the entire family system (Boss & Greenberg, 1984). This theory explicitly addresses ambiguous loss as a personal and systemic problem affecting individuals and their families. It highlights the importance of considering the whole family context in managing ambiguous loss (Boss & Greenberg, 1984)

In contrast, Attachment Theory focuses on the emotional bonds between individuals and how these bonds influence their responses to loss (Kim & Tucker, 2020). This theory is particularly relevant to ambiguous loss because it explores how disrupted or strained attachment bonds lead to heightened distress and anxiety among those affected (Kim & Tucker, 2020).

By integrating Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory, researchers and practitioners gain comprehensive insights into the impacts of ambiguous loss on individual and family relationships and emotional well-being. These theories collectively enhance understanding of the emotional responses, relational dynamics, and coping mechanisms that individuals and families employ to navigate the challenges of ambiguous loss. This integrated approach is crucial for

Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. *Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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developing effective strategies to support those affected by ambiguous loss and fostering resilience and emotional recovery within family systems.

Objectives and rationale

The review aims to find recurring patterns, common themes, and areas lacking research in the current literature on ambiguous loss. The review analyzes available studies in the literature to reveal consistent patterns in how people experience and interpret ambiguous loss within their families and personal lives. The review intends to understand commonalities and differences to extract themes shared among various situations of ambiguous loss, like cases involving chronic illness, missing persons, or migration. Additionally, the review aims to identify areas where research on ambiguous loss is lacking or incomplete, emphasizing the need for further study to comprehend how ambiguous loss affects individuals and families.

A qualitative review is particularly effective in exploring the intricate impacts of ambiguous loss because it focuses on understanding the depth and complexity of individuals' experiences. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative approaches consider the subjective aspects of ambiguous loss, including personal experiences, feelings, coping strategies, resilience, and people's perceptions. Qualitative and thematic analyses enable researchers to understand the complex nature of ambiguous loss by considering different experiences of ambiguous loss. This qualitative review serves as a platform for individuals to share their experiences of ambiguous loss to uncover different consequences of ambiguous loss on the emotional well-being of affected ones.

Methodology

Search strategy

The academic articles relevant to the research topic were selected using databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO to find studies on ambiguous loss. The relevant articles were found using keywords like 'ambiguous loss,' 'traumatic effects of loss,' 'psychological trauma,' 'family dynamics in ambiguous loss,' 'missing persons,' and 'coping with loss.'" The research used Boolean operators to combine search terms and refine search results. The operators "AND" and "OR" help narrow or broaden the search to find the most relevant articles. The research applied the selection criteria to select the search. This review included studies in the English language from January 2000 to December 2023. These criteria ensured the inclusion of recent studies on ambiguous loss.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The studies for the review were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) empirical research as well as qualitative studies relevant to ambiguous loss and consequences of this



loss; (2) the review studies on various coping mechanisms and interventions designed for people experiencing ambiguous loss; and (3) studies about theoretical frameworks on ambiguous loss.

The following Exclusion criteria indicate the type of articles that were not included in the review. These included (1) non-empirical articles like opinion pieces or editorials that are based on personal views of writers without any empirical evidence; (2) studies not involving human participants; and (3) studies not focused on exploring ambiguous loss and its effects.

Qualitative analysis

This review employed the qualitative synthesis methodology to analyze the selected studies to extract common themes, expected outcomes, and theoretical frameworks about ambiguous loss and its traumatic impact on the affected individuals. The main steps of the qualitative synthesis process included coding. The articles were analyzed during coding, and their objectives, methodology, and outcomes were considered to obtain relevant data. The extracted data was then subjected to thematic analysis to identify themes. The data was sorted based on its relevance to different subthemes of emotional and psychological effects, resilience factors, coping techniques, and support and interventions—consequently, the sorted and organized data allowed comprehension of different factors affecting ambiguous loss and its consequences.

Quality assessment

The studies selected for inclusion in the review were subjected to quality assessment to check if these studies show relevance to the study topic in terms of objectives, research design, research methodology, analysis, and outcomes. Only the studies fulfilling and meeting the determined criteria were subjected to analysis in the subsequent step.

Findings

List of themes, sub-themes, and codes obtained from the qualitative analysis

The themes, subthemes, and codes are extracted from the qualitative analysis and tabulated in Table 1 or the Summary Table. The organization of the identified themes, subthemes, and codes revealed the intricate nature of ambiguous loss involving feelings of grief and loss. The qualitative analysis also pointed towards the severe impact of ambiguous loss on the affected individuals' emotional and psychological well-being because of their inability to deal with the loss, mainly because of the uncertainty associated with the loss. In short, the qualitative analysis uncovered the intricacy of ambiguous loss, shedding light on its consequences and suggesting intervention and support for helping those affected by this loss.



Understanding ambiguous loss

- **Definition and types:** There are two types of ambiguous losses: Physical ambiguity and psychological ambiguity. Physical ambiguity is the situation wherein someone is physically missing or separated but still has a psychological presence in the lives of his loved ones (1 reference). Psychological ambiguity is the situation wherein, despite the physical presence, the individual is psychologically distant and detached, as observed in Alzheimer's patients (1 reference). The ambiguous loss may affect (1 reference) individuals' psychological and emotional well-being. This loss stems from a lack of clarity and uncertainty about the loss.
- **Contexts and causes:** Various situations causing ambiguous loss are cases of missing persons (1 reference), migration (1 reference), and chronic illness (1 reference). The ambiguous loss arising from each context is characterized by different causes, emotional responses, and psychological effects, indicating the diversity of ambiguous loss.

Traumatic effects of ambiguous loss

- **Emotional and psychological impact:** The emotional and psychological consequences of the ambiguous loss are covered in this sub-theme. The ambiguous loss instills persistent feelings of grief (3 references), depression (2 references), and anxiety (2 references) in the people experiencing it. The emotional and psychological responses stem from the uncertainty and absence of closure and resolution during the ambiguous loss. The individuals experiencing ambiguous loss respond to the loss and cope with its consequences using either maladaptive coping strategies (3 references) or adaptive coping strategies (3 references).
- **Resilience and adaptation:** Amidst all the emotional and psychological challenges faced during ambiguous loss, practitioners focus on developing resilience in the affected individuals and promoting adaptation to help them cope with these consequences and move on in life. One of the vital resilience factors has been identified as social support (6 references). Meaning-making (6 references) also effectively adapted affected individuals to ambiguous loss. In short, two factors of supportive associations and finding ways to make sense of loss in one's life help individuals cope with the effects of ambiguous loss and carry on with daily life activities.

