

## Araştırma Makalesi

**Children's Well Being after Deceased Fathers: A Qualitative Analysis of Mothers' Views**Münevver ÖZDEMİR<sup>1\*</sup>, Şeyda ERUYAR<sup>2</sup>, Hikmet YAZICI<sup>1</sup>, Panos VOSYANİS<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Trabzon University, Department of Educational Sciences, Trabzon, Turkey<sup>2</sup> Necmettin Erbakan University, Department of Psychology, Konya, Turkey<sup>3</sup> University of Leicester, School of Media, Communication and Sociology, Leicester, UK**Makale Bilgisi****Abstract***Keywords:*trauma,  
mental health,  
paternal loss,  
coping,

Death of a parent has adverse effects on the child's well-being. The surviving parent is often the most important source of support for the child and a close witness of the child bereavement process. The aim of this study was to understand the perceived effects of paternal bereavement on children's mental health and coping strategies through their mothers' narratives. Adopting qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine mothers who had lost their spouses. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: negative effects on mental health, posttraumatic growth, and coping strategies. The findings indicated that the consequences of paternal loss are not limited to negative effects on children's functioning, as they may also experience positive changes following the loss. Moreover, mothers noticed that their children overcame paternal death successfully by using coping strategies such as discovering new activities, religion, and social support. Consequently, these findings indicated that grief-response and resilience-enhancing strategies should be tailored to the emotional needs of each family.

**Öz***Anahtar kelimeler:*travma,  
ruh sağlığı,  
baba kaybı,  
başa çıkma,

Ebeveynlerden birinin vefatı çocukların iyi oluşunu olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Hayatta kalan ebeveyn, genellikle, çocuk için en önemli destek kaynağıdır ve çocuğun yas tutma sürecinin yakın bir tanığıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, babanın yasını tutmanın çocukların psikolojik sağlığı ve başa çıkma stratejileri üzerindeki algılanan etkilerini annelerinin anlatıları aracılığıyla anlamaktır. Nitel araştırma yöntemlerine göre tasarlanan bu çalışmada, eşi vefat etmiş dokuz anne ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Yapılan tematik analiz sonucunda üç ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: psikolojik sağlık üzerindeki negatif etkiler, travma sonrası büyüme ve başa çıkma stratejileri. Elde edilen bulgular baba kaybının sonuçlarının çocukların işlevselliği üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerle sınırlı olmadığını, çocukların kaybın ardından olumlu değişiklikler de deneyimleyebileceklerini göstermiştir. Dahası, anneler çocuklarının yeni aktiviteleri keşfetmek, din ve sosyal desteğe başvurmak gibi başa çıkma stratejilerini kullanarak baba vefatının üstesinden başarılı bir şekilde geldiklerini fark ettiklerini bildirmişlerdir. Sonuç olarak, bu bulgular kedere tepki ve dayanıklılık artırıcı stratejilerin her bir ailenin duygusal ihtiyaçlarına göre uyarlanması gerektiğini göstermiştir.

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## Introduction

Trauma exposure may result in the deterioration of psychosocial functioning and mental well-being (McCann & Pearlman, 2015). Such events comprise natural disasters, traffic accidents, war conflict (Ruppert, 2011/2014a), and sudden loss of a parent or close family member (Ruppert, 2008/2014b). Studies have shown that the prevalence of traumatic events among children ranges between 34% and 68% (Copeland et al., 2007; Gonzalez et al., 2016; Gustafsson et al., 2009). Furthermore, parental loss can lead to prolonged bereavement in a significant proportion of children (at least 11.5%, as established by Itani et al., 2014 and McLafferty et al., 2015). Similar findings have been established by studies in Turkey. In a large-scale study conducted by Sofuoğlu et al. (2014) with 7,540 children, 1.8% reported parental loss. Another study indicated that 3.2% of 805 high school students had lost at least one of their parents (Eskin et al., 2008), usually, their father, consistent with the existing findings (Rostila et al., 2016; Soares et al., 2016).

