

Conceptions of God in the Grief Process of Earthquake-Bereaved Mothers: The Case of Adıyaman

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Abstract

Objective: This study examines how conceptions of God changed during the grieving process of Muslim mothers who lost their children in the Kahramanmaraş earthquake of February 6, 2023. The objective of the present study was to provide answers to the following research questions: (1) How do conceptions of God change during the grieving process of mothers who have lost their children in an earthquake? (2) How do religious values and practices such as the conception of God, worship and prayer, and belief in the afterlife impact grieving mothers' process of accepting the loss and reconnecting with life?

Method: The present study adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach. The data were collected through an interview form developed by the researchers. In-depth interviews were conducted through purposive sampling over a period of one year with 20 mothers in Adıyaman, one of the areas most affected by the earthquake. The first interviews were conducted in March 2024, one year after the earthquake. Prior to the main interviews, preliminary interviews were conducted for a period of 10 days with the aim of familiarising the participants with the study and explaining its purpose to them. The final interviews were held in March 2025, and the study was concluded. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, with the software program MAXQDA being utilised for this purpose.

Findings: The findings yielded four overarching themes: the complex nature of grief, religious coping, divine justice and intervention, and reaching God. It was observed that the grieving process was initially characterised by shock, helplessness, and existential question. Over time, however, trust in God deepened and transformed into a more abstract, compassion-centred conception of the divine. Participants increasingly engaged in prayer, Qur'an reading, and religious rituals; these practices helped them to cope emotionally and spiritually. The bereaved mothers interpreted their children's deaths not as an annihilation, but as a "reaching God", and believed that they would be reunited with their deceased children in heaven. This belief provided a sense of solace and served as a motivating force, thereby restoring meaning to their lives.

Conclusion: The present study demonstrates that religious faith plays a vital role in helping grieving mothers make sense of their traumatic loss and rebuild their lives. In the context of the grieving process, faith was regarded as the primary foundation of the grieving process, and God became the refuge to whom mothers ultimately directed their pain and sorrow. Almost all participants developed a positive and abstract conception of God, although the grieving process was not fully resolved for many of them. During this process, trust in God served as a motivation for participants in anticipation of the day they would reunite with God and their deceased children. This motivation also led them to perform good deeds for others. Consequently, it was determined that a more abstract and love-centred conception of God reinforces spiritual resilience and psychological well-being. Furthermore, in terms of what should be done over one-year period for people experiencing and coping with sudden loss, this study provides a significant reference point for both theoretical and applied research in the domains of religious education, spiritual guidance, and the psychology of religion.

Keywords

The Psychology of Religion; Religious Education; The Concept of God; Death; Grief; Religious Coping

Highlights

- The present study concentrate on the experiences of Muslim mothers who tragically lost their children in the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquake.
- The data were collected over a period of one year, through the medium of interviews with 20 participants.
- A total four key themes were identified through the analysis: the complex nature of grief, religious coping, divine justice and intervention, and reaching God.
- It was observed that almost all participants transitioned to a deeper, more abstract conception of God, and their outlook on life completely changed within this framework.
- Religious practices (prayer, worship, Qur'an recitation) fostered acceptance, meaning-making, and resilience.

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Çocuğunu Kaybetmiş Depremzede Annelerin Yas Sürecinde Allah Tasavvurları: Adıyaman Örneği

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Öz

Amaç: Bu çalışma, 6 Şubat 2023 Kahramanmaraş depreminde çocuklarını kaybeden Müslüman annelerin yas süreci boyunca Allah tasavvurlarının nasıl değiştiğini incelemektedir. Araştırmada şu sorulara yanıt aramıştır: (1) Depremde çocuklarını kaybeden annelerin yas sürecinde Allah tasavvurları nasıl bir değişim göstermektedir? (2) Allah tasavvuru, ibadet ve dua, ahiret inancı gibi dini değer ve uygulamalar yas sürecindeki annelerin kaybı kabullenme ve hayata yeniden tutunma süreçlerini nasıl etkilemektedir?

Yöntem: Araştırmada nitel ve fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Veriler araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen görüşme formu ile toplanmıştır. Amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi ile depremden en çok etkilenen yerlerden biri olan Adıyaman'da ulaşılan 20 anne ile bir yılı aşkın bir süre boyunca derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Depremden bir yıl sonra Mart-2024'te ilk görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. İlk ana görüşme öncesinde 10 gün boyunca katılımcılar ile tanışmak ve araştırmanın amacını açıklamak için ön görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Mart-2025'te son görüşme yapılarak araştırma tamamlanmıştır. Veriler, MAXQDA programı aracılığıyla tematik analiz yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir.

Bulgular: Bulgularda yasin karmaşık doğası, dini başa çıkma, ilahi adalet ve müdahale, Allah'a ulaşma olarak dört tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Yas süreci başlangıçta şok, çaresizlik ve varoluşsal sorgulamalarla karakterize edilirken, zamanla Allah'a olan güvenin derinleştiği ve daha soyut, merhamet merkezli bir ilahi anlayışa dönüştüğü görülmüştür. Katılımcılar giderek daha fazla dua etmeye, Kur'an-ı Kerim okumaya ve dini ritüellere katılmaya başlamış; bu pratikler onların duygusal ve ruhsal başa çıkmalarına yardımcı olmuştur. Anneler, çocuklarının ölümünü bir yok oluş olarak değil, "Allah'a ulaşma" olarak yorumlamış ve kaybettikleri çocuklarıyla cennette yeniden kavuşacaklarına inanmışlardır. Bu inanç, onlara teselli ve yaşamlarına yeniden anlam kazandıran bir motivasyon sağlamıştır.

Sonuç: Çalışma, dini inancın, yas sürecindeki annelerin travmatik kaybı anlamlandırmalarında ve yaşamlarını yeniden inşa etmelerinde hayati bir rol oynadığını göstermektedir. İnanç, yas

sürecinin en önemli temel dayanağı olarak görülmüş, Allah ise annelerin acı ve kederinin nihai olarak yöneldiği bir sığınmaya dönüşmüştür. Katılımcıların neredeyse tamamında, olumlu ve soyut bir Allah tasavvuru gelişmiş, ancak yas birçok katılımcı için tam olarak sonlanmamıştır. Allah'a duyulan güven bu süreçte, katılımcıların Allah ile ve ölen çocukları ile buluşacakları gün için, bir motivasyon olmuş, bu motivasyon ise diğerleri için faydalı işler yapmaya kaynaklık teşkil etmiştir. Böylece, daha soyut ve sevgi merkezli bir Allah tasavvurunun, ruhsal dayanıklılığı ve psikolojik iyilik halini güçlendirdiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Ayrıca bu çalışma; din eğitimi, manevi rehberlik ve din psikolojisi açısından, ani kayıplar yaşayan ve bununla baş etme sürecindeki insanlar için bir yılı aşkın süreçte nelerin yapılması gerektiği konusunda hem teorik hem de uygulamalı çalışmalar için önemli bir referans olma potansiyelindedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Psikolojisi; Din Eğitimi; Allah Tasavvuru; Ölüm; Yas; Dini Başa Çıkma

Öne Çıkanlar

- Çalışma, 2023 Kahramanmaraş depreminde çocuklarını kaybeden Müslüman annelere odaklanmaktadır.
- Veriler, bir yılı aşan görüşmeler yoluyla 20 katılımcıdan toplanmıştır.
- Elde edilen veriler yasin karmaşıklığı, dini başa çıkma, ilahi adalet ve müdahale ile Allah'a ulaşma olmak üzere 4 tema altında toplanmıştır.
- Katılımcıların tamamında derinleşen soyut bir Allah tasavvuruna geçişin olduğu, hayata bakış açısının bu çerçevede değiştiği görülmüştür.
- Dini uygulamalar (dua, ibadet, Kur'an okuma) kabullenmeyi, anlam bulmayı ve dayanıklılığı güçlendirmiştir.