Interventions and support strategies

- **Therapeutic approaches:** Narrative therapy (1 reference) and resilience training (1 reference) are two methods for addressing ambiguous loss. These approaches allow affected individuals to reframe the experience, view it differently, and develop resilience skills to cope with their challenges.
- **Professional support:** Healthcare professionals (1 reference) and social workers (1 reference) offer support and interventions to individuals affected by ambiguous loss. This practice indicates that managing challenges associated with ambiguous loss may require professional assistance.

Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. *Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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- **Community and social support:** Community-based activities (2 references), social connections (2 references), and the positive effects of social support networks (2 references) contribute significantly towards helping affected individuals cope with ambiguous loss. The social connections and support proved helpful and supportive for people experiencing ambiguous loss.

Table 1 entails the outcomes of reviewed articles and provides a detailed overview of various aspects of ambiguous loss covered in the research. These topics include the definition, reasons behind the loss, the associated trauma, and interventions for addressing ambiguous loss. Extensive research has been done in the domain of ambiguous loss. The researchers have shown keen interest in exploring this domain, as evidenced by the wide variety of topics covered and the numerous citations for each topic depicted in Table 1. Figure 1 portrays the themes, subthemes, and codes extracted from the qualitative analysis.

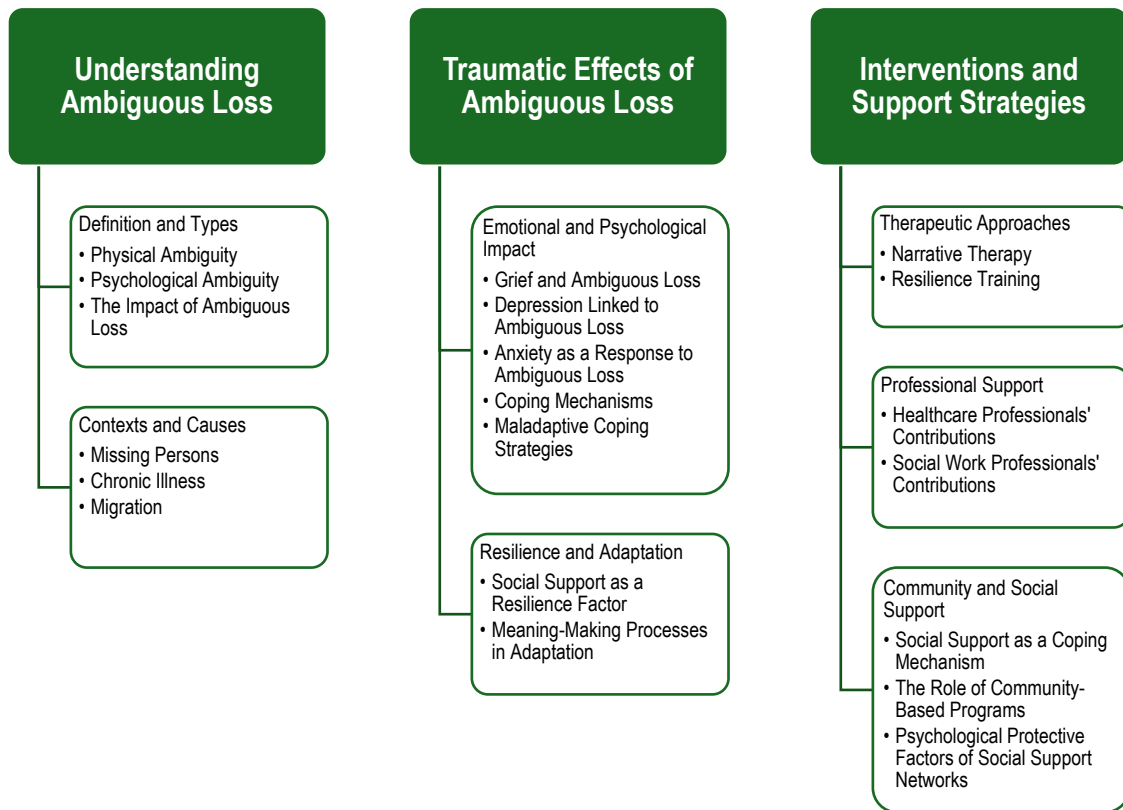


Figure 1. The themes, sub-themes, and codes that emerged from the qualitative analysis.



Table 1.

The outcomes of the qualitative analysis include themes, sub-themes, codes, the number of references, actual references, and critical findings.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Number of References	Actual References	Key Findings
Understanding Ambiguous Loss	Definition and Types	Physical Ambiguity	1	Kaplow et al. (2013)	Physical ambiguity is the distress experienced by a person when he misses the physical presence of a loved one who is present psychologically but absent physically. The ambiguous loss usually occurs as a consequence of war or natural disaster. Such events are characterized by uncertainty about the potential conditions and the status of missing people, leading to emotional turmoil.
		Psychological Ambiguity	1	Boss (2010)	Psychological ambiguity describes the challenges when someone is physically there but emotionally distant. The leading causes behind this ambiguity may be health issues or altered associations. This type of ambiguous loss leads to a challenging emotional state and feelings of loss and separation despite the physical presence of the person.
		The Impact of Ambiguous Loss	1	Blieszner et al. (2007)	Ambiguous loss is multifaceted, involving both physical absence and psychological distance. These complexities lead to significant emotional and psychological difficulties for both individuals and families who experience them. Professionals need to identify these differences between physical and psychological ambiguity in ambiguous loss to enable them to develop interventions and support strategies specifically tailored to help those who are dealing with ambiguous loss cope more effectively.
	Contexts and Causes	Missing Persons	1	Betz and Thorngren (2006)	The leading causes of ambiguous loss caused by missing persons include the uncertainty about the state of missing loved ones. All these uncertainties, worries, and unresolved losses develop emotional distress.
Chronic Illness		1	Williams and Spruill (2005)	Chronic illness creates a specific situation where a type of loss is not clearly defined or understood and involves psychological uncertainty because the illness's symptoms and effects vary over time. This loss affects not only the individuals who have the illness but also their family members and calls for resolution of the challenges associated with this type of loss.	

Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. *Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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		Migration	1	Comtesse et al. (2023)	Another ambiguous loss may be experienced during migration, which involves emotional and psychological challenges faced by displacement and detachment from a dear homeland. Hence, it is crucial to consider migrants' mental, emotional, and psychological states to understand their challenges and offer them interventions accordingly.
Traumatic Effects of Ambiguous Loss	Emotional and Psychological Impact	Grief and Ambiguous Loss	3	Boss (2010); Jeter and Turns (2022); Lang et al. (2011)	A lack of closure and uncertainty regarding the extent of loss characterizes ambiguous loss. This leads to continuous sadness and stress that affect the physical and mental health of those affected. Resolving the feelings of grief and sadness associated with ambiguous loss is essential.
		Depression Linked to Ambiguous Loss	2	Soeterik et al. (2017); Zaksh et al. (2019)	The association of ambiguous loss with depression is evident. The depression is further aggravated by the uncertainty associated with ambiguous losses. Hence, it is essential to resolve the mental health challenges stimulated by ambiguous loss in individuals, specifically in healthcare providers experiencing these losses.
		Anxiety as a Response to Ambiguous Loss	2	Renner et al. (2021); Wise et al. (2023)	One of the physical repercussions of ambiguous loss is Anxiety, which stems from continuous uncertainty and emotional distress. Affected individuals are offered support and interventions to deal with anxiety only after a practical assessment of their anxiety and ambiguous loss.
		Coping Mechanisms	3	Faulk et al. (2013); Kamaludin et al. (2020); Zucca et al. (2010)	The emotional distress developed because of ambiguous loss mitigated with the help of Adaptive coping strategies. Some of these strategies include social support, positive reframing, and problem-solving. These practices help develop resilience and improve psychological health to help individuals cope with ambiguous loss better.
		Maladaptive Coping Strategies	3	Faulk et al. (2013); Kotzé et al. (2013); Zucca et al. (2010)	The psychological challenges and emotional distress stemming from ambiguous loss may aggravate when coupled with maladaptive coping strategies like self-blame, avoidance, and denial. Hence, detecting and stopping these practices is crucial to help affected individuals cope with the loss, adapt to it, and head towards emotional well-being.



	Resilience and Adaptation	Social Support as a Resilience Factor	6	Barber (2013); Machida et al. (2013); Solheim et al. (2016); Walsh (2003); Walsh (2020); Windle (2011)	Individuals affected by ambiguous loss may be encouraged to develop resilience by offering a social support network that offers protective factors for dealing effectively with the consequences of ambiguous loss. Such a network provides emotional support, practical assistance, affiliation, and connection, resulting in an improved psychological state and a better adaptation to the challenges faced in life.
		Meaning-Making Processes in Adaptation	6	Boss (2016); Chase (2022); Huebner et al. (2007); Moradi et al. (2021); Mulyasari et al. (2023); Yu et al. (2021)	The importance of meaning-making in ambiguous loss cannot be denied. It is a powerful tool for individuals to make sense of their experiences and unwind their emotions to understand the situation better, find closure to accept reality and move forward, and ultimately get involved in meaning-making to understand their current priorities. All these practices cultivate psychological resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity.
Interventions and Support Strategies	Therapeutic Approaches	Narrative Therapy	1	Betz and Thorngren (2006)	Narrative therapy involves constructing experiences or recollecting experiences and feelings to understand one's circumstances. It also involves reframing personal experiences, which means that the same experience is viewed positively to instill hope. Both these practices allow individuals to make sense of their experiences. Consequently, individuals find new insights, strengths, and possibilities within their experiences of ambiguous loss.
		Resilience Training	1	Betz and Thorngren (2006)	The main objective of Resilience training is to prepare individuals to better deal with adverse situations and ambiguous losses by developing resilience. These programs train individuals to develop and use coping skills and manage their thinking and stress levels to develop resilience and respond effectively to ambiguous loss.
	Professional Support	Healthcare Professionals' Contributions	1	Lang et al. (2011)	Besides providing medical care, healthcare professionals extend psychological support to those experiencing ambiguous loss. This psychological support involves practices aimed at managing sadness, processing emotions, and training individuals to adopt coping strategies. Moreover, they support the individuals throughout their challenging time by ensuring they are provided with all the information they obtain about their loss.



	Social Work Professionals' Contributions	1	Lang et al. (2011)	The role of social workers in the recovery of individuals affected by ambiguous loss cannot be denied. They provide psychosocial support, advocate their rights, and speak up for their needs. They also ensure the provision of resources like necessary information about their losses and information about physicians associated with mental health and ensure their connection with support groups to ease their grieving period.
Community and Social Support	Social Support as a Coping Mechanism	2	Cohen and Wills (1985); Sharp et al. (2023)	Social support, particularly support from close relatives, friends, and family, plays a vital part in recovering individuals experiencing ambiguous loss. Social groups' emotional support, help, and affiliation serve as therapy for such individuals. Social support was also found to serve as a protective factor for those dealing with mental agony and stress. This support also develops resilience in affected individuals to cope with the consequences of ambiguous loss.
	The Role of Community-Based Programs	2	Parviniannasab et al. (2022); Yin et al. (2022)	Community-based programs also contribute to the recovery of affected individuals by developing resilience to deal with the consequences of ambiguous loss. They promote affiliation and connection, develop a friendly and supportive environment for individuals to express their feelings and experiences, and increase awareness of coping interventions and techniques.
	Psychological Protective Factors of Social Support Networks	2	Chen et al. (2022); Ratajová et al. (2020)	Social support networks play a crucial role in protecting individuals psychologically. These networks provide various forms of assistance, including practical help with tasks, emotional support in need, and feeling connected and accepted by others. The significance of social support networks for individuals dealing with ambiguous loss cannot be denied. Social support networks attempt to develop resilience in such individuals to allow them to get back to life despite the ambiguous loss they have experienced.



Results and Discussion

Results

Understanding ambiguous loss

Ambiguous loss, characterized by unclear, unresolved situations, results in significant emotional distress due to uncertainties about changes in a loved one's presence or identity, including both physical absence with psychological presence and psychological absence with physical presence. Various contexts, such as missing persons from disasters, chronic illness, and migration, highlight the complexities of ambiguous loss, each bringing unique emotional and psychological challenges. Understanding these types of ambiguous loss is crucial for developing effective interventions and support strategies to aid individuals in coping with the associated uncertainties and emotional burdens. This phenomenon is depicted in Figure 2.