Parental loss is associated with several mental health problems in childhood (Cerel et al., 2006). Studies have shown that children with parental loss are at increased risk for depression (Gray et al., 2011; Melhem et al., 2008), PTSD (Stoppelbein & Greening, 2000), other emotional and behavioral problems (Kalantari & Vostanis, 2010), compared to children whose parents are both alive. Moreover, the negative impact of parental death on child mental health can be moderated by the mental state (Kalantari & Vostanis, 2010), parenting capacity and communication style (Howell et al., 2016; Raveis et al., 1999) of the surviving parent. However, parental death does not always result in disruptive and unendurable consequences. Many children may also experience positive changes (Hirooka et al., 2017) explained by the concept of post-traumatic growth [PTG] (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). PTG refers to positive changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and philosophy of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) as a result of coping with a traumatic event (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). For instance, in a study conducted by Flahault et al. (2018), it was reported that children learned new skills, assumed new roles, and felt stronger after their parent died of cancer. In another qualitative study, strengthening the bonds, increasing academic competency and resilience, appreciating life; and finding new perspectives in the philosophy of life, death and spirituality were defined as positive changes experienced by adolescents who suddenly lost their fathers (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020).

Among various research with children exposed to traumatic events such as natural disasters (Russoniello et al., 2002) and accidents (Marsac et al., 2014; Stallard et al., 2001), the most reported adaptive coping strategies were wishful thinking, cognitive restructuring, and social support. On the other hand, maladaptive coping strategies such as social withdrawal and blaming others were associated with mental health problems. Moreover, adolescents who

used religious coping strategies (Kok et al., 2017) reported lower rates of mental health problems (Mutumba et al., 2017). Evidence showed that children using religious coping strategies (Milam et al., 2004) and social support (Wei et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2017) were more likely to develop PTG. To date, there has been limited research on the coping styles of children with parental loss. In one such study with children who lost their parents from AIDS, established responses were talking with other people, sleeping, and avoiding thinking about their parent's death (Dillon & Brassard, 1999). In a study by Brewer and Sparkes (2011), children reported that emotional outlet, physical activity, social support, humor, and competencies in areas such as sports and music were beneficial in the aftermath of parental loss.

There is a considerable amount of research addressing the effects of parental death on children's well-being (e.g., Gray et al., 201; Stoppelbein & Greening, 2000), of which the majority has used quantitative methods. A limited number of qualitative studies have examined PTG (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020) and coping strategies (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011) after a parental loss. Therefore, little is known about how children experience parental bereavement, as well as the coping strategies they use in detail.

When children experience a stressful event, parents closely observe the effects of this event on them and support them to deal with its effects (Williamson et al., 2017; 2019). The surviving parent usually supports the children by taking responsibility for the family, while at the same time trying to deal with the stressors of being a single parent (Kwok et al., 2005). Moreover, surviving parents might exhibit intense and prolonged grief reactions during the post bereavement process (Khosravan et. al., 2010). Further, understanding of how surviving parents experience children's responses is important for preventive strategies and interventions for children who develop mental health problems. This research gap thus informed the rationale for this research. The aim of this study was to explore the perceived impact of paternal loss on children's mental health and coping strategies through their mothers' narratives.

This aim was particularly addressed through the following research questions:

- a) What changes did the mothers observe in their children's mental health following the death of their father?
- b) How did mothers perceive their children's coping strategies?

## Method

### Research Design

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore the views of the participants. Given the limited information on the impact of paternal bereavement on children and the scarce evidence on mothers' perspectives, a single case study design was deemed appropriate. Single case study designs allow a case in its own environment to be examined in depth. This type of design is often used to examine the most frequently encountered daily life events (Yin, 2014).

