
Research Article

Spiritual Resilience in Bereaved Young Women: A Case Study of a Young Woman Who Was Left to Die by Her Fiancé

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ABSTRACT

The grief of loss has been addressed in many studies. Most of these studies describe the grief of losing a husband or wife. Studies on the bereavement of a fiancé are few. This study aims to explore the role of spiritual resilience in the grieving process experienced by a young woman who was left by her fiancé. One of the issues they addressed was how people process their grief and assign meaning to the loss experience. This qualitative case study involved in-depth interviews to extract information about informants' experiences and coping strategies. The results show that belief in destiny, social support from family and friends, and engagement in meaningful spiritual practices contribute significantly to developing spiritual resilience. The interpretation of the results of this analysis suggests that spiritual resilience not only helps individuals deal with grief but also promotes personal growth and emotional recovery. This research contributes to the field of Islamic psychology on the mechanisms of spiritual resilience in the recovery process from bereavement. Hence, this study provides insight for individuals and mental health practitioners who are facing similar issues.

1. INTRODUCTION

In living life in today's modern world, which is complex and full of challenges, psychological and spiritual resilience are becoming increasingly important (Howard et al, 2023). Even more so for someone who is experiencing the grief of losing a loved one. In the context of Eastern culture, most grief of a loved one is associated with the loss of a spouse in marriage or the loss of a family member (Liang et al, 2024). However, there is a lack of literature describing the grief process among those who are in the engagement phase but are left for dead by their partner (Bristowe et al., 2024). In contrast, within Eastern culture, engagement is widely regarded as an integral part of the process and is a deeply rooted tradition preceding marriage.

In Islam, proposing is also a process that is recognized and accepted religiously. Usually those who propose already have a strong determination to move on to the marriage process (Rajnaara,

2018). This means that, in line with the proposal process, most of the preparations for marriage have already begun and communication between the couple and between the two extended families has also begun. This has major consequences because the proposal process involves very complex relationships between the couple and their families (Schweingruber et al., 2004). Accordingly, even though the betrothed is not officially married, they are emotionally and psychologically bound in a commitment towards marriage.

When it comes to the impact of bereavement, researchers have done a very good job of explaining the possible effects. The stress caused by losing a spouse on the Life Change Index Scale (The Stress Test) can reach 100 points on the scale. This 100 score is the highest score and has implications for the level of stress and side effects (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). One study mentioned that the loss of a spouse in the later adult age groups can increase the increase in cases for manic episodes, phobias, alcohol disorders, and generalized anxiety disorder (Keyes et al., 2014).

Previous research has shown a plethora of effects that are related to the loss of a spouse. In case study research, it was established that loss of a spouse can significantly impact one's (a wife's) physical and psychological well-being (Priambodo et al., 2025). The grieving process that takes place among widows after the death of their husbands due to severe illness may lead to issues in the acceptance of the loss. This, consequently, may lead to the development of mental problems. In addition, the quality of the preceding relationship with the spouse also powerfully predicts the response to bereavement, with a positive relationship playing a role in reducing the adverse impact of loss (Priambodo et al., 2025). Loss of a spouse can be physically and psychologically harmful to the surviving spouse. People, however, may respond differently to such a loss in many ways. The influence on mental well-being can be in terms of anxiety or depression. As it stands, these psychiatric disorders impact the decision to seek physical health tests, such as cancer screening (Scherbakov et al., 2025).

In addition, from another study, it is seen that losing a spouse has a huge impact on the mental condition of older adults, resulting in sorrow, isolation, and reduced economic and health status (Tiyarningsih & Sulandari, 2021). Older adults who lose a spouse are also at risk for psychological problems, such as despair, powerlessness, and intense anger, and have high levels of stress that are due to emotional distress and low social support (Bui et al., 2018). To reduce grief during bereavement, social support and spirituality (religiosity) play an important role because these two factors can help the elderly overcome the difficult time after losing a spouse (Rahmadewi & Lestari, 2024). Some of these studies are useful to help us understand and help those who are grieving to get through it well.