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Introduction

The sudden death of an infant or child is one of the most traumatic events that parents can experience, and the pain it causes is indescribably profound (Park - Halifax, 2021; Hawthorne et al., 2016). Sudden and sometimes violent deaths may lead to more traumatic and unexpected consequences compared to deaths resulting from illness or prolonged medical treatment (Anderson et al., 2005). Such deaths can give rise to serious problems for parents, such as loss of hope (Mohamed Hussin et al., 2018), stress disorders (Murphy et al., 2003), severe grief symptoms (Hazzard, Weston - Gutterres 1992), and deterioration of mental and physical health (Hawthorne et al., 2016). Furthermore, sudden and unexpected deaths can also prompt bereaved parents to undergo certain changes (Cook - Wimberly, 1983). Grieving parents are thus led to re-evaluate their lives by assigning meaning and purpose to their own lives, as well as to the lives and deaths of their deceased children (Meert et al., 2005).

When confronted with the aftermath of a natural disaster, people may seek theological explanations by attributing religious and metaphysical meaning to those events (Kirman, 2023). Indeed, it has been observed that even in societies with a high level of awareness of scientific and social explanations, attempts are made to explain losses in theological terms (Chester, 2005). Belief systems offer different ways of explaining the process of understanding and accepting the phenomenon of death (Armentrout, 2009; Cook - Wimberly, 1983; Meert et al., 2005; Morris et al., 2019). Among these, establishing and deepening a relationship with the divine and transcendent is frequently emphasised (Hawthorne et al., 2016; Kristiansen et al., 2016; McNeil et al., 2021; O'Mathúna, 2018; Proulx, 2016). Unable to rationalise the great devastation and destruction that occur after natural disasters, people develop a range of ideas about the role of God in these events (Hawthorne, Youngblut - Brooten, 2016; Kirman, 2023). God's direct or indirect intervention in the universe (Jenkins - Pargament, 1988; VandeCreek - Mottram, 2011), the role of sin and guilt in disasters (Cook - Wimberly, 1983), and changing perceptions of God after death (Ganzevoort - Falkenburg, 2012; Kushner, 1981) are regarded as part of this process. Especially in Islamic history, disasters such as earthquakes and epidemics have been interpreted not only as divine punishment or a sign of the apocalypse, but also as a trial and a means of salvation for believers (Akasoy, 2006). For example, following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake, it was observed that some Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists claimed that the disasters occurred due to the increasing sins of humanity, whereas some survivors praised God for saving them from the catastrophes (O'Mathúna, 2018).

In Türkiye, on February 6, 2023, two consecutive earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 and centred in Kahramanmaraş, struck 11 provinces, resulting in the loss of over 50,000 lives (Kurt et al., 2023). This disaster left profound physical and psychological impacts on millions of people, both directly and indirectly (Tekke - Şenol, 2023). In a society with a high level of religiosity (Ete - Yargı, 2023), understanding how such a devastating disaster shapes individuals' religious beliefs and conceptions of God constitutes an important area of research in terms of the grieving process and coping mechanisms. Accordingly, this study examines whether Muslim mothers who lost their children in the earthquake experienced changes in their conceptions of God during the grieving process, and if so, how these

changes occurred. The reason why the study focuses on mothers is that the bond between a mother and her child is profound and unique, making the emotional and psychological impact of losing a child particularly intense for mothers. Particularly focusing on participants' belief in the afterlife, their understanding of divine destiny, and their worship practices, the study analyses the effects of these elements on the grieving process. In the existing literature in Türkiye, no study has been found that directly examines changes in the understanding of God among parents who have lost children or infants after a natural disaster such as an earthquake. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on the following questions: (1) How do conceptions of God change during the grieving process of mothers who have lost their children in an earthquake? (2) How do religious values and practices such as the conception of God, worship and prayer, and belief in the afterlife impact grieving mothers' process of accepting the loss and reconnecting with life? The findings of the study aim to contribute to a better understanding of the role of religious belief in coping with traumatic loss. Furthermore, it can be said that studies from different disciplines will constitute an important resource for coping with two traumatic events such as an earthquake and the loss of a child. Within this framework, this study aims to contribute to different disciplines in terms of both educational methods and academic research.

This study aims to contribute to religious education by clarifying how guidance should be given to individuals who have experienced trauma; to the psychology of religion by examining grief processes and the development of conceptions of God in different contexts; and to spiritual counselling by offering guidance on appropriate counselling practices.

1. Literature Review

In light of the themes derived from the collected data, the existing literature has been analyzed under two primary categories.

1.1. The Conception of God

An individual's conception of God is shaped by their relationships with their parents and environment during childhood and continues to develop throughout life. In this context, the individual's conception of God develops as a reflection of their early relationships. Studies conducted in the West indicate that God is often conceptualised as a father or mother figure (Beit-Hallahmi - Argyle, 1975; Moriarty-Hoffman, 2007; Rizzuto, 1974). Piaget's theory of cognitive development, on the other hand, proposes that children begin to conceptualise God through symbols during the preoperational and concrete operational stages. Heller discusses six different conceptions of God that children develop depending on the family environment in which they are raised. The most common among these is their perception of God as a "friendly and companionable being" (Heller, 1986, pp. 79-92). The conception of God evolves in parallel with cognitive development and becomes increasingly abstract as the capacity for abstract thinking develops (Elkind, 1970; Goldman, 1964; Harms, 1944). Thus, a shift occurs from an anthropomorphic and magical understanding of God to a more abstract and personal understanding associated with concepts such as compassion, creation, love, justice, and mystery (Garrod et al., 1990; Thackeray, 2000; Yavuz, 1987; Yıldız, 2007).

Allport (1962) stated that children conceptualise God by concretising the information they receive from their surroundings according to their own level of understanding. In

adulthood, the conception of God becomes more complex, and is influenced by various factors such as the individual's personal experiences, religious teachings, denominational influences, and religious authorities (Goldman, 1964; Thackeray, 2000). The conception of God is thus shaped as a combination of both early experiences and the beliefs and experiences the individual acquires throughout life (Burger - Reevy, 2022). In this context, attachment theory emerges as an important theoretical tool for explaining the development of the conception of God (Bowlby, 1988; Kirkpatrick, 1992; Rizzuto, 1974). Indeed, Keefer and Brown (2019) concluded that secure attachment to God enhances psychological well-being.

As Grom (1981) pointed out, there are six key factors that shape an individual's conception of God: (1) relationships with parents, (2) significant others and the social environment, (3) self-perception and self-esteem, (4) learning about God and the God-human relationship, (5) religious practices (e.g., prayer, worship, sacred texts), and (6) the individual's personal relationship with God (Wulff, 1997, 368). These factors are considered as elements that shape an individual's perception of God from psychological, social, and religious perspectives.