### Participants

Participants in the study consisted of nine women with at least one child and whose spouses had died. Firstly, school counselors working in secondary education and high schools in Trabzon were contacted to access children whose fathers had passed away in the last 1-10 years. Fifteen mothers who fulfilled the selection criteria, were initially approached, and informed about the study. Of those, 13 mothers agreed to participate. For the purpose of this study, certain exclusion criteria were defined, in order to keep the sample relatively homogenous. Therefore, at the next stage, mothers who a) were married, b) did not live in the same house with their child, before or after the death of the spouse, c) were refugees, and d) the reason for the death of their spouse was suicide, were excluded from the study. All these factors were considered as likely to compound children's vulnerability. Thus, the sample of the present study comprised nine mothers aged between 34-52 years, with children between the ages of 10 and 17 years (Table 1).

Table 1.

#### *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

Mother Number	Age	Occupation	Monthly income	Child gender	Child age	Years passed since the paternal death
1	42	Architect	5.000tl	Girl	14	3
2	52	Housewife	1.200tl	Boy	11	1
3	38	Nurse	2.500tl	Girl	13	3
4	34	Teacher	4.000tl	Girl	10	1
5	44	Teacher	4.000tl	Girl	17	5
6	40	Engineer	6.500tl	Boy	12	2
7	50	Housewife	2.200tl	Girl	13	1.5
8	37	Housewife	2.500tl	Girl	10	1
9	46	Housewife	1.500tl	Girl	14	7

## **Procedure**

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Based on the literature and the research questions, the semi-structured interview-guide explored three broad topics regarding the post-bereavement process: 1) What negative changes have you observed in your child? 2) What positive changes have you observed in your child? 3) What coping strategies has your child used? Semi-structured interviews provide the interviewee with the opportunity to express themselves, while providing in-depth information on the subject (Büyüköztürk et al., 2014). The interviews lasted between 25 and 40 minutes. Interviews took place in the participants' first language and were audio recorded. The recordings were transcribed and translated into English by the first researcher who had conducted the interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

We utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to investigate mothers' narratives, which included their observations regarding their children during the post-bereavement stage. Thematic analysis provides a rich and detailed account of participants' perspectives and experiences, by identifying, analyzing, and reporting emerging patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This analytic process consists of the following stages: a) transcribing, b) re-reading the data several times, c) generating initial codes, d) searching for potential themes, e) reviewing the themes, and f) defining and naming the final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes and sub-themes that emerged are presented in Table 2.

## **Transparency and Data Validation**

To ensure validity, we presented key findings and transcripts to an independent expert to examine. Such review process is based on receiving support from an expert who is not included in the design and implementation of the study (Creswell, 2012). We subsequently considered the expert's feedback regarding the alignment between the themes and sub-themes, and the data. Moreover, we constantly checked and contrasted the coding, through memos, research diaries and discussions between the researchers throughout the analysis (Gibbs, 2007).

## **Results**

Three key themes emerged, reflecting the mothers' perspectives (Table 2).

Table 2.

*Emerging themes and sub-themes*

Themes	Sub-themes
Negative impacts on mental health	Social withdrawal Behavioral changes Emotional difficulties
Post traumatic growth (PTG)	Improving relationships with people Becoming more independent Developing new perspectives
Coping strategies	Discovering new activities Religion Social supports Avoidance

**Theme 1: Negative impacts on mental health**

Seven of the participants reported deterioration in their children's mental health. All mothers were aware of the social, emotional, and behavioral changes in their children after the death of their father; and identified profound changes that had negative psychological consequences on their children's well-being. Most mothers reported decreased interactions between their children and other people and noted that they often preferred to be alone after they lost their father.

My child didn't go out for three months. I thought he didn't understand what he was going through, but he actually could understand, yet could not express himself. He didn't respond to conversations at all.

Mother 2

She did not even eat with us for two years... she never spoke to our guests; she did not even greet them.

Mother 9

Behavioral changes were often observed in children's eating habits. Mothers reported that their child had started eating less or more than before the loss; thus, leading to changes in appearance and weight.

He did not want to eat for a long time, became very weak, immediately noticeable.

Mother 2

Most mothers also observed differences in their children's sleep routines, such as getting up earlier and not being able to sleep alone anymore. Moreover, mothers of children

who had trouble sleeping alone, reported that they slept with their children for a while after the death of their partner, and expressed guilt that they may have caused or reinforced children's separation anxiety.