On the other hand, when it comes to understanding the situation of someone who has lost their fiancé, we do not understand it well enough. To overcome this situation, a more specialized effort is needed to understand the impact and grief process experienced by someone who has lost their fiancé. Given this very specific and unique situation, we argue that understanding the situation through a case study is the way to go. This case study also involves an attempt to holistically

understand the integration of psychology and religion in understanding this situation more thoroughly in dealing with those in a state of grief. This integration work has been universally recognized, for example, by Saari et al. (2023). On the part of knowing the grieving process, one has a good model in place in terms of the model of grieving or loss consisting of five phases—denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance (DABDA)—first proposed by Kubler Ross. Additionally, to measure how much LM is grieving, grieving symptoms of LM have been quantitatively indexed by using symptoms of Prolonged Grief Disorder, or PGD (Boelen & Lenferink, 2019; Mughal & Siddiqui, 2023).

On the other hand, this study focuses on emotional responses to loss as experienced by a young woman left dead by her fiancé and how she attains spiritual resilience in the healing process. By a case study following Kubler Ross's five-step grieving process measured in terms of Prolonged Grief Disorder symptoms and Islam's resilience through spirituality, a case of a young woman left on the street for dead by her fiancé will be analyzed in terms of grieving. In terms of its contribution, such a study can benefit through its demonstration of a healing model for healing post-traumatic events—like death—that is supported through love and care of the environment and near and dear ones (Tyrrell et al., 2023). In terms of the larger scale and contribution to the scientific framework, this research can be a first step and foundation for understanding the larger scale in the future. In the current state, this research can fill the void of references and literature regarding case studies of losing a spouse during engagement.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative method, namely a case study method, to explore the spiritual resilience of a girl with the initials LM, whose prospective life partner died before they were officially engaged. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in more depth the emotional and mental turmoil experienced by LM. Data was collected through a semi-structured depth interview. This gives LM the flexibility to tell his experiences and views chronologically and in detail.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen as the main data collection tool because this method allows researchers to explore certain topics in more depth (Knott et al., 2022) while still giving LM the freedom to express his experiences, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings spontaneously. Although the questions are prepared, they are flexible in implementation. When one question was asked, it was followed by follow-up questions to explore the topic and actively listen to the informant. During the interview, the probing technique was also used when wanting to get more information about what LM said (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). In addition, this approach also allows the researcher to explore some new and unexpected aspects that may emerge during the interview.

Then the data from the LM interview was analyzed using thematic analysis. Theme analysis is a qualitative research method that includes a systematic approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in data (Dawadi, 2020). Thematic analysis is flexible and allows

researchers to build meaning-based themes and patterns from qualitative data (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). In this way, the interview data was grouped into several key themes that aligned with the research in this case study.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Profiling Informant

At the beginning of the interview, LM recounted the incident of losing her future husband (F). The two met while boarding at a *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding). When at *Pesantren*, they were in one organization, namely the *Pesantren* Security Division. After undergoing education at the boarding school around 2018, both of them planned to continue to the level of marriage, at that time LM was 17 years old and F was 19 years old. F's first meeting was with LM's family. From this meeting, considering that the conditions have not allowed them to immediately get married, the family has planned that they will get married in 2024. Then LM continued her studies in Jakarta, while F migrated to Kalimantan. However, F had an accident while riding a motorcycle while selling *Baozi* on Kalimantan Island in 2021. He was hit by hot water from the motorcycle. He underwent treatment for 15 days in the hospital. He was operated on three times because the hot water hit his skin and face. He had 75% of his body injured. To describe the interaction process that has occurred between LM and F, it can be seen in the following timeline.