In Islam, the conception of God (Allah) is addressed within an abstract framework. The Qur'an states that Allah is a being beyond human perception and imagination (42/11; 6/100). The Qur'an frequently emphasises Allah's oneness and uniqueness (112/1), Allah's incomparability to anything within the world of human perception (42/11), Allah's continuous act of creation (55/29), and Allah's absolute power and sovereignty (2/255). However, through the use of certain concepts and metaphors that enable humans to comprehend Allah, the Qur'an provides clues to help individuals develop their own conception of Allah. For example, the Qur'an provides numerous explanations about what Allah is not (42/11; 19/65; 112/4), paving the way for individuals to develop their own conception of Allah based on the sacred text. Thus, in the Qur'an, Allah is seen as an authority present in every stage and process of human life, responsible for creating, sustaining, nurturing and guiding from beginning to end (Asad, 2013).

In studies directly related to this subject in the local literature, Köse and Küçükcan (2000) found through interviews conducted after the August 17th earthquake that belief in a just, merciful, and compassionate God helped individuals cope with trauma. Kula (2002) found that 76% of individuals who experienced the August 17th and November 12th earthquakes used religious coping strategies such as prayer, worship, and reading the Qur'an, whereas some individuals were angry towards God. Studies in the literature indicate that individuals' conceptions of God are generally addressed in two main categories: positive and negative.

- Positive (love-oriented) Conception of God: This is the perception of God as merciful, forgiving, protective, and supportive. It is suggested that this perception contributes positively to an individual's psychological well-being and can be used as a coping strategy.
- Negative (fear-oriented) Conception of God: This is the perception of God as punitive, vengeful, or frightening. It is stated that this type of perception can increase feelings of guilt, lead to negative self-attributions, and result in unhealthy psychological outcomes (Yıldız - Ünal, 2017; Güler-Aydın, 2023).

In the international literature, Pargament (1997), in his study arguing that religious coping may have both positive and negative aspects, stated that positive religious coping includes elements such as trusting in God, receiving support from religious communities, and finding peace through religious rituals. In support of these findings, Park and Halifax (2021) and Pihkala (2024) also found that religious rituals and faith-based behaviours help individuals cope during the grieving process. Negative religious coping, on the other hand, encompasses factors such as experiencing conflict with one's religious beliefs, perceiving God as punitive, and showing discord with religious communities. Similarly, Stulp et al. (2019) found that individuals' psychological well-being is strongly associated with their positive perceptions of God, while their psychological problems are strongly associated with their negative perceptions of God.

Frankl (2017) argued that in order to cope with the traumas they experience, people need to engage in a search for meaning. Following trauma, individuals may use their religious beliefs as a source of meaning. Individuals who perceive God as supportive and meaning-giving are better able to cope with loss. Religious coping may enhance individuals' sense of purpose in life and increase their commitment to life.

1.1. Death and Grief

Grief and mourning are universal human responses to death (Barrera et al., 2007). However, religious and cultural understandings can differentiate both perceptions of death and grieving processes (Morris et al., 2019; Park - Halifax, 2021; Stroebe - Schut, 1999). While death is perceived as a threat to human life in some cultures, in others it may be regarded as a transition to another dimension or as liberation (Bakker - Paris, 2013). A study conducted in predominantly Muslim societies revealed that death is interpreted within the context of faith (Kristiansen et al., 2016). In Turkish-Islamic culture, death is seen as an unavoidable reality, representing a transition from one existential state to another (29/57). Life is regarded as a trust from Allah, and it is stated that it will be taken back when the time comes. Worldly life is considered as preparation for the afterlife and a return to one's original homeland in recompense (99/7; 2/52). From this perspective, death can also provide an opportunity to remember Allah's boundless mercy and forgiveness, to reflect on the hereafter in light of past actions, and to ask for forgiveness for past wrongdoings (Sarhill et al., 2001). For Muslims, therefore, death is not a taboo; rather, it is both a reason for grief and an occasion for reflection that requires prayer and supplication (Sheikh, 1998). Although there are no definite limits for the mourning period in Islam, it traditionally lasts for about three days. During this period, visits are made to the relatives of the deceased, and prayers are offered. The extended family network provides support to the deceased's loved ones, and efforts are made to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation (Khan, 1983). Condolences are considered an important form of spiritual guidance and support for Muslims (Sarhill et al., 2001). The message and condolence conveyed by verses such as "*Allah has taken back His trust*" (2/281) and "*We will all return to Allah*" (2/156), along with prayers for the deceased and their relatives, help to alleviate suffering by sharing sorrow and reducing feelings of guilt.

Grief is a highly individual and psychological phenomenon that determines how individuals cope with loss and pain. A number of theories have been developed in the literature to explain the grieving process. These theories offer various perspectives on

understanding the emotional states, thoughts, and behaviours of grieving individuals. The most widely accepted approach among these theories is that presented by Kübler-Ross (1969). Her five-stage process-denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance-is an attempt to understand the emotional transitions individuals undergo in accepting their losses. However, the fact that Kübler-Ross's model was developed in relation to death means it may be limited in its application to other types of loss (e.g., divorce, job loss). Bowlby (1969) addressed the grieving process within the framework of attachment theory. According to this view, individuals who have formed a strong bond with the person they have lost experience significant emotional difficulty in coping with this loss. The grieving process involves the reshaping of this bond following the loss and the emotional acceptance of the deceased person's place. However, this approach is limited only to individuals who have experience of attachment. Moreover, not all individuals form emotional bonds with their attachment figures to the same degree, and this may influence the grieving process in different ways.

In his theory, Worden (2018) stated that grieving individuals need to accept the loss, express their emotional pain, reshape their bonds with the deceased, and establish a new order in their lives in order to continue living (Gross, 2018). Worden's approach addresses the grieving process not as a single stage, but as a series of tasks. McIntosh et al. (1993) also examined the role of religion in helping parents who have lost a child to adapt to the grieving process. The study determined that religion facilitates this adaptation through three main mechanisms: social support, cognitive processes, and finding meaning. It was emphasised that participation in religious communities provides social support, that belief-based cognitive structures make the grieving process shorter and more coherent, and that religion serves as an important resource for making sense of the loss. These factors enable religious individuals to cope with loss and manage the adjustment process in a healthier way. However, presenting grief as a set of tasks within this approach may prevent some individuals from experiencing the grieving process in such a sequential and organised manner. Nevertheless, research shows that continuing bonds with the deceased play a significant role in coping with loss (Field et al., 2014; Hsu - Palitsky, 2023). This approach, known in the literature as the "Continuing Bonds" theory, proposes that individuals do not sever their bonds with the deceased after death, but instead maintain these bonds in a different form (Klass, 2006). Rituals play an important role in maintaining these bonds. For example, practices such as visiting the grave and praying help individuals make sense of the loss and navigate the grieving process in a healthy way (Hsu - Palitsky, 2023).

Although the grieving process is universal, it differs from individual to individual and is grounded in personal experiences (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Neimeyer's Meaning Reconstruction Theory focuses on the processes of making sense of loss and deriving benefit from loss. During this process, individuals constantly ask themselves questions such as, "Why did this happen to me?" or "Why did God take him/her?", and the answers they give to these questions play a significant role in the reconstruction of the grieving process. Finding meaning following loss is a process that can develop over time, and the reconstruction of identity after loss is also part of this process (Holland et al., 2006).