My daughter always used to say good night, wear her pajamas, and go to bed. Now, she doesn't want to sleep without me. She doesn't sleep in her own room. But I may have caused this. I slept with her initially. Now, she doesn't sleep without me.

Mother 4

Nevertheless, mothers were conscious not to pathologize all behaviors. A few participants, for example, considered that some changes may be related to adolescence rather than bereavement. Alternatively, they considered whether there was an interaction between growing up and their family loss.

He became an irritable, aggressive boy. But I do not fully understand if this change is related to adolescence or the death of his dad.

Mother 6

Emotional difficulties are the most common indicators detected by researchers and practitioners that reflect negative psychological impact of paternal loss. In this study, these included unusual reactions in the mourning process and negative emotions towards the mother. Some mothers described their children's emotional reactions as sadness, easy irritation, obstinacy, crying too much about trivia matters, and resentment.

My daughter is not happy anymore. I look at our previous photos and my daughter looks so happy, but now I can't see her like that anymore.

Mother 1

She was an obstinate child and complained about everything constantly...but about everything. If someone hits her accidentally while walking on the street, she begins to complain about the behavior of all people immediately, reacts to any situation a lot.

Mother 4

Another emotional response observed was ambivalence towards their mother after they experienced paternal loss. This was expressed through anger and blame towards the mother, as well as worries of losing her.

My daughter was angry with me. She said, "If my father was alive, he would never behave like that". She constantly complained about this. She always overreacted. She treated me as if I was the enemy. She told me that she hated me

Mother 3

Losing me is his only fear. He gets scared immediately, even when I get a small headache. He thinks that something will happen to me.

Mother 7

## **Theme 2: Post traumatic growth (PTG)**

This theme consisted of three subthemes (see Table 2). Most of the mothers observed positive changes in their children after the death of their father, and identified notable differences in inter-personal, behavioral, and cognitive domains. Only one mother stated that the death of the father had no positive effect on her child.

What?! Can it have a positive effect?! Can a death of a father have a positive effect?! It has no positive effect. I did not observe something like that.

Mother 4

Differences in relationships with people are among the indicators that reflect positive impacts of paternal loss. Some mothers reported that their child had developed more empathy and acted sensitively to other people after their paternal death.

He empathizes more with people, like "it might be like that, he/she might think like this". He became more thoughtful.

Mother 8

Most mothers reported that there were positive changes in their children's ability to do their own work. This included ability to complete schoolwork and other tasks independently.

My daughter declared her independence, she stands on her own feet and she grew up.

Mother 5

Her father's death taught her a lot...she asserts herself very well and does everything by herself. She can do school and other work alone.

Mother 9



Some mothers identified children's new perspectives on everyday life, events, or people. Children were reported not to mind minor stressors, not have prejudices about people, be able to take a holistic look at events, and pay less attention to materialistic goods.

*Things that bothered her before, are no problem anymore. Two of her friends had boyfriends. They had a problem about it, she went to them when they're sorry to say that "Why are you upset? My father died and I do not do what you do. These are small things; you don't know about life".*

Mother 7

### **Theme 3: Coping strategies**

Both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies were reported. Subthemes related to the coping strategies used by children in the period after the paternal death, were as follows: discovering new activities, religious coping, social support, and avoidance (see Table 2). Mothers reported that their children generally had responded to paternal loss by using relatively adaptive strategies. They described most of the above strategies of coping as being beneficial, except for avoidance.

I have not encountered very abnormal situations. It is not possible to forget, they got used to it. They found a way, they overcame it.

Mother 6

Most of the mothers reported that their children discovered new activities such as reading books, playing computer games, participating in various courses, studying, travelling, and drawing. They were spending a lot of time on these activities. Mothers also emphasized that they were sharing some activities with their children.

My daughter was top of the school at that time, completely focused on her studies. And we travelled all the time. We suddenly went on long journeys.