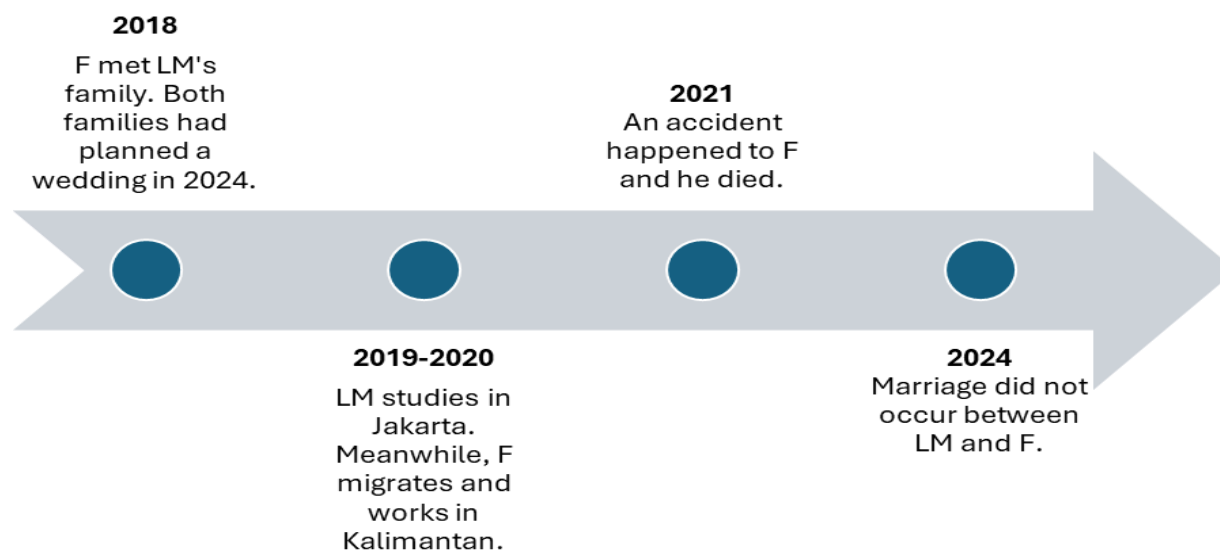


Figure 1: Timeline of ongoing interactions between LM and F.

In general, the interview questions were classified as emotional responses to loss and aspects of spiritual resilience in the recovery process.

3.2. Emotional Response to Loss

When LM received news about F, who had an accident and eventually died, she experienced several emotional responses, such as feeling devastated, not believing the incident, feeling denial,

and feeling very shocked. LM's emotional response was then followed by a physical response, namely she felt weak and had no appetite. In fact, when she forced herself to eat, she vomited. This can be seen from the following expression:

“At that time, I felt really shattered, especially since I wasn't told about it by F's family. I felt that this incident was either true or not. My body felt weak, I had no appetite, and I vomited when forced to eat.”

Furthermore, LM found it difficult to accept the fact that F had died, even after seeing the body and the funeral process. This is illustrated in the following LM expression:

“There's no way she died. When I saw the body, I still thought that she was alive. Even when the body was buried, I still imagined that she could still talk.”

LM only realized and accepted the fact that F had died a few days after F's funeral. There was also a feeling of guilt in LM because she felt that she had not repaid the kindness of her future fiancé. She made the following statement:

“After a few days after returning from the funeral, after a few days, I realized that he was really gone because his body had been buried in the ground. Realizing this, I also felt guilty that I had caused F a lot of trouble and felt that I had not repaid her enough.”

Lastly, after realizing what happened to her fiancé, there was one question that kept popping up in her mind: why did she have to experience this? She said, *“Oh Allah, why should I be the one to experience something like this?”*

3. 3. Spiritual Resilience

The accident that befell her fiancé made LM question why she had to experience it. However, over time, LM was slowly able to strengthen her belief that losing her fiancé was part of God's destiny that could not be avoided. This belief was able to strengthen LM to be able to rise above her grief. This can be seen from her statement,

“Believe in God's destiny. This accident has become God's destiny that cannot be rejected at all.”

This belief shows that LM has a strong spiritual resilience foundation that can direct her to make efforts to overcome her grief. This spiritual resilience is influenced by the role of her family because she was raised in a religious family culture. Her father is a figure and has an Islamic boarding school. In her daily life, she appears as a devout Muslim woman who covers her body and performs various other obedience. In the context of facing this grief, the values of religious

education instilled by her parents since childhood are firmly embedded, so that when facing this reality, she can feel much stronger. Furthermore, LM's belief in God's destiny led her to practice several religious activities, such as attending Islamic studies. She said,

"I often miss F. When that feeling arises, I divert it by attending the studies of Ustazah Halimah Alaydrus—an eminent preacher in Indonesia. By attending the study, I feel strengthened, especially when Ustazah explains that everything that is expected is not always in line with Allah's will."