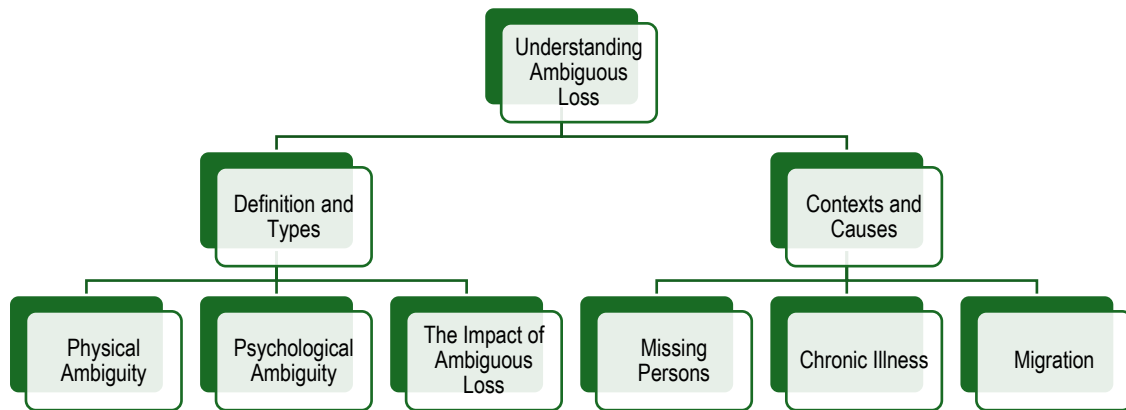


Figure 2. Thematic representation of Understanding Ambiguous Loss.

Definition and types

Ambiguous loss refers to unclear, unresolved situations lacking closure, which result in significant emotional distress due to uncertainties about changes in a loved one's presence or identity. There are two main types:

- **Physical ambiguity:** Physical ambiguity occurs when someone is physically absent yet remains psychologically present for their loved ones. Familiar with wars or disasters, this form of loss leaves families in distress over the missing person's safety and whereabouts, exacerbating sadness and prolonging emotional recovery (Kaplow et al., 2013).
- **Psychological ambiguity:** Psychological ambiguity occurs when a person is physically present but emotionally distant or has undergone significant personality or behavioral changes. Conditions such as cognitive or mental health issues cause this type of ambiguity, where the physical presence does not mitigate the emotional and relational strains caused by these changes (Boss, 2010).

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Both types of ambiguous loss create confusion and grief due to the uncertainty involved, affecting individuals' ability to cope and recover (Blieszner et al., 2007).

Contexts and causes

Sayfa | 738

Ambiguous loss manifests in various forms, each characterized by distinct challenges and emotional distress:

- **Missing persons:** Commonly arising from natural disasters or conflicts, families of missing persons deal with immense grief and depression due to the lack of closure and uncertainty about their loved ones' fate (Betz & Thorngren, 2006).
- **Chronic illness:** Ambiguous loss also occurs in chronic illness, where significant changes in a person's physical abilities and health lead to their psychological "absence." This uncertainty and change profoundly impact the patient and their family, creating ambiguous loss from their physical presence and emotional absence (Williams & Spruill, 2005).
- **Migration:** Migration introduces ambiguous loss through detachment from homeland and cultural identity, compounded by the emotional and psychological challenges of establishing a new life in an unfamiliar context. This type of loss requires addressing the migrants' and their families' needs to help them cope with the uncertainties and changes (Comtesse et al., 2023).

Understanding the different manifestations of ambiguous loss is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Recognizing each context's unique emotional and psychological challenges allows practitioners to offer specific support and strategies tailored to those experiencing ambiguous loss. Effective coping strategies and interventions are essential for promoting well-being and resilience among affected individuals, enabling them to navigate and overcome the complexities of ambiguous loss.

Traumatic effects of ambiguous loss

Ambiguous loss profoundly impacts individuals by causing unresolved emotional and psychological distress, characterized by prolonged sadness, anxiety, and depression, which hinders their ability to achieve closure and heal. People use various coping mechanisms to manage these effects, from adaptive strategies like seeking support to maladaptive behaviors such as avoidance, which influence their emotional recovery and adjustment. Enhancing resilience and adaptation through social support and meaning-making processes is vital for individuals to cope with the traumatic effects of ambiguous loss, aiding their psychological health and overall well-being. This phenomenon is depicted in Figure 3.

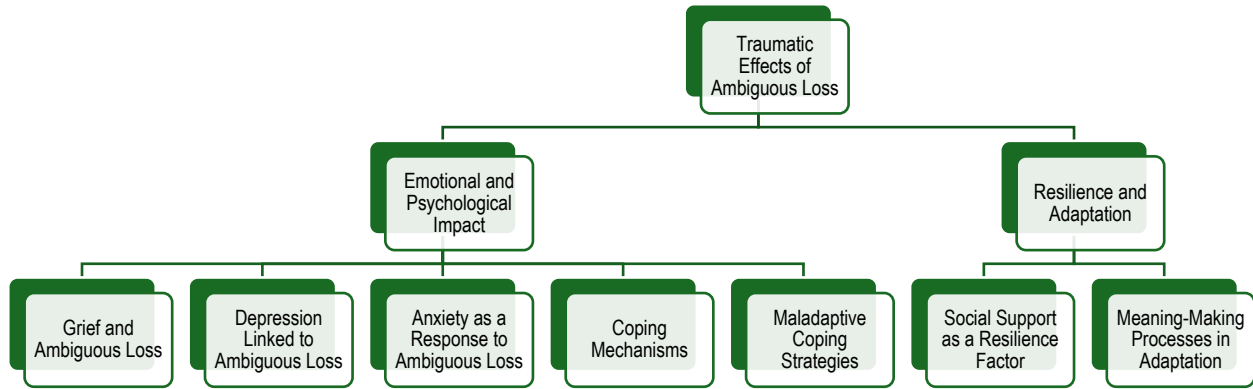


Figure 3. Thematic Representation of Traumatic Effects of Ambiguous Loss

Emotional and psychological impact

Ambiguous loss, characterized by a lack of clarity and resolution, profoundly impacts the emotional and psychological states of those affected, often leading to sadness, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. This type of loss is particularly challenging because it prevents closure, causing individuals to experience grief and emotional distress continually (Boss, 2010; Jeter & Turns, 2022; Lang et al., 2011).

- ***Sadness and grief:*** Ambiguous loss triggers prolonged grief due to the ongoing uncertainty surrounding a loved one's condition or presence. This indefinite waiting exacerbates the emotional pain and hinders the healing process (Lang et al., 2011).
- ***Depression:*** The continual uncertainty and emotional strain linked with ambiguous loss also lead to depression. Individuals may feel overwhelming sadness and despair, significantly affecting their overall well-being (Soeterik et al., 2017; Zaksh et al., 2019).
- ***Anxiety:*** The lack of closure and constant fear of unforeseen losses contribute to anxiety among those dealing with ambiguous losses. This continuous worry affects their mental health and daily functioning (Renner et al., 2021; Wise et al., 2023).