Mother 5

She was always painting. Sometimes, she was painting for hours at the table in the living room. I was watching her too.

Mother 7

Children accessed various social supports to deal with the death of their father. These included support from the mother, siblings, or relatives, as well as self-initiated support and

care. Some mothers noticed that the process of sharing the child's feelings and thoughts about the paternal death had a positive impact on their well-being.

His older sisters and brothers supported him. He had heart-to-heart talk with his sister, which made him feel good. Now that at first, she never cried. When he shared his feelings and thoughts with us, he started to heal and started acting as before.

Mother 2

*He always wanted someone to visit us. He wanted to be in a crowded environment. Anything but silence...he invited everyone home. He wanted his aunt to stay with us. While on vacation, he invited a child that he saw for the first time to our room. At first, he always wanted to go to the village to see her grandmother and uncle.*

Mother 6

Some mothers observed that their children were using avoidance as a maladaptive response. This coping strategy included refusing to speak, trying not to reveal emotions, and not accepting the loss. Mothers reported that they were worried about their children's avoidance during the post-bereavement stage.

My daughter acted as if nothing happened. As if it's normal...she never cried, even after two years. There were no tears at all. She kept doing the same things she did before. I tried to understand what happened. I asked her to get professional help, but she didn't accept it.

Mother 5

My daughter was nine years old when her father died. When there is a situation or event that reminds her of her father; she does not react at all. I told her: "Your father was like...do you remember?" She acts as if she didn't hear. She does not react at all. She sometimes catches me crying. I want her to come and hug me. But she is not reacting. She is not answering to any questions about her father. These behaviors scare me.

Mother 4

Several mothers reported that religion played an important role in the coping processes of their children. Religious coping made it easier for children to adapt to the new situation. Religious coping included learning and reading the holy books, praying, believing that the father went to heaven, increased awareness of death, and interest in the religion of Islam. Mothers emphasized that children using religious coping strategies were influenced by their parents.

Her father gave her religious education. She does not cry. She thinks it will just upset her father. So, she prays to his father.

Mother 8

She prayed, moral support is very important, it is especially helpful in terms of acceptance. We raised her in accordance with religion.

Mother 3

He asked me that “When we die, does God send us to heaven?” ...or similar questions. I was also telling him by giving an example from the life of our Prophet. Now, he knows death. He is aware that death is imminent. He lives knowing that one day everyone will die...but he can still be happy.

Mother 6

Moreover, some of the mothers reported that their children coped more easily with their problems after their fathers passed away, that is, their coping skills improved. It was observed by their mothers that children were able to cope with their problems alone, produce solutions, and resort to their mothers less than before they had lost their fathers.

He can solve his problems himself; it was not like that before. If there is a problem at school, he will solve it by himself, he will not reflect it to me.

Mother 9

When she has a problem, she solves it herself. I later noticed that she had a problem.

Mother 5

## **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to understand the perceived impact of paternal bereavement on children’s mental health and coping strategies through their mothers’ narratives. Three themes emerged from the analysis: 1) Negative impact of mental health 2) post-traumatic growth, and 3) coping strategies. According to mothers, children were reported to have both negative responses, i.e., social withdrawal, challenging behaviors, and emotional difficulties; and positive adaptation, i.e., improved relationships with people, becoming more independent, and developing new perspectives and problem-solving after losing their father. Children were

reported to use both adaptive strategies such as discovering new activities, religion, and social support; and maladaptive responses such as avoidance to cope with the paternal bereavement.

The first theme is consistent with previous evidence that children who experience parental loss are at increased risk of developing mental health problems, predominantly depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and behavioral presentations (APA, 2013; Kaplow et al., 2013). Similarly, children in this study were reported as becoming socially withdrawn, that is they preferred to be alone and less enthusiastic in interacting with others. Participating mothers observed changes in their children's routines, which were often expressed through eating and sleeping. Moreover, emotional problems such as irritability, sadness and resentment were reported in paternally bereaved children, which are also consistent with previous literature (Ajiboye & Ajokpaniovo, 2019). Ambivalent feelings, even anger, were sometimes directed at the surviving parent, as children struggled to comprehend and come to terms with their loss.