Other religious practices carried out by LM are making a visit to her fiancé's grave, reading the Qur'an, praying, and dhikr regularly. Specifically, she said,

"After 5 months of F's death, I made a visit at least once a week and a maximum of 3 times a week. Every day, and this went on for about a year, she made it a habit to read Surah Yasin and Tahlil between after the Maghrib prayer and before the Isha prayer."

LM's spiritual resilience was also strengthened by a support system, namely from her family and friends. Her mother provided emotional support, although, in the end, she reduced her confidence in him because she did not want her mother to be sad too. Then she also shared her story with her brother F. Her brother strengthened her by suggesting that she pray a lot for F. Meanwhile, her friends at the boarding school provided support so that LM could be strong enough to accept God's destiny. However, for LM, this support was not enough, because she thought that they did not really experience what happened to her. This can be seen in her statement,

"Unfortunately, when I shared my feelings with my mother, she also became sad. So, I decided to make her stop or start sharing less because I didn't want my mother to be sad too. While my friends at the boarding school only said, 'Okay, just accept it.' But I think they don't really feel the loss that I feel."

Therefore, LM looked for a way that she thought was better to support her recovery process, such as learning from the experiences of other people who had experienced similar events to her. She did this by asking a lot of questions about adults who had lost their partners and learning from influencers on social media, as she said.

"I often ask adults who have been left behind. By asking, I can learn how they behave in the face of loss. I also learn from the lives of influencers who share their journeys and life stories in dealing with grief. I learned from an influencer named N. I learned from her posts how she was able to accept what happened to her, studying the reasons and explanations posted in her content."

Furthermore, LM also has supporting activities that can strengthen her in the recovery process, namely completing her thesis assignment and starting a flower bouquet business. *“Finishing my thesis can distract me from my feelings of grief. Then starting a floristry business, this flower hill business is actually an effort to realize a plan that I had previously set with F. So, we have a plan to start a business after getting married.”*

Table 1: Classification of Interview Data Using Thematic Analysis

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Details
1	Emotional Response to Loss	Feelings of loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling devastated, in denial, and in shock. Weak body, no appetite, vomiting when forced to eat. Difficulty accepting reality even though I have seen the body and funeral. Feelings of guilt because I feel like I haven't repaid the kindness
		Questions to Allah (Bargaining)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wondering, "Why did I have to experience something like this?"
2	Spiritual Resilience Strategies	Faith to Destiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believing that loss is Allah's destiny. Belief in Allah helps LM rise and overcome sadness.
		Family religious education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious education in a religious family forms strong spiritual resilience.
		Spiritual activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attending Islamic studies. Visiting F's grave regularly (1-3 times a week). Reading Surah Yasin and Tahlil every day for a year.
		Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mother provided emotional support even though LM ended up confiding less. Listened to the advice of her fiancé's older sister to pray for the deceased. Her friends supported her with advice to accept her fate.
		Learning from others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LM also often asked adults who had lost their partners. Learned from influencers' experiences on how to accept grief.
		Recovery support activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed her thesis Started a flower bouquet business.

4. DISCUSSIONS

In this study, the grief experienced by LM was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, resulting in two themes and several subthemes related to emotional responses and spiritual resilience that emerged during the grieving process. Table 1 presents a classification of the data from the interviews conducted, which includes two main themes: Emotional Response to Loss and Spiritual Resilience.

4.1. Emotional Response to Loss

Grieving is a natural and universal response to the loss of a loved one. The grieving process can vary significantly between individuals, depending on various factors such as the relationship with the person lost, the manner of death, and the social support available (Mughal & Siddiqui, 2023). There are some differences in how people respond to the death of their loved ones. Normal grief may last for several months after the loss. If grief lasts longer than 6 months, it is categorized as PGD (Prolonged Grief Disorder) with more intense symptoms. PGD symptoms include deep longing, difficulty accepting the loss, feeling a loss of identity, recurrent thoughts about the person who died, feelings of guilt or regret, and feeling anxious or uncertain. When referring to this statement, LM underwent a grieving process of more than 6 months, although with a note that not all of this PGD appeared. There are several symptoms that appear, such as the emergence of longing and difficulty accepting the loss of a loved one.

