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*Research Article*

# The Analysis of the Relationship between Bereavement Degrees of Adolescents Who have Lost Their Parents and Their Self-Compassion

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## Abstract

In this research, the aim is to study the relationship between bereavement degrees of adolescents who have lost their parents and their self-compassion. The research has been conducted with 250 adolescents in total, of which 143 are boys, and 107 are girls of 12th grade. The data about adolescent's bereavement degrees have been obtained by using the Bereavement Scale; for determining the self-compassion degrees Self-Compassion Scale, and for data about characteristics Personal Information Form prepared by the researcher have been used. For the analysis, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient Technique has been used. According to research results, it has been found out that there are significant negative relationships between bereavement degrees of adolescents who have lost their parents and self-compassion. It has been understood that the bereavement degrees of girls are relatively higher than boys, yet self-compassion degrees of boys are relatively higher than girls, that the bereavement degrees of adolescents who have lost their mothers are higher than those who have lost their fathers and that there is no difference in their self-compassion degrees.

## Key Words

Adolescence • Death • Bereavement • Self-Compassion

\* This research is based on the first author's master's thesis.

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Adolescence is a stage of rapid physical, emotional, social, and personal changes, which begins with a transition from childhood to adolescence called reaching puberty, and which shows differences in age with features like climate, nourishment, and race (Kulaksızoğlu, 2016, s. 18). In this transition process, there are some factors that help the adolescent overcome these hardships s/he faces. One of these factors is self-compassion. In order for people to cope with upsetting emotional situations like bereavement, to recover from this situation without harm, and to continue their lives in a more livable way it is important for them to improve their self-compassion (Deniz, Kesici, & Sümer, 2008).

The notion of death, which means the end of life, is a phenomenon that the individual tries to exclude because of the anxiety it gives and because s/he lives her/his whole life aware of this fact. Much as some people use a defense mechanism to exclude it from their lives, death is an event that all humans will go through like all other living things (Tanhan, 2007). Because of this, when the individual loses someone s/he loves like mother, father, friend, or kin in her/his lifetime, s/he experiences psychological exhaustion and hardships in adapting to the new situation after this loss (Şenelmiş, 2006).

Although concepts like mourning and sorrow are used for the process an individual goes through after the loss, this process, in general, is expressed with the concept of bereavement. According to Oates (2003), bereavement is a natural process for the individual who has gone through the death of someone s/he loves or the loss of someone important. In other words, bereavement is a hard process to overcome, which has in extent physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social effects that begin after the loss (Lindermann, 1944; 1993). Bereavement degrees differ from person to person, from society to society, and according to various factors like age group. Especially when the developmental features of adolescents are taken into consideration, the bereavement degrees they will experience would be quite different from adults.

Beside parental loss, bereavement can be experienced in children and adolescents as a result of divorce. The main reason for the bereavement in the child or the adolescent after their parent's divorce is that one of the parents disappear suddenly and their communication is cut off. For this reason, for the parents to continue the communication with their children after divorce, and to support them all their life would prevent a possible bereavement after divorce. According to research conducted by Taş (2017), which supports this knowledge, it has been deduced that the negative influence on the child or adolescent caused by parental separation differs with the attitude of the parent before, during, and after divorce. Also, it is seen that parental divorce has permanent damage on the child or adolescent, and causes negative opinions about marriage in the process of creating their own family (Taş & Balay, 2017; Taş, 2018).

Self-Compassion can be defined as an individual's being open to situations that cause grief and sadness, being able to face these situations without ruling out the facts, approaching oneself with sympathy and love, coming to terms with possible errors and failures, and knowing that these situations are a part of life (Neff, 2003a). Also, it is an individual's showing kindness to oneself instead of developing an accusatory attitude, seeing oneself as a natural part of life without isolating oneself, forgiving oneself without causing oneself harm in these painful situations (Neff, 2003b). In other words, one has to approach oneself with positive behaviour (Zessin, Dickhauser, & Garbade, 2015). Self-Compassion means that the individual can be sensitive not only to himself but also to others in circumstances of pain and mourning (Kirkpatrick, 2005).