There is limited knowledge on bereaved children's resilience-building strategies. In this study, most mothers reported positive changes in their children's functioning. This could be explained by post-traumatic growth, which refers to positive change following trauma exposure, and is characterized by improved relationship with others, new possibilities in life, spiritual change, and personal strength (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996). Although some children were reported as socially withdrawn in the present study, others sought comfort through family and peer relationships, to the extent of being described as becoming more sociable than before. Social interactions were described as thriving for more independence rather than remaining close to their mother. This was possibly more likely for adolescents, than for younger children, who may be more prone to separation anxiety. Moreover, mothers reported that their children had developed new and positive perspectives on life events and people and, paid less attention to materialistic goods such as clothes and bicycles. In their recent study, Asgari and Naghavi (2020) reported that children who experienced a sudden loss of their fathers, also developed a more positive outlook to life, built up interpersonal bonds, and strived for academic success, although they had been confused and distressed during the first phase of grief. Consistent with the literature, according to their mothers most children in the present study showed indications of post-traumatic growth, which was not mutually exclusive with mental health problems described under the first theme. Instead, both aspects often co-occur and require concurrent management, i.e., both in promoting adaptive responses and dealing with mental health problems, as appropriate for each child.

A systematic review of 15 studies on post-traumatic growth following bereavement identified a range of coping strategies, which were essential in the recovery process (Michael & Cooper, 2013). Several of those adaptive coping strategies were observed by mothers in this

study, and included discovering new activities, religion, and social supports. These adaptive responses appeared to underpin post-traumatic growth described in the second theme. Most mothers reported that their children discovered new activities such as reading books, playing computer games, studying, travelling, and drawing. Similarly, another study revealed that one third of bereaved children participated in different kinds of activities such as music and kept themselves busy to cope with their grief (Rask et al., 2002). Moreover, a qualitative study by Brewer and Sparkes (2011) explored the motives and impact of such activities. The authors established that these activities provided children with enjoyment, a sense of purpose, and the opportunity to develop one of their talents during a period of emotional turmoil.

Social support was another coping strategy used by children to deal with the death of their father. To this effect, they reached out to their mother, siblings, relatives, and peers, which was consistent with previous research (Rask et al., 2002). Mothers observed that self-disclosure had a healing role for their children during the post-bereavement stage. Similarly, an earlier qualitative study with children who experienced the loss of a parent, both these children and their surviving parents stated the importance of trying to acknowledge, understand and express their feelings, in obtaining comfort and support (Weber et al., 2019). Ajiboye and Ajokpaniovo (2019) also reported that adolescents encouraged themselves to talk about their deceased parents to cope with parental bereavement. Moreover, several adolescents preferred their teachers or friends to talk about loss.

Religious coping strategies involve both internal and external sources of looking for meaning and strength through faith and spirituality (Shaw et al., 2005). In this study, several mothers reported that coping strategies such as reading holy books, praying, or believing that the father went to heaven had a positive effect on children's adaptation. This finding is also consistent with the literature, which showed that religious coping strategies act as buffer in the face of a range of traumatic events in children's lives (Sleijpen et al., 2017).

On the other hand, some children were reported to be using avoidance as a coping strategy which can lead to social withdrawal and a more negative mental outlook. Mothers observed their children refusing to speak, trying not to reveal emotions, and not accepting death. This reaction is also common, and not mutually exclusive with the previously described positive approaches (Dillon & Brassard, 1999). Moreover, there is a well-established literature on the association between avoidance and mental health problems exposed to other traumatic events such as war conflict, maltreatment, or violence (Russoniello et al., 2002; Thabet & Vostanis, 2015).