Furthermore, with regard to LM's emotional response to the grief of this loss, according to Tyrrell et al. (2023), Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss - American psychiatrist, describes the grieving process through five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (DABDA). These stages are not linear and may not be experienced sequentially by everyone. First, denial is often considered the initial reaction to grief. Likewise, with LM, the earliest reaction when her fiancé-to-be died was an expression of denial that it did not happen. Second, anger can be directed toward medical professionals, relatives, spiritual leaders, or even God. At this stage, LM questioned why she had to experience this event. Third, bargaining. At this stage, a person tries to negotiate in various ways to gain control over their condition. This stage is expressed by LM, who feels guilty for not being able to repay F's kindness when he was alive. Fourth, symptoms of depression include lethargy, melancholy (gloomy), and anhedonia (feeling empty). This phase can also be shown by a decrease in appetite as experienced by LM. Finally, acceptance, where the individual recognizes the reality of death. This stage can be seen from LM's condition, who has accepted the fact that F's body has been buried in the ground.

4.2. Spiritual Resilience

According to Rochman et al. (2024), resilience may be understood as the ability of any individual to bear and adapt to intricate scenarios. Lalani et al. (2021) state that self-renewal participates in a person's spiritual life, which plays a major role in resilience as it positively self-evolves and constructs a person after he or she experiences trauma or other stressful situations.

Meanwhile, Manning et al. (2019) explained that spiritual resilience is an individual's ability to overcome life's challenges and difficulties by utilizing their spiritual resources. LM has developed her spiritual resilience in response to loss. LM believes that loss is God's destiny, and this belief helps her to rise up and overcome grief. LM went through this grieving process by strengthening aspects of spiritual resilience. Hence, spiritual resilience became a reinforcing aspect for LM to be able to overcome the grieving process in an adaptive way, namely by performing various ritual worship activities.

Some of the spiritual components that LMs practice include attending Islamic studies, pilgrimage to the grave, and other types of worship. This gives a clear justification for the growing blend of religion and mental health along the lines suggested by Manning et al. (2019), that people with these strong spiritual beliefs grieve more thoroughly and faster. LMs also benefit by hearing from other people who have been through grief, so that it is apparent learning from others may help mitigate the painful situations.

Park & Halifax (2021) assert that religion and spirituality give proper meaning, which helps a person to comprehend loss as part of life, as well as providing the rituals and social support that give some order and ease to the bereaved. In addition, emotional support from friends, family, and community provides a sense of security and acceptance (Cacciatore et al., 2021). Moreover, mental health is not created in isolation; it is created through connections (Lalani et al., 2021). In this case, LM received social support from her family and friends in order to accept the fate that had befallen her potential partner. LM was eventually able to achieve some measure of relaxation when she joined the Islamic study community.

Additionally, religious activities conducted within the family context can add to LM's spiritual coping mechanisms. From the perspective of Jumiarti (2024), family structures can foster Islamic religious education that may help develop individual resilience. In this sense, LM's mother, despite being less forthcoming, offered emotional support that benefited her healing process. LM's family and friends, including family members, also offered some encouragement, such as praying for the dead, which they hope is going to aid in strengthening LM's spiritual healing. This finding agrees with Cacciatore et al.'s findings (2021) on the importance of social support in the grieving process.

As a result, LM's spiritual resilience was formed through a combination of belief in destiny, family support, and consistent spiritual practices. The grieving process experienced by LM manifested in a variety of complex emotional responses, but these were overcome with strong spiritual resilience so that she was able to manage her emotions and cope with her grief. That being said, this study confirms the importance of faith/spirituality, which is the main aspect that makes up spiritual resilience.

5. CONCLUSION

Spiritual resilience has a significant contribution to the grieving process of young women when they lose their fiancé. This research found many factors that help develop spiritual resilience that stems from having faith in destiny, receiving social support from loved ones, and practicing Islam in a meaningful way. The emotional aspect of grief can be painful particularly when you have a strong emotional bond with the deceased. Thus, it is crucial to find the ways to alleviate grief. In this case, the LMs had experiences of loss, which gave them an insight on how to spiritually cope and strengthen oneself in the recovery process of a loss. This study contributes to exploring how spiritual resilience can be practiced in individuals when facing the grief of loss. Furthermore, this study also provides experiential insights for mental health practitioners when they encounter clients with cases similar to this study.

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