Considering adolescents physical, social and psychological structure, they can be influenced by negative events, and it can cause an imbalance in them (Avci, 2006). Especially in the sensitive cases that are hard to deal with such as the death of a parent; it becomes important to discover how to make sense of the situation and to deal with it and the effect of self-compassion on this grief process. These Discoveries are important for the specialists that work with adolescents and will contribute by filling a gap in the literature. In this context, the study aims to examine if there is a relationship between grief levels of adolescents that lost a parent; if these levels change depending on factors like the gender, which parent is lost, and the elapsed time after the parent's death.

## Method

### Research Model

The present study which was aimed to present the relationships between bereavement degrees of adolescents who lost their parents and their self-compassion and whether the bereavement degrees and self-compassion of adolescents differ according to gender, the lost parent, and the time after parental lose was designed according to relational survey model which is a subtype of general survey model. According to Karasar (2011), in the survey model, the researcher selects a research sample and applies standardized questionnaires to them. In the survey model, the researcher does not try to change the present situation, on the contrary, she/he just tries to observe the situation as it happens.

### Research Group

The research group consists of 250 12th grade high-school students in total from Istanbul's different high-schools in the 2017-2018 academic year, of which 107 are girls, and 143 are boys. 90 (36 %) of the participants lost their mother, and 160 (64%) of the participants lost their father.

### Data Collection Tools

In this study, "Personal Information Form", "Bereavement Scale", and "Self-Compassion Scale" have been used as data collection tool.

**Bereavement Scale.** Bereavement Scale, which has been developed by Balci Çelik (2006), is made up of 35 clauses in five point likert scale. To determine the internal consistency of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been calculated and found .96. The reliability coefficient that has been obtained with the test-retest method has been found .84. The total point for similar scale validity, which has used beck hopelessness scale, has been found  $r=.80$ . As a result of the factor analysis that has been carried out with the aim of determining the construct validity, four factors have been obtained. These are physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions to bereavement.

**Self-Compassion Scale.** Self-compassion scale, which was developed by Neff (2003b), is made up of 6 subscales of 26 clauses in total. In the scale, participants are required to grade a specific situation with regards to the frequency of their action in 5 point likert scale that changes from "1 = Strongly disagree" to "5 = Strongly agree". The scale's Turkish reliability and validity study was tested by Deniz, Kesici, and Sümer (2008). Differently from the original scale, Turkish Self-Compassion Scale is understood be comprised of a one dimensional and 24 clause structure. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale's Turkish model has been

reported to be .89 and test-retest correlation to be .83. It has been found out that there are significant relationships between the criterion-related validity of the self-compassion scale and satisfaction with life ( $r = .45$ ), and between positive affectivity ( $r = .41$ ) and negative affectivity ( $r = -.48$ ).

### Analysis of Data

The obtained data has been analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 22.0 program. As descriptive statistics methods; numbers, percentage, average, and standard deviation have been used to evaluate the data. For comparing the quantitative continuous data between the two independent groups, t-test, and for comparing the quantitative continuous data of more than two independent groups One-way Anova test have been put to use. As supplementary post-hoc analysis, Scheffe test has been taken advantage of to determine the differences after the Anova test. Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis have been implemented among the continuous variables of the research. The obtained findings have been evaluated in %95 confidence interval, and %5 significance level.

### Findings

Table 1

*Gender Oriented t-test Table of Adolescent's Self-Compassion and Bereavement Degrees*

	Group	N	Avg	ss	t	p
Self-Compassion	Boys	143	77.441	13.315	2.686	0.010
	Girls	107	72.327	16.781		
Bereavement In Total	Boys	143	80.224	23.180	-2.981	0.003
	Girls	107	89.224	24.195		

\* $p < 0.05$

When the results in Table 1 are considered, as a result of the t-test which was done in order to determine if the self-compassion points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to gender factor, the difference between the group averages has been found to be statistically significant ( $t(248)=2.686$ ;  $p=0.010 < 0.05$ ). Self-Compassion degrees of the boys ( $\bar{x}=77.441$ ) have been found to be higher than the self-compassion degrees of the girls ( $\bar{x}=72.327$ ). When we consider this result, one can say that self-compassion degrees of boys are relatively higher than girls. Similarly, as a result of the t-test which was done in order to determine if the total bereavement points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to gender factor, the difference between the group averages has been found to be statistically significant ( $t(248)=-2.981$ ;  $p=0.003 < 0.05$ ). The total bereavement points of the girls ( $\bar{x}=89,224$ ) are found to be higher than that of the boys ( $\bar{x}=80.224$ ). In the light of this result, it could be said that girls are affected by parental loss relatively more than boys are.