The Social Support Model addresses the role of religious communities and individuals' sources of spiritual support during the grieving process. In this regard, Koenig (1998)

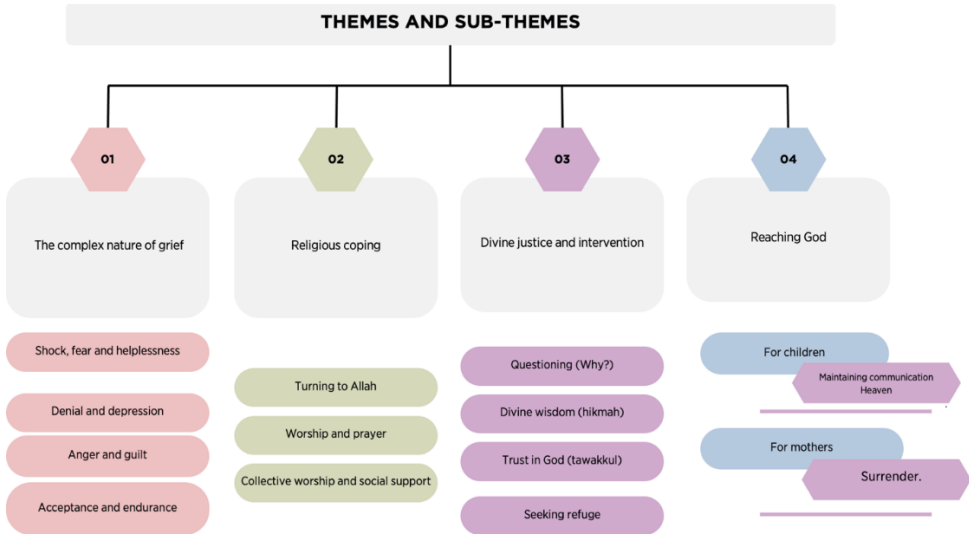
investigated the effects of religious coping on psychological health. In his view, individuals with religious beliefs may be more resilient in the face of stressful events. Praying, participating in religious rituals, and receiving support from religious communities can positively influence individuals' mental health. Cacciatore et al. (2021) and Lipp and O'Brien (2022) state that individuals with a strong social support network can cope with loss in a healthier way. While Cohen and Katz (2015) argue that environmental support reduces the effects of stress by alleviating emotional difficulties, Stroebe and Schut's (1999) Dual Process Model demonstrates that social support plays a critical role in both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping strategies. Zalli (2024) also asserts that family, friends, and support groups facilitate healing by providing empathy and spiritual strength during the grieving process. Studies conducted in the local context also highlight the importance of religious education and religious coping strategies in dealing with trauma and psychological distress following earthquakes. Asoğlu and Özdemir (2024) stated that religious education enhances individuals' psychological resilience and promotes inner peace. Özgölet and Utkucu (2021) emphasised that family support, religious belief, and social support are effective in coping with psychological distress. Bala (2021) observed that positive religious coping methods, such as prayer and worship, enhance individuals' capacity to cope during the process of meaning-making following an earthquake.

2. Method and study group

The research was designed using a qualitative study design, and data were collected through an interview form. Expert opinions were sought while preparing the interview form. The form was finalised based on feedback received from two academics and one religious education teacher. After obtaining ethical committee approval (from İnönü University Social and Humanities Division Research and Publication Ethics Committee, (Decision no 29, dated 2024), two separate series of interviews were conducted with each participant who agreed to participate in the study, during the first (2024) and second (2025) years after the earthquake. Prior to the first main interview, preliminary interviews were held for 10 days in order to get to know the participants and explain the purpose of the study to them (APA, 2020).

The collected data were analysed using MAXQDA-2022 software, evaluated using thematic analysis, and interpreted through a phenomenological approach (Braun - Clarke, 2019; Creswell, 2013; Krippendorff, 2018). To ensure data validity and reliability, the recordings were listened to and transcribed independently by three researchers (Data Collection). The transcribed data were categorised based on similarities and differences, and themes were generated accordingly (Data Categorisation and Generation). The expert opinion of a fourth researcher, who was not involved in the study, was sought and obtained (Expert Contribution). A comparison was made to ensure consistency between the categories and themes (Validation). Finally, based on the themes and subthemes presented in Table 1, the researchers completed the study by comparing the findings with the literature, in line with the research objectives (Analysis and Reporting).

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes



Purposive sampling methods, namely snowball sampling and criterion sampling techniques, were used to determine the study group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2020; Patton, 2018). In this context, the participants of the study consisted of 20 mothers who met the following criteria: having experienced the earthquake in Adıyaman, having lost their children during the earthquake, volunteering to participate in the study, and having the mental capacity to understand the interview questions. The demographic characteristics of the participants are as follows:

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of participants

Code	Occupation	Age Group	Education Level
P1	Housewife	25-35	Primary School
P2	Housewife	36-45	High School
P3	Housewife	46 and over	Primary School
P4	Housewife	36-45	High School
P5	Healthcare Professional	25-35	University
P6	Healthcare Professional	36-45	University
P7	Healthcare Professional	46 and over	High School
P8	Healthcare Professional	36-45	University
P9	Teacher	25-35	University
P10	Teacher	36-45	University
P11	Teacher	46 and over	University
P12	Teacher	36-45	University
P13	Private Sector Employee	25-35	High School
P14	Private Sector Employee	36-45	University

P15	Private Sector Employee	46 and over	High School
P16	Private Sector Employee	36-45	University
P17	Self-Employed	25-35	University
P18	Self-Employed	36-45	High School
P19	Self-Employed	46 and over	Primary School
P20	Self-Employed	36-45	University

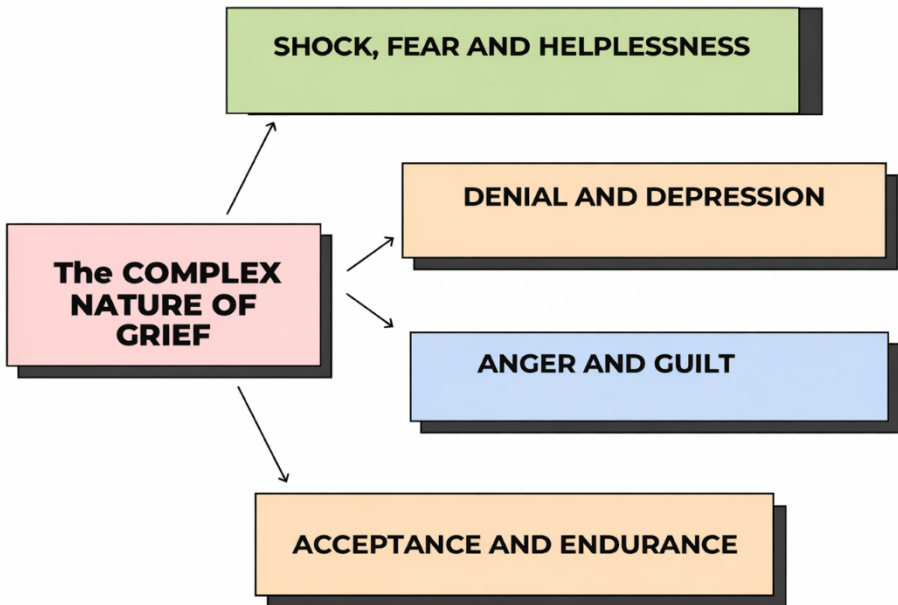
3. Findings

In this study conducted over a period of one year with 20 participants, four main themes were identified based on the in-depth interviews. The longitudinal design was used to follow the evolution of participants’ experiences over time.