Support and tailored interventions are crucial for helping individuals cope with these intense emotions and facilitating their journey towards emotional stability.

Coping mechanisms

Effective coping strategies are essential for managing the complex feelings associated with ambiguous loss. These strategies vary in effectiveness and are categorized as adaptive or maladaptive.

- ***Adaptive coping strategies:*** These help individuals positively handle the consequences of ambiguous loss, fostering emotional recovery and resilience. Positive reframing, seeking social support, and proactive problem-solving are beneficial. They promote emotional



stability and enhance the individual's ability to deal with uncertainty and distress (Faulk et al., 2013; Kamaludin et al., 2020; Zucca et al., 2010).

- **Maladaptive coping strategies:** In contrast, maladaptive strategies such as avoidance, self-blame, and denial hinder emotional adjustment and prolong grief. Although these may offer temporary relief, they ultimately lead to increased depression and anxiety, worsening the individual's emotional state (Faulk et al., 2013; Kotzé et al., 2013; Zucca et al., 2010).

Understanding and addressing both coping strategies is vital for developing interventions that enhance resilience and support individuals' emotional health.

Resilience and adaptation

Resilience and adaptation are critical for effectively navigating the challenges of ambiguous loss. Engaging in meaning-making processes and leveraging social support are pivotal in developing these qualities.

- **Social support as a resilience factor:** Strong social connections provide emotional stability, practical help, and a sense of belonging, all essential for resilience. Social support from family, friends, and community networks plays a crucial role in mitigating the psychological impacts of ambiguous loss, enabling individuals to maintain their emotional health (Barber, 2013; Machida et al., 2013; Solheim et al., 2016; Walsh, 2003; Walsh, 2020; Windle, 2011).
- **Meaning-making processes in adaptation:** Meaning-making helps individuals reinterpret the impact of their loss, fostering acceptance and adaptation. This process encourages them to redefine their identities and life goals, providing a framework for dealing with ambiguous loss with strength and resilience (Boss, 2016; Chase, 2022; Huebner et al., 2007; Moradi et al., 2021; Mulyasari et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2021).

Social support and meaning-making are essential for enhancing resilience and adaptation. Individuals must recover from ambiguous loss and continue their daily lives with renewed purpose and well-being.

Interventions and support strategies

Interventions and support strategies for ambiguous loss focus on therapeutic approaches like narrative therapy and resilience training to help individuals reframe their experiences and develop coping mechanisms. Healthcare and social work professionals provide essential support, assisting in emotional counseling and coping strategy development while emphasizing the role of community and social networks in resilience and recovery. These combined efforts in therapeutic interventions, professional guidance, and community support are critical in aiding those affected by ambiguous loss to navigate their challenges and enhance their emotional well-being. This phenomenon is depicted in Figure 4.

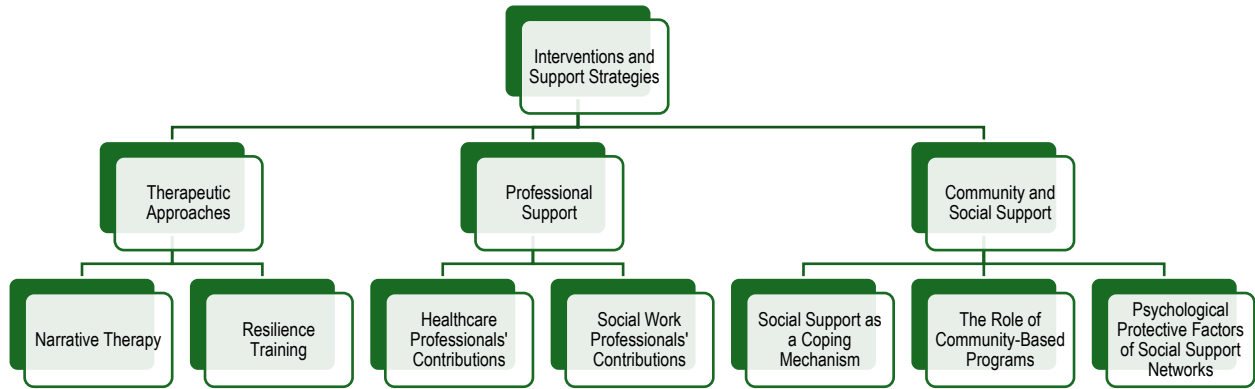


Figure 4. Thematic Representation of Interventions and Support Strategies

Therapeutic approaches

Therapeutic interventions are crucial in mitigating ambiguous loss's emotional and psychological impacts. Primary approaches include narrative therapy and resilience training, which help individuals and families reframe their experiences and develop coping mechanisms for emotional distress and uncertainty.

- **Narrative therapy:** This therapy helps those experiencing ambiguous loss by enabling them to reconstruct and reframe their loss experiences. It allows individuals to express their feelings and share their stories, which helps them move beyond a fixed perspective and embrace a more empowering narrative. This process facilitates meaning-making, growth, and recovery, fostering a positive outlook on managing their losses (Betz & Thorngren, 2006).
- **Resilience training:** This approach enhances individuals' ability to cope with the challenges of ambiguous loss by developing their resilience (Betz & Thorngren, 2006). It includes training on adopting effective coping mechanisms, building social support networks, maintaining a positive outlook, and learning more robust stress management techniques to handle uncertainty (Betz & Thorngren, 2006).

Combining narrative therapy and resilience training helps individuals facing ambiguous loss develop the skills to navigate their situations positively and effectively, promoting recovery and empowerment.

Professional support

Healthcare and social work professionals play vital roles in providing specialized support to those experiencing ambiguous loss. They help individuals understand their emotional challenges and discover effective coping mechanisms.

- **Contributions of healthcare professionals:** Healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, and psychiatrists, offer crucial physical and psychological support. They help manage pain, provide emotional counseling, and facilitate the development of coping strategies. These



professionals are integral to the support system for individuals with ambiguous loss, offering guidance and knowledge throughout the grieving process (Lang et al., 2011).

- **Contributions of social work professionals:** Social workers provide essential psychosocial support to individuals and families. They assist with grief management by providing advocacy, emotional support, and resource access (Lang et al., 2011). Social workers are critical in connecting clients with local support networks and resources, vital for managing the psychological aspects of mourning and loss (Lang et al., 2011).

Together, social workers and healthcare professionals deliver comprehensive support that addresses the social, psychological, and medical needs of those dealing with ambiguous loss, facilitating recovery, resilience, and adaptation during bereavement.