Table 2

*t-test Table of Adolescent's Self-Compassion and Bereavement Degrees Towards the Lost Parent*

	Group	N	Avg	ss	t	p
Self-Compassion	Mother	90	73.456	16.197	-1.415	0.158
	Father	160	76.263	14.368		
Bereavement In Total	Mother	90	93.022	25.525	4.597	0.000
	Father	160	79.044	21.583		

\* $p < 0.05$

As seen in Table 2, as a result of the t-test which was done in order to determine if the self-compassion points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to the lost parent factor, the difference between the group averages has not been found to be statistically significant ( $p>0.05$ ). When this result is evaluated, it can be understood if self-compassion degrees create a significant difference according to the lost parent.

When one looks at the bereavement degree in terms of the lost parent, as a result of the t-test which was done in order to determine if the total bereavement points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to the lost parent, the difference between the group averages has been found to be statistically significant ( $t(248)=4.597$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). The total bereavement points for those who have lost their mothers ( $\bar{x}=93,022$ ) are found to be higher than those who have lost their fathers ( $\bar{x}=79.044$ ). According to this result, it can be said that adolescents who have lost their mothers undergo their bereavement process in a more intense and extensive way than those who have lost their fathers.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of Adolescent's Self-Compassion and Bereavement Regarding the Time after The Loss of the Parent*

	Group	N	Avg	Ss	F	p	Variation
Self-Compassion	0-1 Year	25	64.880	13.612	4.722	0.003	
	2-3 Years	52	75.808	16.719			2>1
	4-5 Year	69	75.797	13.864			3>1
	More Than 5 Years	104	77.106	14.538			4>1
Bereavement In Total	0-1 Year	25	118.200	22.418	37.375	0.000	1>2
	2-3 Years	52	91.750	20.725			1>3
	4-5 Years	69	82.464	20.141			2>3
	More Than 5 Years	104	73.106	18.924			1>4
							2>4
							3>4

\* $p<0.05$

When one examines Table 3, as a result of the one-way variance test (ANOVA), which was done in order to determine if the self-compassion points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to the time factor after the parental loss, the difference between the group averages has been found to be statistically significant ( $t(248)=4.722$ ;  $p=0.003<0.05$ ). To determine the source of the differences, supplementary post-hoc analysis has been done. The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 2-3 years ago ( $75.808\pm 16.719$ ) are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $64.880\pm 13.612$ ). The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 4-5 years ago ( $75.797\pm 13.864$ ) are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $64.880\pm 13.612$ ). The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents above five years ago ( $77.106\pm 14.538$ ) are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $64.880\pm 13.612$ ). When these results are taken into consideration, one can say that as more time passes after the loss of a parent, self-compassion degrees of adolescents increase as well.

Also, as a result of the one-way variance test (ANOVA), which was done in order to determine if the total bereavement points of the participating adolescents show significant differences according to the time factor after the parental loss, the difference between the group averages has been found to be statistically significant

( $t(248)=37.375$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ). To determine the source of the differences, supplementary post-hoc analysis has been carried out. The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $118.200\pm 22.418$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 2-3 years ago ( $91.750\pm 20.725$ ). The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $118.200\pm 22.418$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 4-5 years ago ( $82.464\pm 20.141$ ). The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 2-3 years ago ( $91.750\pm 20.725$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 4-5 years ago ( $82.464\pm 20.141$ ). The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago ( $118.200\pm 22.418$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents more than 5 years ago ( $73.106\pm 18.924$ ). The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 2-3 years ago ( $91.750\pm 20.725$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents more than five years ago ( $73.106\pm 18.924$ ). The total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents 4-5 years ago ( $82.464\pm 20.141$ ) are found to be higher than the total bereavement points of those who have lost their parents more than 5 years ago ( $73.106\pm 18.924$ ). According to these findings, it could be said that as more time passes after the moment of parental loss, bereavement degrees start to decrease as well.