Theme 1: The Complex Nature of Grief

Almost all participants reported experiencing an intense sense of shock and fear at the moment of the earthquake. In addition to physical reactions such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, and trembling, emotional responses like fear, helplessness, and anger were commonly expressed, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Complex Structure of Grief



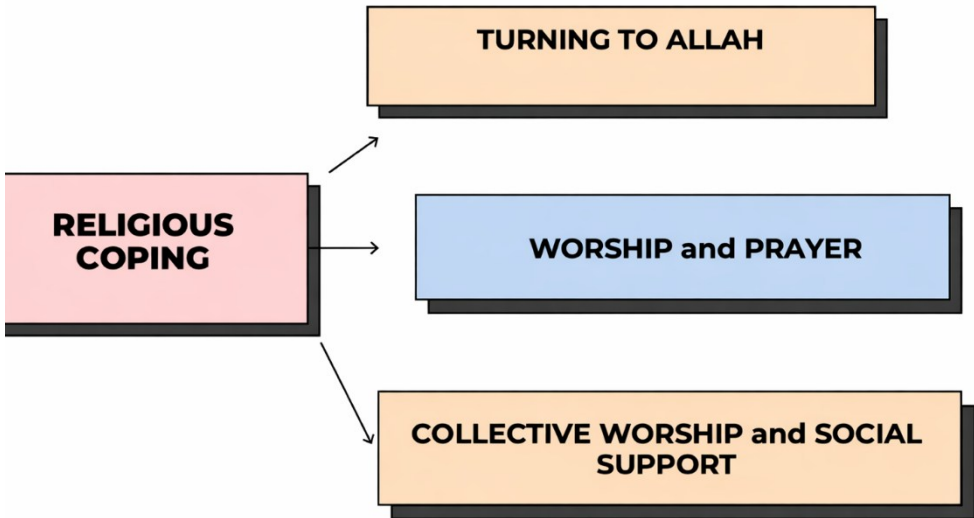
At the time of the earthquake, almost all participants reported experiencing intense feelings of shock and fear. As well as physical reactions including heart palpitations, shortness of breath, and trembling, emotional responses such as fear, helplessness, and anger were commonly reported. While younger participants (P1, P5, P17) remained in a state of panic and helplessness, those over 46 (P3, P7, P11) began to take action more quickly. “Helplessness” was the most frequently used expression in the interviews. Statements like “It all felt like a dream” (P10) and “For a long time, I didn’t think this situation was real. I

imagined my child walking through the door” (P10) clearly illustrate that following helplessness, participants exhibited reactions typical of the early stages of grief, such as denial and anger. During this process, they struggled to accept the reality of their loss and expressed their profound pain through anger. This anger largely stemmed from an inability to make sense of the event, leading them to question fate. The question “Why my child?” was one of the common questions all mothers initially asked. Following questions that began “Why didn’t others experience this pain?” (P17, P9, P4), participants showed a tendency to attribute what had happened to their own mistakes. This finding is supported in the literature (Park, 2016). From this perspective, feelings of inadequacy accompanied the guilt associated with the inability to protect one’s child. However, emotional reactions such as anger and blame directed towards a divine power, as reported in previous studies (Armentrout, 2009; Ganzevoort - Falkenburg, 2012; Kula 2002; Sawyer - Brewster, 2019; Superdock et al., 2025; VandeCreek - Mottram, 2011), were not evident among participants in this study. Almost all participants directed this anger towards themselves or, especially in the second year after the loss, towards those around them, and experienced intense emotional fluctuations as they tried to make sense of their loss. For example, in the first year after the loss, expressions reflecting regret and guilt, such as “I wish I could have spent more time (with them)” (P17, P7, P11) and “I didn’t leave the house for months; I didn’t want to talk to people” (P14, P8, P12) indicate that participants experienced intense depression and confusion. Indeed, some participants (P15) continued to experience nightmares that affected their quality of life even at the end of the second year. Previous research also shows that individuals exposed to traumatic disasters such as earthquakes are more likely to experience psychological distress such as depression and anxiety. Baloğlu et al. (2005) stated in their study that conditions affecting mental and psychological health, such as depression, are likely to persist over a long period.

In general, during and after trauma, individuals exhibit stress responses in physical, cognitive, and behavioural domains, including shock, sadness, anger, guilt, disorganised thinking, and self-accusatory statements such as “it happened because of me”, as well as symptoms such as palpitations, loss of appetite, and sleep disturbances (Filazoğlu Çokluk, 2023). However, by the second year, these emotions had largely given way to seeking refuge in memories. In this process, which can be considered the acceptance and endurance stage of grief, statements such as “This is my destiny” (P6), “I must go on living” (P8, P12), and “His smile makes me both cry and feel happy” (P9) show that individuals had begun to make sense of their loss and reshape their lives. However, even though participants had begun to adapt to normal life, they still experienced some difficulties in their daily routines, such as inability to adjust to the absence of their children, expecting certain signs from their children, difficulty concentrating, and drifting into deep thought. At this stage, memories serve as both a source of comfort and pain, and continue to be an important part of the grieving process.

Theme 2: Religious Coping

In managing the grieving process, the mothers frequently relied on religious coping strategies, which were categorized into individual and communal forms, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Religious Coping

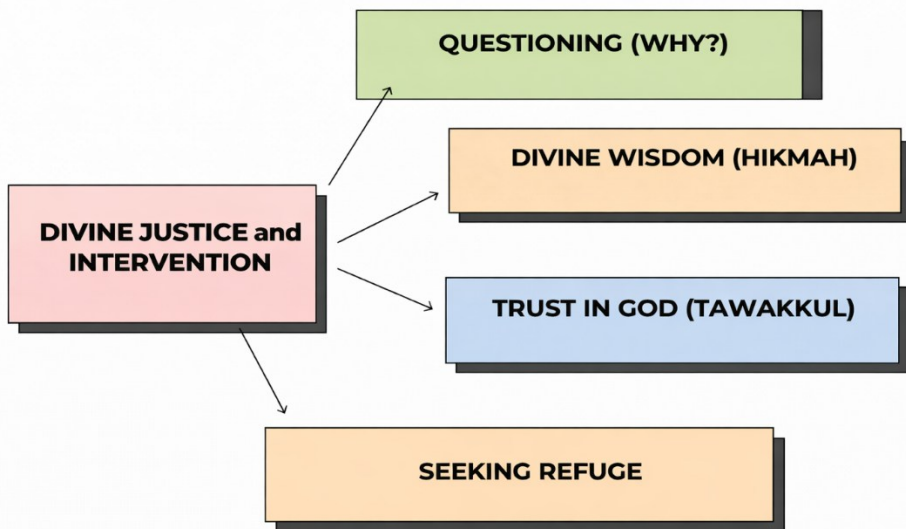
Mothers frequently relied on religious coping mechanisms in managing the grieving process. These methods can be categorised as individual and communal coping. Just as prayer, worship, and spiritual practices are particularly emphasised in the literature as important coping mechanisms (Pargament, 1997; Vaillant, 1998), these tools also played a fundamental role in the lives of the mothers. Prayer and worship, as primary tools of religious coping, became an integral part of the mothers' lives. Pargament (1997) defined prayer and worship as methods of coping with stressful and traumatic events, and stated that such spiritual practices provide individuals with relief and support. In addition, reading and listening to the Qur'an became an integral part of this process. Following the earthquake, the frequency of prayer increased among all grieving mothers, and for P8 and P9, who had not previously engaged in regular prayer, it became an integral part of their lives. One mother (P1) stated, "Prayer became a breathing space for me", while another (P8) explained, "I didn't use to pray much, but now prayer is everything for me". It was also observed that participants' perspectives on the Qur'an shifted during the grieving process. The statement "Reading the Qur'an calms me down. It connects me more strongly to God" (P9) reveals that reading the Qur'an emerged as one of the most important ways for individuals to establish a connection with God. Participants stated in the interviews that their perspectives on prayer and worship changed profoundly during the year following their children's passing and also compared to the period before the earthquake. In the first year, prayer, worship, and reading and listening to the Qur'an were primarily associated with seeking escape, consolation, help, and inner peace, while in the second year, these practices became regular spiritual practices that constituted an indispensable inner dimension of the mothers' lives. Reading and listening to the Qur'an were regarded as a complementary form of prayer.