These findings should be viewed within the limitations of the study design. The sample was relatively small, and the sample size may not be sufficient for reaching thematic saturation (Francis et al., 2010). It is plausible though that the mothers who came forward to participate

in this research may have been better adjusted, thus reported more positive outcomes than, for example, mothers living in disadvantage and facing multiple adversities. However, previous studies indicated that the loss of a spouse is significantly associated with depression and anxiety disorders (Kristiansen et al., 2019). The mental state of the participants was not considered in this study, which may have influenced their perception about their children's well-being, hence our findings. The findings may have also been influenced by the type of paternal death, for example after chronic or sudden illness, accidents, or violence, as well as by the availability of supportive networks for the family. Mothers were interviewed at different times following their spouse's death. Similarly, in Asgari and Naghavi's (2020) study examining the post-traumatic growth experiences of adolescents with sudden loss of their father, post bereavement process ranged between 5 and 9 years. It is important that future research juxtaposes surviving parents' perspectives with those of their children, as well as external informants like relatives, peers, or teachers. Finally, the results from this study are based on observation and evaluations of mothers. Therefore, adopting a mixed methods approach in future studies would integrate subjective experiences with quantitative measures of key outcomes such mental health, post-traumatic growth, and resilience.

Although the effects of parental bereavement on children's mental health are well documented (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Gray et al., 2011); the present study provides some of the first evidence of surviving parents' observations of their children's post-bereavement experiences. Moreover, the findings of this study, which showed that parents are sensitive to their children's reactions to the traumatic event, even if they are exposed to a traumatic experience at the same time as their children, extended the results of previous research (Williamson et al., 2017). Considering the findings of the present study and, given the fact that children who lost their fathers are at increased risk of various mental health problems, bereaved children need to be supported socially through family, friends, and neighbors; and provided with counselling if they experience prolonged emotional and behavioral symptoms. Children can also be encouraged to disclose their feelings and adapt to new social, sports and creative activities, therefore, teachers, other professionals, mentors, or other important adults have an important preventive role to play.

Previous research has shown that family-based intervention programs reduced the prolonged grief responses of children who had lost a parent (Sandler et al., 2010). However, there is a need to develop tailored intervention programs focusing on the parent's role in supporting the child and the overall mental health of children to mitigate grief and traumatic grief responses (Dyregrov et al., 2015). The current study can contribute to the development of grief-focused intervention programs by providing information about the positive and negative

experiences of children in the post-bereavement process, as well as the sensitivity of surviving parents to their children's grief reactions.

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**Authors' Contribution:**

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## **Baba Vefatından Sonra Çocukların İyi Oluşu: Anne Görüşlerine Dayalı Nitel Bir Analiz**

### **Özet**

Ebeveynlerden birinin vefatı çocukların iyi oluşunu olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir. Yapılan araştırmalar ebeveyn kaybının depresyon (Gray ve diğerleri, 2011; Melhem ve diğerleri, 2008), travma sonrası stres bozukluğu [TSSB] (Stoppelbein ve Greening, 2000) ve diğer duygusal ve davranışsal problemler (Kalantari ve Vostanis, 2010) için risk oluşturduğunu göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, ebeveyn vefatı sonrasında travma sonrası büyüme [TSB] deneyimleyen çocuklar da vardır (Hirooka ve diğerleri, 2017). Hayatta kalan ebeveyn ise, genellikle, çocuk için en önemli destek kaynağıdır ve çocuğun yas tutma sürecinin yakın bir tanığıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, babanın yasını tutmanın çocukların psikolojik sağlığı ve başa çıkma stratejileri üzerindeki algılanan etkilerini annelerinin anlatıları aracılığıyla anlamaktır.

Bu çalışma, nitel araştırma yaklaşımı çerçevesinde tasarlanmış ve yürütülmüştür. Araştırma, tek bir durumun derinlemesine ve kendi ortamında incelenmesine olanak sağlayan tek durum çalışması desenine uygun olarak düzenlenmiştir. Tek durum çalışması, günlük yaşamda sık karşılaşılan durumlar üzerinde çalışılırken kullanılmaktadır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu eş vefat eden ve en az bir çocuğa sahip 9 kadın oluşturmaktadır. Çalışmaya katılan annelerin yaşları 34 ile 52 arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcıların çocukları ise 10 ile 17 yaş arasındadır. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. 25-40 dakika süren mülakatlar sırasında ses kaydı alınmış ve ilk yazar tarafından ses kayıtları deşifre edilmiştir. Araştırmadan elde edilen verileri analiz etmek için tematik analiz kullanılmıştır.