Community and social support

Community support and social networks are invaluable in developing resilience and managing the impacts of ambiguous losses. This support provides emotional comfort, assistance, and a sense of community, which are crucial for navigating the challenges of ambiguous loss.

- **Social support as a coping mechanism:** Emotional support from family, friends, and neighbors is crucial for those experiencing ambiguous loss. It offers consolation, practical help, and a community feeling, which are protective against the stress and adversity caused by loss. Social support enhances psychological health and resilience, highlighting its protective role (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sharp et al., 2023).
- **Role of community-based programs:** Community initiatives significantly benefit individuals dealing with ambiguous loss by fostering coping mechanisms and a sense of belonging. These programs provide safe spaces for sharing experiences and accessing support and resources needed to cope with loss's emotional challenges (Parviniannasab et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2022).
- **Protective factors of social support networks:** Social networks provide psychological protection and aid individuals in overcoming stress and traumatic situations. They build resilience during challenging times by offering belonging, practical help, and emotional support, essential for emotional well-being (Chen et al., 2022; Ratajová et al., 2020).

Community and social support are fundamental in helping individuals cope with ambiguous loss, underlining the importance of social networks in fostering effective coping strategies and resilience through community involvement, support, and emotional care.

Discussion

The nuanced understanding of ambiguous loss highlights its dual manifestations—physical and psychological ambiguity—and the profound emotional impacts they impose on individuals. This study has explored the specific contexts that give rise to ambiguous loss, such as missing persons, chronic illness, and migration, each presenting unique challenges that exacerbate the distress experienced by affected individuals. The discussion extends to coping mechanisms and resilience (Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). *Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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strategies that facilitate emotional recovery and adaptation. Additionally, we review therapeutic interventions and the pivotal roles of professional and community support in managing the complexities of ambiguous loss, aiming to enhance the well-being and resilience of those impacted. This comprehensive analysis underscores the need for targeted intervention strategies and robust support systems to address ambiguous loss's diverse and complex scenarios effectively.

- **Understanding ambiguous loss.** Ambiguous loss refers to a type of loss characterized by uncertainty and unresolved grief, where closure is unachievable. It manifests in two primary forms: physical ambiguity, where the person is physically absent yet remains psychologically present, commonly due to situations like wars or natural disasters, and psychological ambiguity, where the person is physically present but is psychologically or emotionally detached, as seen in severe mental health issues or cognitive decline. Both forms cause significant emotional distress, compounding grief and complicating emotional recovery due to the absence of clarity and closure.
- **Impacts of ambiguous loss.** The traumatic effects of ambiguous loss significantly affect the emotional and psychological states of those involved, often leading to prolonged sadness, anxiety, and depression. The lack of closure and ongoing uncertainty exacerbates these conditions, hindering the grieving process and affecting the well-being of the individuals. Understanding the emotional consequences of ambiguous loss is essential for developing practical support and intervention strategies tailored to the needs of those experiencing this kind of loss.
- **Contexts and causes.** Ambiguous loss arises in various contexts, each characterized by unique challenges that intensify emotional distress. In cases of missing persons, families face the disappearance of loved ones without any knowledge of their fate, leading to unresolved grief and persistent depression. Chronic illnesses alter a person's physical and psychological capabilities, creating a state of psychological absence despite physical presence, which triggers anxiety and ambiguity for both the patient and their family. Migration involves detachment from familiar social and cultural contexts and the uncertainty of new environments, contributing to the emotional and psychological challenges migrants face. These scenarios underscore the need for strategies that recognize the emotional and psychological challenges of each type of ambiguous loss.
- **Coping mechanisms and resilience:** Effective coping strategies are crucial for managing the impacts of ambiguous loss. Adaptive coping strategies, such as positive reframing, seeking social support, and active problem-solving, promote emotional recovery and resilience, helping individuals to handle uncertainty and distress positively. Conversely, maladaptive strategies like avoidance, self-blame, and denial exacerbate emotional distress and hinder adjustment. It is imperative to promote adaptive coping strategies and resilience building to support individuals in navigating the complexities of ambiguous loss.
- **Therapeutic interventions and professional support:** Therapeutic interventions are vital for mitigating the effects of ambiguous loss on an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. Narrative therapy allows individuals to reframe and reconstruct their experiences, promoting meaning-making, growth, and recovery. It helps them to adopt a more positive outlook on their loss, effectively dealing with the uncertainty and emotional distress



associated with ambiguous loss. Resilience training is another critical intervention that enhances individuals' coping skills. It involves developing coping skills, fostering social support, maintaining a positive view of the situation, and employing stress management techniques to manage the emotional consequences of ambiguous loss. These interventions are essential for developing a practical framework to support individuals facing ambiguous loss, helping them recover and regain emotional stability. Healthcare and social work professionals provide specialized support to families and individuals experiencing ambiguous loss. They offer physical and psychological support, facilitate access to resources, and advocate for the needs of their clients, ensuring comprehensive care that addresses both the emotional and practical aspects of living with ambiguous loss.

- **Community and social support:** Community and social networks also significantly impact the development of resilience and the management of ambiguous loss. They provide emotional comfort, practical assistance, and a sense of community essential for coping with ambiguous loss. Community-based programs enhance social networks and provide resources crucial for dealing with the emotional challenges of ambiguous loss. Social support networks offer psychological protection and resilience, helping individuals to overcome the difficulties associated with ambiguous loss and promoting efficient coping strategies.

In conclusion, understanding ambiguous loss, its contexts, and its impacts are crucial for developing effective interventions. Individuals experiencing ambiguous loss find the support and resilience needed to navigate these profound challenges by employing targeted therapeutic approaches and leveraging professional and community resources. Tailored interventions, such as narrative therapy and resilience training, alongside robust social support systems, play pivotal roles in helping individuals adapt to and overcome the uncertainties of ambiguous loss. This comprehensive approach aids emotional recovery and fosters long-term resilience and well-being.

Identified research gaps and future research directions

The document extensively reviews the literature on ambiguous losses, highlighting various therapeutic approaches and support systems. However, several research gaps identified from the review that need further exploration:

- **Cultural and contextual variability:** The impact of ambiguous losses appears to be examined predominantly within Western contexts, with limited studies focusing on non-Western perspectives. There is a gap in understanding how different cultural backgrounds influence the experiences of ambiguous loss and the effectiveness of various coping strategies and therapeutic interventions.
- **Longitudinal studies on ambiguous loss:** A lack of longitudinal research tracks the impact of ambiguous loss over time. Most studies are cross-sectional and do not provide insight into the long-term psychological, social, and health outcomes for individuals dealing with ambiguous loss.
- **Intervention efficacy:** While the document discusses various therapeutic interventions such as narrative therapy and resilience training, there is limited empirical evidence on their long-term efficacy and how they impact individuals and families experiencing ambiguous loss.