During the grieving process, social support mechanisms were shaped by the positive influence of extended family ties, communal worship, and the professional support received. Family members and close friends were the most important elements of support in the grieving process. Statements such as “I couldn’t have survived this process without my family” (P14) and “My friends were always there for me. They didn’t leave me alone, and that kept me going” (P3) reveal that the grieving process was experienced within a broad social network. Sharing emotions within family and friendship circles, accompanied by prolonged periods of crying, was frequently reported. As can be understood from the statement, “I attended programmes organised at the mosque. These made me feel stronger” (P7), spiritual support also included increased participation in religious guidance activities. Communal prayers, spiritual discussions, and social assistance constituted important sources of support. P4’s statement, “When I think of the patience of the Prophet Ayyub, I find greater endurance within myself”, indicates that identification with figures in sacred narratives and participation in religious activities also helped to make sense of the grieving process in religious coping.

Theme 3: Divine Justice and Intervention

The earthquake and the resulting losses led to significant changes in the participants’ perceptions of Allah. For almost all participants, turning to Allah served as both a coping strategy and a means of sharing and alleviating their pain—a form of spiritual refuge. Following their loss, participants increasingly associated Allah with abstract concepts, reflecting a shift in their theological understanding. Allah began to be perceived in connection with notions such as justice, wisdom, refuge, trust, and trust in God (tawakkul), as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Divine Justice and Intervention



The earthquake and the resulting losses brought about significant changes in participants’ perceptions of God. Turning to God became a “refuge” for almost all participants, serving both as a coping mechanism and as a means of sharing and alleviating

their pain. In this orientation, there was an increasing tendency for participants to associate God with more abstract concepts, particularly after their loss. God began to be associated with concepts such as divine justice, divine wisdom (hikmah), refuge, and trust in God (tawakkul). The process unfolded as a complex one, where God's intervention in the universe and human life was accepted yet not fully misunderstood. During this process, anger played a dominant role, and a simultaneous increase in deep reflection on divine justice and engagement in religious rituals occurred.

In the second year following their loss, participants were observed to make sense of their experiences through the concept of divine wisdom (hikmah) and to orient themselves towards a conception of a compassionate God. However, as evidenced in the statement "I sought refuge in God, but I still cannot understand why such an event happened to me" (P12), this process continued with occasional periods of bewilderment and incomprehension rather than full acceptance. Among participants over 35 years of age, God's comforting nature and absolute sovereignty over the universe came to the forefront. In contrast, the younger age group stated that they could not find answers to their questions about divine justice. In this context, participants struggled to make sense of their losses during the grieving process; however, their belief that everything must occur within the framework of God's justice also played a significant role. Moreover, differences were also observed based on education level and occupational group. The perception of God in a more abstract and positive way, associated with increased education levels and diversification of occupational groups, can be linked to an individual's ability to evaluate the world and events from a broader and deeper perspective. As the level of education increased, God was perceived as a guiding, directing, and protective being. While healthcare workers responded to their search for the reason for their loss by attributing it to God's divine wisdom (hikmah), teachers interpreted the situation as a trial (imtahan) sent by God. Ultimately, almost all participants had developed a positive and abstract conception of God by the end of the one-year period.

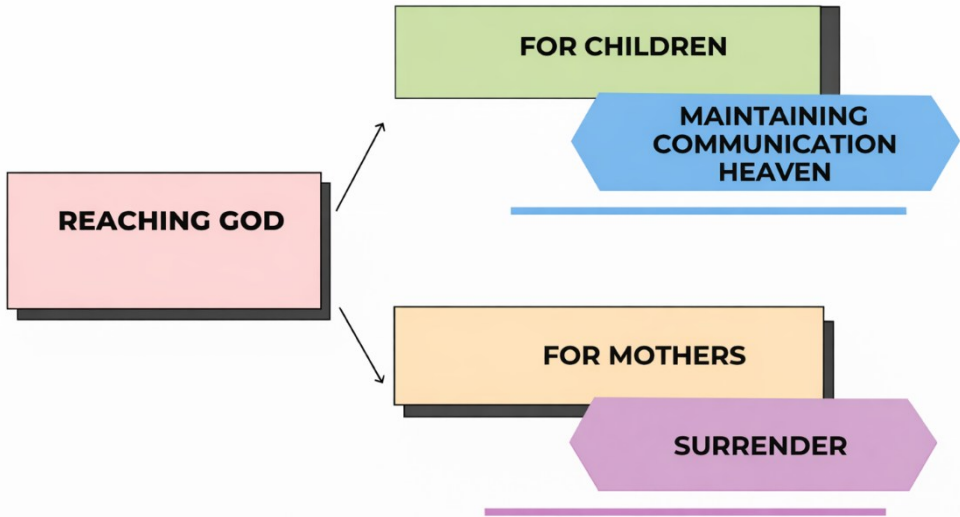
As highlighted in the themes of "The Complex Nature of Grief" and "Religious Coping," participants' prayer and prayer habits shifted from a conception of God who was consulted only in specific situations before the loss, to an abstract understanding of God through whom they found peace when they established communication with God. Expressions beginning with "Praying gives me peace. Seeking refuge in God..." indicate that God was no longer perceived merely as a being from whom things were continually requested; more importantly, God had come to be seen as an inseparable part of their own existence. The statement, "I didn't use to pray much, but now prayer is everything for me" (P8), supports this conclusion. Prayer became one of the regular spiritual practices of reaching God and being with God. Through prayer, by the end of the one-year period, participants felt more at peace, achieved emotional balance, and developed inner resilience. In the opinion of almost all participants, "seeking refuge in God" was the only thing that remained when everything else was lost. For almost all participants, prayer went beyond being a means of making a request and expressing a desire; it became a means of communication itself with their deceased children and with God. The same was true for reading the Qur'an. Responses such as "I can only calm down when I pray and listen to the Qur'an" (P8, P9, P18) indicate a change in participants' perspectives on life. The verse, "Allah is truly with those who are

patient” (2/153), which was frequently mentioned by participants during the interviews, indicates a shift towards a new reality expressing a unity with God rather than a reciprocal relationship. A similar situation manifested itself in prayer. The literature notes that understandings of prayer differ according to the nature of the relationship developed with God, distinguishing between “talking to God” and “talking with God” (Scarlett - Perriello, 1991, 66). Talking with God, as Allport (1962) pointed out, involves orientation towards an “intrinsic religiosity”, requiring a closeness that may be described as becoming one with God. Participants began to view prayer and Qur’an reading not merely as a means to achieve this closeness and unity, but as an integral part of it.

Theme 4: Reaching God

The in-depth interviews conducted with the participants revealed that the process of reaching God occurred in two distinct dimensions, as depicted in Figure 4 below. The first of these is the perception of the death of children not as an annihilation, but as a shift in dimension, conceptualised as “reaching God.” The second dimension developed depending on the nature of the mothers’ relationship with God, whereby they moved closer each day after the loss of their children to a God they had previously been aware of but came to experience more deeply and intimately.