Yapılan tematik analiz sonucunda üç ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: psikolojik sağlık üzerindeki negatif etkiler, travma sonrası büyüme ve başa çıkma stratejileri. Katılımcıların çoğu baba vefatı sonrasında çocuklarında ortaya çıkan sosyal, duygusal ve davranışsal değişikliklerin farkındaydı ve çocuklarının iyi oluşunu olumsuz yönde etkileyen değişiklikler tanımladılar. Birçok anne çocuğunun babasının kaybı ile birlikte diğer insanlar ile etkileşiminin azaldığını ve genellikle yalnız kalmayı tercih ettiğini bildirmiştir. Çocuklarının yemek yeme ve uyku alışkanlıklarının değiştiğini rapor eden anneler de vardır. Duygusal negatif değişiklikler ise üzüntü, önemsiz şeyler için ağlamak, anneye yönelik çelişkili duyguları gibi değişiklikleri içermekteydi. Elde edilen bulgular baba kaybının sonuçlarının çocukların işlevselliği üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerle sınırlı olmadığını, çocukların kaybın ardından olumlu değişiklikler de deneyimleyebileceklerini göstermiştir. Ancak; yalnızca bir anne baba vefatının çocuğunun üzerinde olumlu bir etkisi olmadığını belirtmiştir. Bazı anneler çocuğunun babasının vefatından sonra diğer insalara karşı daha empatik ve duyarlı bir şekilde yaklaştığını bildirmiştir. Nitekim; birçok anne ise çocuğunun kendi işlerini bağımsız olarak

yapabilmeye başladığını rapor etmiştir. Küçük stres faktörlerine aldurmamak, insanlar hakkında ön yargıya sahip olmamak, olaylara daha bütüncül bir bakış açısı ile bakabilmek, maddi şeylere daha az ilgi göstermek gibi değişiklikler de bildirilen olumlu değişiklikler arasındadır. Dahası, anneler çocuklarının yeni aktiviteleri keşfetmek, din ve sosyal desteğe başvurmak gibi başa çıkma stratejilerini kullanarak baba vefatının üstesinden başarılı bir şekilde geldiklerini fark ettiklerini bildirdiler. Diğer taraftan; bazı anneler de çocuklarının baba vefatı ile başa çıkmak için kaçınmaya başvurduğunu söylediler.

Ebeveyn vefatının çocukların ruh sağlığı üzerindeki etkilerine ilişkin ciddi bir araştırma birikimi olmasına rağmen, sağ kalan ebeveynin bu süreçteki gözlemlerine ilişkin bilgilerimiz oldukça sınırlıdır. Nitekim; bu çalışmada katılımcıların -kendileri de bir yas sürecinden geçmesine rağmen- çocuklarının baba vefatı sonrasındaki tepkilerine ilişkin duyarlılık gösterdikleri bulunmuştur. Önceki araştırmalar (Sandler ve diğerleri, 2010) aile temelli müdahale programlarının ebeveynini kaybetmiş çocukların uzun süreli yas tepkilerini azalttığını göstermiştir. Bununla birlikte, yas ve travmatik yas tepkilerini azaltmak için ebeveynin çocuğu ve çocuğun genel ruh sağlığını desteklemedeki rolüne odaklanan özel müdahale programlarının geliştirilmesine ihtiyaç vardır. Bu çalışma, çocukların yas sonrası süreçteki olumlu ve olumsuz deneyimleri ile hayatta kalan ebeveynlerin çocuklarının yas tepkilerine karşı duyarlılıkları hakkında bilgi vererek yas odaklı müdahale programlarının geliştirilmesine katkıda bulunabilir.