Kucukkaragoz, H. & Meylani, R. (2024). Ambiguous losses and their traumatic effects: A qualitative synthesis of the research literature. *Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, 15(2), 721-755.*

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- **Specific populations:** The review highlights general coping mechanisms and interventions but lacks a detailed exploration of how these strategies affect specific populations, such as children, the aging, or those individuals with physical challenges, who may experience ambiguous loss differently.
- **Comparative studies:** There are minimal comparative studies that investigate the differences or similarities between ambiguous loss and other types of loss, such as bereavement due to death. Understanding these distinctions could enhance the tailored therapeutic approaches needed for ambiguous loss.

Based on the identified gaps, the following suggestions for future research are proposed:

- **Cross-cultural studies:** Conduct research that explores the concept of ambiguous loss across different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds to understand the universal and unique aspects of the experience. This will help develop culturally sensitive interventions.
- **Longitudinal and developmental perspectives:** Implement longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of ambiguous loss on psychological health and well-being. Such studies help understand the progression of grief and adaptation processes over time.
- **Effectiveness of therapeutic interventions:** Develop and test the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as narrative therapy and resilience training, through randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to establish evidence-based practices for treating ambiguous loss.
- **Targeted population studies:** Investigate how ambiguous loss affects different populations based on age, gender, disability, and other demographic factors. This would include studying the impact on caregivers, spouses, and children within family systems.
- **Comparative and integrative research:** Conduct studies comparing ambiguous loss with other types of losses, examining psychological and physiological impacts. Additionally, integrating various theoretical perspectives, such as attachment and family systems theory, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of ambiguous loss.

This review has underscored the complex and multifaceted nature of ambiguous loss, identified critical research gaps, and suggested directions for future studies. Addressing these gaps through targeted research could lead to the development of more effective, tailored interventions that consider the cultural, contextual, and individual variability of those experiencing ambiguous loss. These efforts will enhance the psychological and emotional support available, promoting better coping strategies and overall resilience.

Suggestions for policy and practice

Targeted policies and practices must be established to effectively support individuals and families navigating the challenges of ambiguous loss. These suggestions aim to guide policymakers and practitioners in enhancing support systems, therapeutic interventions, and resilience among those affected.



Development of specialized training programs for professionals

- Healthcare providers and social workers should be trained to recognize and address ambiguous loss to offer appropriate psychosocial support and therapeutic interventions.
- Educational programs for psychologists, counselors, and therapists should incorporate modules on ambiguous loss to improve their competency in dealing with these complex grief scenarios.

Implementation of community awareness campaigns

- Community workshops and seminars should be conducted to raise awareness about ambiguous loss, its impacts, and the support resources available.
- Public health campaigns should be promoted to educate the community on how to support affected individuals and reduce the stigma associated with conditions leading to ambiguous loss, such as mental health disorders or migration.

Enhancement of support networks

- Support groups should be established to provide a platform for sharing experiences and coping strategies among those experiencing ambiguous loss.
- Community-based programs should be developed to facilitate connections among affected individuals, fostering a network of support and mutual understanding.

Inclusion of ambiguous loss in policy development

- Considerations of ambiguous loss should be integrated into mental health and social support policies to ensure that legislative frameworks are responsive to the needs of those experiencing such losses.
- Advocacy for policy changes should occur to provide financial and logistical support to families dealing with the disappearance of loved ones or the long-term care of individuals with severe chronic illnesses or cognitive decline.

Adaptation and flexibility in therapeutic practices

- Therapeutic interventions should be tailored to address physical and psychological ambiguities, specifically utilizing narrative therapy and resilience training to help individuals reframe their experiences and find meaning.
- Therapy should encourage adaptive coping strategies, build resilience, and reduce reliance on maladaptive behaviors.



Fostering interdisciplinary collaboration

- Collaboration between different health and social care professionals should be promoted to provide a holistic approach to treatment and support for individuals experiencing ambiguous loss.
- Partnerships between governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, and community groups should be encouraged to develop integrated support services that address the complex needs associated with ambiguous loss.

Research and continuous learning

- Ongoing research into the causes, effects, and treatments of ambiguous loss should be supported to refine and improve intervention strategies.
- Investment in longitudinal studies should be made to examine the long-term impacts of ambiguous loss and the effectiveness of various therapeutic and support interventions.

Resource allocation

- Adequate funding and resources should be ensured for mental health services and community support programs to handle ambiguous loss cases.
- Resource centers that provide information, counseling, and practical support to individuals and families affected by ambiguous loss should be developed.

By implementing these suggestions, policymakers and practitioners significantly enhance the support and resources available to those with ambiguous loss, improving their quality of life and emotional well-being. These strategies aim to address the immediate needs of affected individuals and foster long-term resilience and recovery through comprehensive support and professional care.

Conclusion

Summary of key findings

This qualitative study featured different strategies in which ambiguous loss impacts psychological and emotional wellness. Since ambiguous loss is innately unsettled and includes persistent vulnerability, this study has meticulously investigated the literature to pinpoint the subtle ways in which ambiguous loss differs from more traditional types because of its ongoing uncertainty and intrinsic lack of closure. Creating therapeutic interventions and support systems that are attentive to the difficulties associated with ambiguous loss must consider these distinctions. In clinical practice and examination, it is essential to recognize and address ambiguous loss. This conclusion summarizes the findings and provides recommendations for upcoming review topics.