Table 4

*Correlation Analysis Between Adolescent's Self-Compassion and Bereavement Points*

		<b>Self-Compassion</b>
Bereavement In Total	r	-0,256**
	p	0.000

\*\*  $p < 0,01$

Concerning Table 4, there is significantly a weak and negative relationship between the total bereavement and self-compassion ( $r=-0.256$ ;  $p=0,000<0.05$ ). When these results are evaluated, it could be said that as self-compassion degree increases, bereavement degree decreases.

Table 5

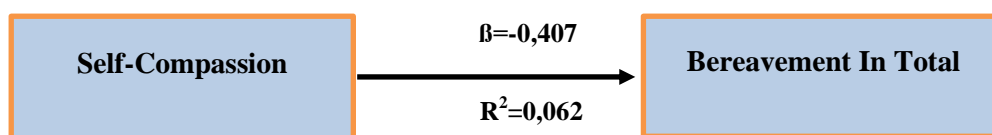
*Analysis Table Concerning Self-Compassion is Predicting Bereavement Degree*

<b>Dependent Variable</b>	<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>β</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Model (p)</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>
Bereavement In Total	Invariable	114.740	15.311	0.000	17.414	0.000	0.062
	Self-Compassion	-0.407	-4.173	0.000			

\* $p < 0.05$

When Table 5 is examined, the regression analysis that has been implemented to determine the cause and effect relationship between self-compassion and total bereavement is found to be statistically significant ( $F=17,414$ ;  $p=0,000<0.05$ ). It is seen that the relationship between bereavement degrees and self-compassion variables as an indicator of the total bereavement degree is weak in terms of explanatoriness ( $R^2=0,062$ ). The self-compassion degrees of adolescents decreases the total bereavement degrees ( $\beta=-0,407$ ). According to this result, it can be said that self-compassion not only decreases the bereavement degrees but also it comprises %6 of those factors which decrease the bereavement degrees.

Figure 1. Conclusion Model With Respect to the Effect of Self-Compassion on Age



### Discussion and Conclusion

After evaluating the research findings, they have been examined in order to understand if self-compassion differs according to gender factor or not. When the research results are considered, it is seen that the self-compassion degrees of male students are statistically higher than female students and that there is a significant difference between them. In the literature survey that has been conducted, it is seen that the gender factor has no significant difference on self-compassion degrees. In [Dilmaç, Deniz, & Deniz \(2009\)](#)'s studies on the university students for self-compassion and value preferences, in a research of [Tathoğlu \(2010\)](#), which was done with 249 males and 468 female students of a public university's different faculties, on the self-esteem, decision making styles and characteristics of university students who have different self-compassion degrees, in a research conducted by [Sümer \(2008\)](#) for evaluating depression, anxiety, and stress in university students of different self-compassion degrees, in [Yılmaz \(2009\)](#)'s study about examining the relationship between self-compassion and parental attitudes of university students, in a study by [Çetin \(2017\)](#) about examining the relationship between sense of humour and self-compassion in adolescents, it is seen that the gender factor has no significant difference on self-compassion degrees. One can say that the reason for the differences between the current research and the researches that have been scanned in the literature is the fact that the self-compassion degrees, which express showing mercy and self-love in adolescents who have lost their parents, are lower in female students, and as seen in this research finding that the bereavement degrees of female student are higher.

When the research results are examined, it is seen that there is a significant difference in the bereavement degrees in terms of gender factor. The total bereavement points of the girls are found to be higher than that of the boys. There are researches which support these results. In a study by [Balcı Çelik \(2011\)](#) for comparing the anti-law attitudes of adolescents in terms of gender factor and depression degree, the researchers worked with 100 adolescents in total, of which 47 were girls and 53 were boys, and it was found out that the total bereavement points of girls are relatively higher than that of the boys. Again in another research prepared by [Balcı Çelik \(2006\)](#), it is seen that the bereavement degrees of girls are significantly higher than that of the boys. Similarly, in a research conducted by [Bağcaz \(2017\)](#) on adults, one reaches to the conclusion that the bereavement degrees of women are relatively higher than that of men. There are also researches of the literature which does not support that the bereavement degrees of girls are higher. In study implemented on university students by [Coşkun \(2009\)](#), it is seen that there are no significant differences in terms of gender factor. When the research results and the related subject are considered, it is seen that the bereavement degrees of adolescent girls are higher as a result. One can say that the reason for that is girls being more emotional and the upbringing of boys in our culture with the advise of not showing their emotions.