Figure 4: Reaching God



Almost all participants stated that they believed in the afterlife as emphasised in Islam. This belief strengthened the mothers’ conviction that they would be reunited with their children and that they were in a good place, providing them with a significant spiritual foundation. Almost all participants stated the belief that they would be reunited with their children in “paradise”. Thus, in the face of profound grief, the infinite nature of God and the safety of the souls of the deceased in God’s presence were seen as a source of reassurance (Hunt - Greeff, 2012). The response given by one participant, “I know I will be reunited with my child in heaven; this gives me strength” (P2), shows that belief in the afterlife was not

only a source of hope but also a point of reference that gave meaning to life. The literature indicates that even parents who view death as annihilation begin to consider alternative possibilities in the face of their children's death, instead of the idea of total extinction (Ganzevoort - Falkenburg, 2012). It can be argued that the idea of continued existence in another dimension serves as an important source of comfort for many people (Robinson et al., 2006).

For the survivors, the loss served as both a factor that encouraged preparation for death and as a motivation that strengthened the desire to live a meaningful life while preserving the bonds with their children. Thus, the loss of their children, on the one hand, brought the mothers closer to a loving, protective, and trustworthy God, and on the other hand, led them to question the purpose of existence in this world. However, this subsequently led to a search for reasons within the framework of the divine wisdom underlying God's actions and to an attempt to derive meaning from this for themselves. In the first year after the loss, there was a strong tendency for them to view themselves as responsible for the death, expressed through questions such as "Why did this happen to me?", whereas after one year, a sense of acceptance had developed. This acceptance was an acknowledgment of God's justice and trust in God. By the end of the second year, questioning of divine justice had given way to surrender. The mothers stated that they had gained a better understanding of God's justice and wisdom, and that this process was also a test for them. This acceptance also became an important source of support for the participants, helping them to maintain their psychological well-being.

4. Discussion

Contemporary bereavement literature views grief as "a working through of emotion, the eventual goal being to move on and live without the deceased" (Walter, 1996). However, there are findings suggesting that grief can be experienced through its integration into daily life (Barrera et al., 2007; Stroebe - Schut 1999; Worden 2009). It can be said that almost all participants conform to this classification of grief. This may be due to the fact that a large number of participants stepped outside their individual spheres and worked in different professions, and that even those who were housewives took up different activities. Indeed, it was found that participants' involvement in religious and spiritual activities increased in the three-month period following their loss. Thus, rather than experiencing an isolated grief, grieving mothers continued their lives with grief integrated into daily life. In the literature, this situation has also been associated with lower levels of grief and depression (McNeil et al., 2021; Yapıcı - Doğanay, 2019). Participants experienced all of Kübler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief; however, this process was not linear, but occurred in a highly variable manner. Even after one year, at the acceptance stage, a complex grieving process was experienced, in which evidence from other stages was still visible.

As noted by Worden (2018) and Armentrout (2009), participants did not exclude their lost children from life; on the contrary, a living bond was established with them in a new dimension. Thus, two changes occurred in the participants: firstly, a desire to live a better life in order to reunite with their deceased children, and secondly, an effort to leave them better, more meaningful memories. This indicates that a fundamental change occurred in the participants' outlook on life, fuelled by the desire to reunite with their children, whom they believed to be "in the presence of God." The literature reveals that following losses,

individuals' perspectives on a number of issues, especially regarding fate and responsibility, tend to change (Mohamed Hussin et al., 2018; Proulx, 2016). Moreover, as Daniel (2017) also points out, loss and grief have been depicted as a path leading to new spiritual quests.

Our study has shown that the losses led all participants to turn more towards their beliefs and form a stronger bond with God. This process manifested itself in the participants deepening their spiritual lives, making an effort to do more good deeds, and strengthening their spiritual bonds with their children. In this transformation, the fundamental principles of Islam served as an important reference point. In particular, the influence of the collaborative model of religious coping, in which participants viewed God as a partner and actively sought solutions, as well as the surrender model of religious coping, in which they entrusted their difficulties to God, as described by Pargament (1997), was observed. These religious coping models may have contributed to the participants' deeper spiritual maturation by trusting in God during the grieving process.

Islam explains death not as an annihilation, but as a change of dimension (2/154). This belief especially helped grieving mothers develop a sense of continuity (Bakker - Paris, 2013). However, although Ganzevoort and Falkenburg (2012) reported in their study that Muslim mothers generally expressed continuity through dreams, evidence of continuity in terms of sensing their children in different ways or receiving signs from them was not observed in the mothers in this study (Proulx, 2016; Mun - Ow, 2017). Participants painfully recognised that their children were no longer physically present, but they did not accept that they were nowhere at all. According to the mothers, their children were somewhere, and that place was paradise in the presence of God. This belief aligns with the continuing bonds theory of bereavement (Denhup, 2021; Klass, 2006; Klass et al., 1996) in the literature. Ismail and Dekel (2023) found that religious belief supported this notion in Muslim mothers. Similar results have been obtained in Christian parents (Superdock et al., 2025). A relationship has been found between the belief in maintaining a bond with the deceased and making sense of death and thus finding healing in one's own life (Chapple et al., 2011). There is a broad body of literature showing that continuing bonds with the deceased are crucial in coping (Field et al., 2014; Yang Hsu - Palitsky, 2023). Establishing and maintaining a bond with deceased children actually indicates the emergence of another reality that develops beyond the boundaries of life and death (Shi, 2025).

Our study showed that mothers' bonds with their children were further strengthened, particularly through prayer and worship. This also helped participants make sense of the loss and cope with the emotional challenges of the grieving process, enabling them to navigate the mourning period in a healthier way. The emotional void that followed the loss was transformed into a meaningful bond through spiritual beliefs, and through these beliefs, individuals experienced both emotional healing and personal growth. This process allowed the loss to become not merely an end, but also an opportunity for the individual's spiritual development and inner peace. This can also be seen as an indication of trust in God, since this trust in God led participants to develop a perspective that their children had not ceased to be, but rather continued to exist, and that through their own actions, they could maintain and strengthen this bond. This perspective also supports the idea that sudden deaths deeply affect individuals and serve an "awakening" function. Indeed, VandeCreek and Mottram (2011, 159) state that sudden deaths play an "awakening" role for the

individual. This awakening process allows for the development of deep reflections on the meaning of life after loss and fosters an awareness that death is not without purpose. The concepts of “hikmah” (wisdom) and “imtilhan” (trial), frequently emphasised in our study, also indicate that death has a purpose and that this process is a meaningful experience worth going through by performing better deeds. This is consistent with the theological approach found in literature shaped within the framework of Islam, where disasters are seen as a trial and a means of salvation, and those who die in such circumstances are even regarded as martyrs (Akasoy, 2007). Accordingly, death is a transitional phase that opens the door to a new life and is never without purpose.