- **Unique challenge of ambiguous loss:** Families and people experiencing ambiguous loss face a unique set of ..ardifficulties due to the psychological upheaval that results from unresolved sorrow and a lack of finality. During the examination, it was shown that individuals experience a temporary state of interrupted grieving when they encounter ambiguous loss, whether it be mental or physical. This interruption altogether affects mental health and depression, increases anxiety, and delays grieving more. To help people and families negotiate the ambiguity and move toward a path of recovery and adaptation, therapeutic techniques and assistance strategies must be specially designed to address the unique nature of this event due to the complexity of ambiguous loss.
- **Role of coping mechanisms and resilience:** Examining methods for dealing with hardship or stress and building versatility while discussing ambiguous loss is essential. The exploration features the essential jobs that adaptable endurance draws near, for example, looking for cordial help and partaking in importance-making works out, play in relieving the impacts of ambiguous loss. Social help, which offers close-to-home solace and a feeling of the local area that protective elements against the mental effects of misfortune, is an urgent component of versatility. It helps people by reconsidering their misfortune, considering their larger life story, and offering lucidity and consistency amidst difficulty. These show that building resilience through connection, community, and story rebuilding is vital to dealing with ambiguous loss.
- **Therapeutic interventions - a path forward:** To effectively address the difficulties presented by ambiguous loss, a compilation of evidence from the literature study suggests therapeutic interventions such as narrative therapy and resilience training. Through the most common way of recreating individual stories and bracing methods for dealing with tough times, these treatments help people coordinate distress into their lives in a way that encourages mental development and recovery. Considering their capacity to assist people and families with researching the shortcomings of problematic misfortune, the survey advocates planning these steady techniques into social work, provoking, and clinical thought associations.
- **Implications for future research:** Recognizing the constraints of earlier studies, more investigations about ambiguous loss are required. Further research must emphasize understanding the outcomes of ambiguous loss in different social and group environments, the effectiveness of therapies, the effects on varying individuals, and the results of ambiguous loss. The formation of progressively convoluted and emotionally supportive networks is subject to this kind of study to gain a superior comprehension of ambiguous loss.

This study on ambiguous loss and trauma concluded that it is essential to understand and deal with difficult situations promptly. Customized treatment interventions, boosting adaptive coping mechanisms, and increasing our knowledge of ambiguous loss are essential to supporting affected individuals and their families. This study is expected to help people—it will make them resilient in ambiguous loss through increased understanding and utilization of caregiving strategies.



Contributions of the study

This study on ambiguous loss offers several significant contributions to psychology and social work, particularly in understanding and addressing the unique challenges of this type of loss. Here are the summarized contributions of this study:

Sayfa | 749

Deepening understanding of ambiguous loss

- ***Definition and characteristics:*** The study clarifies and broadens the understanding of ambiguous loss, highlighting its unique characteristics of uncertainty and lack of closure, differentiating it from other types of loss.
- ***Types of ambiguous loss:*** It delineates the two types of ambiguous loss: physical ambiguity, where the person is physically absent but psychologically present (e.g., missing persons), and psychological ambiguity, where the person is physically present but psychologically or emotionally absent (e.g., Alzheimer's disease).

Impact on emotional and psychological health

- ***Emotional distress:*** The review confirms that ambiguous loss leads to significant emotional distress, manifesting as prolonged grief, depression, and anxiety.
- ***Psychological effects:*** It explores the psychological ramifications, such as stress and sadness, which complicate the grieving process due to the indeterminate nature of the loss.

Coping mechanisms and resilience

- ***Adaptive coping strategies:*** The study identifies effective coping strategies, including seeking social support, engaging in meaning-making, and utilizing resilience training, which help mitigate the effects of ambiguous loss.
- ***Maladaptive coping strategies:*** It also discusses maladaptive strategies such as avoidance and denial, which exacerbate the distress caused by ambiguous loss.

Therapeutic interventions

- ***Narrative therapy:*** Narrative therapy is emphasized as a beneficial approach to help individuals reframe and process their experiences of loss, facilitating a better psychological adjustment.
- ***Resilience training:*** The study highlights resilience training as a crucial intervention that equips individuals with the skills to cope with the uncertainties brought about by ambiguous loss.



Guidance for practitioners

- **Tailored interventions:** It underscores the need for interventions specifically tailored to address the unique challenges of ambiguous loss, advocating for practices sensitive to the complexities of such situations.
- **Role of healthcare providers and social workers:** The paper offers valuable insights into how healthcare providers and social workers better support individuals with ambiguous loss through targeted therapeutic practices and comprehensive support systems.

Practical applications

- **Healthcare and social work:** The findings are particularly relevant for healthcare and social work professionals, providing a framework to enhance their practices when dealing with clients affected by ambiguous loss.
- **Community and support networks:** The study emphasizes the importance of community involvement and the establishment of robust social support networks to aid in the resilience and recovery of individuals facing ambiguous loss.

Implications for future research

- **Research gaps:** The literature on ambiguous losses reveals significant gaps in understanding the cultural influences on ambiguous loss experiences, the absence of longitudinal studies to track these losses over time, the uncertain long-term efficacy of therapeutic interventions, the under-exploration of specific vulnerable populations, and a deficiency in comparative studies with other types of losses.
- **Future research directions:** Future research should focus on conducting cross-cultural and longitudinal studies to explore the dynamics of ambiguous loss, evaluating intervention efficacy through rigorous trials, examining the impacts on diverse and specific populations, and integrating various theoretical perspectives to develop comprehensive, tailored therapeutic approaches.

These contributions are vital for advancing the theory and practice related to ambiguous loss. They offer a comprehensive overview benefiting practitioners and individuals dealing with such losses. The insights gained from this study enhance understanding and inform the development of effective strategies to support affected individuals.

Limitations of the study

This study on ambiguous losses is insightful but limited by its methodology and scope, necessitating cautious application of its findings. The literature review is restricted to English-language sources published within a specific timeframe, introducing bias and excluding potentially



relevant studies in other languages or from different periods. This limits the cultural diversity and universality of the conclusions.

Methodologically, the study's qualitative focus, while in-depth, restricts the ability to generalize across populations. Such an approach does not fully capture the breadth of experiences or quantify ambiguous loss's impact as effectively as quantitative methods. The subjective nature of thematic analysis may also introduce biases that affect the findings' replicability and consistency. Moreover, selective study criteria might overlook significant research that offers contrasting insights into ambiguous loss.

Culturally, the study's findings are context-specific and may not apply to settings where ambiguous loss appears differently and requires varied coping mechanisms. The types of ambiguous loss examined—such as due to Alzheimer's disease, disappearances, or migration—affect individuals uniquely, suggesting the need for tailored interventions.

The suggested interventions, including narrative therapy and resilience training, are based on limited evidence, potentially oversimplifying the complexities involved in implementation. These strategies do not fully consider practitioners' practical, financial, or cultural challenges.

While the study proposes practical therapeutic approaches for managing ambiguous loss, its inherent limitations highlight the need for careful interpretation. Future research should validate these interventions empirically, explore ambiguous loss's longitudinal effects, and broaden the demographic and cultural scope of the studies to enhance intervention efficacy and relevance.



Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2024), 15 (2), 721-755.

Western Anatolia Journal of Educational Sciences, (2024), 15 (2), 721-755.

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Batı Anadolu Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi, (2024), 15 (2), 721-755.
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