When the research results are taken into account, one could not find a statistically significant difference in self-compassion degrees with regards to the lost parent variable.

If one looks at the research results, one can see that there is a statistically significant difference in bereavement degrees with regard to the lost parent variable. The total bereavement points for those who have lost their mothers are found to be higher than those who have lost their fathers. When we look at the research results prepared by [Koyuncu \(2015\)](#), it is seen that there is no significant difference in bereavement degrees in terms of the lost parent variable. [Koyuncu \(2015\)](#) attributes the reason for no difference to the fact that most of the participants have experienced father loss. Since the numbers of mother and father loss are close to each other in the current study, it is thought to be more generalizable when compared with the literature. The reason for the high bereavement degrees in those who have lost their mothers is thought to be the importance our society attaches to the mother.

When we look at self-compassion degrees in terms of time factor after the loss of a parent, there seems to be a significant difference. The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 2-3 years ago are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago. The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 4-5 years ago are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago. The self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents more than five years ago are found to be higher than the self-compassion points of those who have lost their parents 0-1 years ago. Looking at these findings, one can say that during the time after the loss, adolescents start to show love and compassion towards themselves. However, no similar research could be found in the survey of the literature. In order to generalize the comments, it is thought to be beneficial to work with similar groups in similar researches.

It is understood that there are significant differences in bereavement degrees according to the time variable after the parental loss. According to this, it has been found out that the total bereavement points of adolescents who have experienced a loss 0-1 years ago are higher than that of those who have experienced a loss 2-3, 4-5 and more than 5 years ago, the total bereavement points of adolescents who have experienced a loss 2-3 years ago are higher than that of those who have experienced a loss 4-5 and more than 5 years ago, and the total bereavement points of adolescents who have experienced a loss 4-5 years ago are higher than that of those who have experienced a loss more than 5 years ago. In a study by [Bağcaz \(2017\)](#), which supports the current research's findings of bereavement degrees according to time factor after a loss, it is seen that there are significant differences. Thus, one can say that bereavement degree decreases with various factors after the first years of experiencing loss. A research done by [Genlik \(2012\)](#) supports this idea.

When the research findings are considered, it has been concluded that there is a weak, negative, and significant relationship between bereavement degrees and self-compassion. In a study done by [Lenferink, Eisma, Keijsers, & Boelen \(2017\)](#), which supports the results of the current research, it has been concluded that there is a weak, negative, and significant relationship between bereavement degrees and self-compassion. From this point of view, it could be said that as self-compassion degree increases, bereavement degree decreases. It can be said that it would be beneficial to use self-compassion, which embraces the teachings of showing compassion to oneself and seeing the painful events as a part of life, for overcoming the negative emotions one experiences after the loss of a parent, which could be one of the most important pain one can face in a lifetime.

When the research results are taken into consideration, it is seen that there is a statistically significant relationship between bereavement degrees and self-compassion. It is seen that the relationship between



bereavement degrees and self-compassion variables as an indicator of the total bereavement degree is weak in terms of explanatoriness. Self-compassion degrees of adolescents decreases the total bereavement degrees. Similarly, according to the results of a study done by [Lenferink, Eisma, Keijser, & Boelen \(2017\)](#), it is seen that there is a significant difference between bereavement degree and self-compassion. As there are similar results in the current research and the related subject, we can say that when confronted with a painful situation self-compassion will provide resistance to the negative situation for the individual.

We think that activities that will contribute the self-compassion in order to decrease the grief level might be helpful and the results of the study may help psychological counsellors in the guidance services of the schools. It may also be important to work with a parent that is alive and to provide awareness on self-compassion. It is a limitation that the study is done with 250 senior high school students that live in Istanbul and it is needed to work with broader populations to generalize the results.

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