The findings of McIntosh et al. (1993) regarding the role of religion in social support and meaning-making during the grieving process are supported in this study. In our study, religion was found to be the most important source of social support and meaning-making in coping with loss. There are studies in the literature that point to the positive effect of a strong social support network in coping with loss (Aho et al., 2009; Cacciatore et al., 2021; Lipp - O'Brien, 2022; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2003). Strong social support not only reduces emotional problems (Cohen - Katz, 2015) but also accelerates the adaptation process (Stroebe - Schut, 1999) and facilitates recovery (Zalli, 2024; Doğanay, 2023). The positive effect of religious social support programmes has been emphasised, especially in studies conducted after earthquakes (Asoğlu - Özdemir, 2024; Bala, 2021; Özgölet and Utkucu, 2021). Kristiansen et al. (2016) found that extended family networks, collective worship, and Qur'an recitation had a positive impact among Muslim women during the grieving process. Furthermore, a limited number of studies have reported that prayer and worship serve as a “bridge” for commemorating deceased children (Mohamed Hussin et al., 2018). Continuing prayer and worship has been seen as a trigger in the search for meaning (Sawyer - Brewster, 2019) and in performing good deeds (Pargament et al., 1990). Performing these activities collectively both alleviated the grieving process and enabled participants to experience a more integrated form of grief. Unlike the literature, reciting and listening to the Qur'an without understanding its meaning stood out as a means of alleviating participants' pain and building a “bridge” to connect with their deceased children.

In this study, almost all participants turned more towards God during the grieving process. This is not an orientation that should be seen merely as psychological relief; turning towards God corresponds to a state equivalent to the “master motive” discussed by Allport (1962). This progressed as an inner and profound orientation towards establishing a bond with God. Almost all participants showed a shift towards a conception of God as a “friendly and companionable being,” one of Heller's (1986, pp. 79-92) six conceptions of God. This development occurred as a result of a crisis. While there are findings in the literature regarding turning to religion and God in such crisis situations (Calhoun - Tedeschi, 1990; Cook and Wimberly, 1983; Jenkins - Pargament, 1988; Kushner, 1981), such an orientation as observed in our study has been extremely limited. In previous studies on deaths in children, there are findings on holding God responsible (Armentrout, 2009), cursing God (Bakker - Paris, 2013), feeling anger towards God (Ganzevoort - Falkenburg, 2012), accusing God (Hawthorne et al., 2016; Meert et al., 2005), and believing that God is punishing oneself for one's own mistakes (Chapple et al., 2011; Chester, 2005; Proulx, 2016). Initially, questions

like “Why?”, “I don’t understand,” and “What could I have done?” are interpreted not as expressions of anger or accusation against God, but rather as a way of indirectly communicating one’s suffering to God and as a search for meaning (Koenig et al., 1988). In contrast to the nihilistic notion in the literature that when everything is lost, nothing will remain (Kristiansen et al., 2016), our study revealed the development of a conception of God, expressed as “only Allah will remain”, as an abstract being known for His justice, wisdom, and mercy, who is believed with absolute certainty to exist, even though He cannot be fully explained. This differs from theories and previous research that explain the development of the conception of God through parental identification (Rizzuto, 1974), secure attachment (Bowlby, 1988; Keefer - Brown, 2019; Kirkpatrick, 1992), and the development of abstract religious thought with age as a result of cognitive development (Elkind, 1970; Goldman, 1964; Harms, 1944). Indeed, as Wulff (1997) noted, participants experienced a transformation in which a personal relationship with God evolved into an abstract conception of God. This change occurred as a result of a crisis that transformed the individual’s relationship with God, going far beyond personal searching, cognitive development, and secure attachment in childhood. By the end of the one-year period, this relationship established with God reflected a form of religiosity closer to Allport’s (1950) concept of intrinsic religiosity, where God remained as the ultimate—indeed, the sole—refuge. Thus, God was seen as an essential support for the individual during the grieving process (Hawthorne, 2016). In line with Superdock et al.’s (2025) proposition that God’s actions may at times be beyond human comprehension, God became the sole and absolute refuge for almost all participants. The fact that participants did not express any negative attitudes or discourse towards God during the interviews supports this interpretation.

In the interviews, compassion, forgiveness, and wisdom were the concepts most frequently attributed to God. The fact that God’s justice was the most frequently mentioned aspect indicates that the participants developed a positive (Güler-Aydın, 2023), forgiving, compassionate (Gorsuch, 1968), and love-oriented (VandeCreek - Mottram, 2011) conception of God, as described in the literature. This finding goes beyond the responses seen in the national literature, such as people turning to religious practices like prayer after an earthquake (Köse - Küçükcan, 2000) and viewing these as a coping mechanism (Bala, 2021; Kula, 2002), and suggests that an existential change occurred in the participants over a period of one year, leading to a positive and love-oriented conception of God. As noted in previous studies (Güler, 2007; Güler-Aydın, 2023; Yıldız - Ünal, 2017), the development of such an abstract conception of God also functioned as a method of coping with the crisis by promoting psychological well-being (Stulp et al., 2019). As mentioned above, this can be attributed to participants strengthening their bond with God through faith in the afterlife and submission to God’s will, as well as religious practices such as prayer and worship that help alleviate suffering, with the concepts of patience and submission (tawfız) in Islam playing a central role. Following the loss, guided by these values, mothers tried to remain patient despite their pain and distress, and demonstrated submission to God in the face of their circumstances. Rather than leading them towards negative thoughts, this understanding enabled them to find meaning in life and trust in God. Based on this, it can be argued that the notable change in participants’ conceptions of God occurred as a consequence of coping with the crisis, rather than as the result of a search or in-depth

reflection. More importantly, the study addresses the psychological processes through which faith—by emphasising the order of the universe and the idea of an inherent justice in everything—directs individuals towards a search for meaning and the pursuit of answers to their questions (Spilka et al., 1985). Frankl's (2017) observation that a person should engage in a search for meaning in coping with trauma is echoed in the studies by Park and Halifax (2021) and Pihkala (2024), where God is viewed as a source of meaning. In our study, God was conceived as an absolute source of meaning. In Islamic literature, the verse, "*It may well be that you dislike something which is good for you, and it may well be that you like something which is bad for you*" (2/216), similarly emphasises that Allah's knowledge and wisdom are above all things and transcend human limitations. Beyond the statement, "He [husband] loves me and we love each other and, SubhanAllah, I couldn't believe my life without him, I couldn't. That's why I [supplicated] 'Please, please Allah don't leave me alone, You are the One, You are the One', and really Allah supported [me]." (Kristiansen et al., 2016, 234), our study found that the absolute surrender to and trust in Allah, which Coles (1990) reported as developing in Muslim children, was also observed in Muslim mothers after experiencing loss.

Conclusion

In times of crisis, and especially in situations of helplessness like earthquakes, people may turn to religiously grounded explanations after experiencing losses. These explanations enable individuals both to come to terms with the loss and to navigate the grieving process by turning to the highest realm of existence, thereby opening up a new domain of meaning for themselves. This orientation resulted in two outcomes for the participants. Firstly, the belief that the deceased child was not truly gone but continued to exist in a different dimension and in the presence of God led to a process in which death was accepted and a bond with the deceased child was established. Secondly, within the belief that the child had not ceased to exist, a change occurred in the participants' perspective on life, shaped by the belief that they would be reunited one day. The grieving mothers experienced a transformation grounded in the belief that their children were in heaven and that they would one day surely be reunited with them.

The parents' firm belief in resurrection after death developed as a result of their trust in God. This trust in God functioned on the one hand as a crucial support during the grieving process, and on the other hand, as a fundamental source of motivation for the individual to continue living and to strive to be a good person. Thus, in almost all participants, death resulted in a transformation in their conception of God. This transformation occurred not as a result of searching or questioning, but rather emerged after a profound crisis. In almost all participants, seeking refuge in God, praying, and reading the Qur'an increased significantly, and this helped alleviate their emotional burden. The hope of being reunited with their children in paradise brought the participants closer to God. It was observed that almost all participants transitioned towards a deeper and more abstract conception of God, and that their outlook on life changed substantially within this framework.

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