

The Resilience of Generation Z Students Who Have Lost a Father Figure: A Guidance and Counseling Perspective

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Abstract. The loss of a father figure is a traumatic experience that can significantly impact the psychological and social well-being of university students, especially Generation Z individuals who are in a critical stage of identity development and independence. This study aims to explore the resilience dynamics of Gen Z students who have lost their fathers, viewed from the perspective of guidance and counseling. A qualitative approach with a case study method was employed to deeply understand the experiences of three students who lost their fathers due to death. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The findings reveal that father loss causes profound emotional distress, feelings of emptiness, and emotional crises. However, participants demonstrated resilience by employing positive coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in productive activities, and utilizing university-based guidance and counseling services. Counseling interventions, particularly those based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), were found to be effective in helping students regulate emotions and strengthen self-efficacy. This study highlights the crucial role of guidance and counseling in supporting students who have experienced parental loss and underscores the need to develop services that are responsive to the unique characteristics of Gen Z.

Keywords: Resilience; Father Loss; Gen Z students; Guidance and Counseling; Coping



INTRODUCTION

Fathers play a vital role in the psychological and social development of children. Theoretically, a father functions as a protector, educator, and identity shaper, particularly in strengthening self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and emotional stability (Lamb, 2019). In a functional family, a father's physical and emotional presence supports the development of children into resilient, independent, and socially mature individuals. A father's role cannot simply be replaced, as he represents social control, structure, and a role model in the child's socialization process (Amato, 2015).

However, the social reality in Indonesia during the 2020–2025 period presents a stark contrast to this theory. According to data from (Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Nasional, 2025), approximately 80% of Indonesian children experience the absence of a father figure, either physically or emotionally, and around 20% are raised without any active paternal involvement in their daily lives. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as *fatherlessness*, can result from divorce, death, geographical separation, or emotional absence such as neglect or indifference. Its impact is not limited to childhood but extends into early adulthood, including among university students.

Generation Z (Gen Z) students, born between 1997 and 2012, currently make up the majority of the higher education population in Indonesia. While Gen Z is often recognized for their adaptability to technology and information, they are also considered psychologically vulnerable. According to (UNICEF, 2025), approximately 13% of Indonesian adolescents aged 10–19 experience mental health issues, with anxiety, stress, and depression being the most common. Academic pressure, social expectations, and internal stressors are significant sources of mental strain. When combined with the absence of a father figure, Gen Z students face a dual burden that may compromise their psychological resilience, manifesting in emotional dysregulation, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and loss of life direction.

This situation underscores the importance of studying *resilience*, defined as the ability to endure, recover, and grow positively after experiencing stress or trauma. Resilience involves internal factors such as self-efficacy, optimism, and emotional regulation, as well as external factors like social support from family, peers, and the community (Masten, 2021). The loss of a father figure can weaken a person's primary support system, potentially undermining the development of resilience. Nevertheless, various studies indicate that resilience can be fostered through counseling interventions and the reinforcement of social support systems.

Previous research has explored aspects of resilience in students who have lost their fathers. (Wulandari, 2023), through a phenomenological study, found that students who lost their fathers due to divorce experienced complex emotional conflicts but were able to develop resilience through productive activities and supportive social relationships. Meanwhile, (Hartati & Suharto, 2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in group counseling for developing resilience, particularly in emotional regulation and self-efficacy. (Universitas Palangka Raya, 2024) has also developed a resilience module tailored to Gen Z characteristics, which was validated and found to be suitable as a counseling support tool.

However, most existing studies are quantitative in nature, focus on children or early adolescents, and rarely explore the lived experiences of Gen Z university students who have lost a father figure through a qualitative lens within the context of guidance and counseling. Therefore, this study offers novelty by employing a phenomenological qualitative approach to

deeply explore the resilience dynamics of Gen Z students who have lost a father figure, while also examining how counseling approaches can serve as relevant and contextual interventions.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the emotional experiences of students who have lost a father figure, and to enrich the academic discourse in the field of guidance and counseling. The findings are expected to serve as a foundation for developing interventions that are empathetic, applicable, and responsive to the actual needs of university students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the resilience of Generation Z university students who have lost a father figure, viewed from the perspective of guidance and counseling. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researcher to explore the participants' subjective experiences, psychological processes, and coping strategies in a detailed and contextual manner.

The study sample consists of two to three Generation Z students who have experienced the loss of a father figure and are currently enrolled in a university in Indonesia. Participants were selected purposively based on specific criteria: students who are willing to openly share their experiences and who are considered to have sufficient insight into the resilience process they have undergone. This small and focused sample enables the researcher to conduct in-depth interviews and produce rich, detailed data analysis.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on the participants' experiences of loss, the challenges they faced, the forms of support received, and the role of guidance and counseling in their recovery and resilience-building processes. In addition, the researcher conducted observations and gathered documentation to complement the interview data. The entire data collection process adhered to ethical research standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and categories relevant to the research objectives. Thematic analysis was chosen for its effectiveness in organizing and interpreting complex narrative data and for its ability to uncover deeper meanings within participants' lived experiences.

Through this method, the study aims to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of how Generation Z students build resilience in the face of paternal loss and how guidance and counseling serve as a psychological support system that facilitates this process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Participant Profiles

This study involved three Generation Z university students who had experienced the loss of a father figure. The first participant (Respondent A) is a 20-year-old male psychology student who lost his father two years ago due to a chronic illness. The second participant (Respondent B) is a 21-year-old female English education student whose father passed away in a traffic accident. The third participant (Respondent C) is a 22-year-old male computer science student who lost his father during junior high school. These profiles provide background and contextual insight into the resilience processes each participant underwent.

Understanding these profiles serves as a foundation for gaining deeper insight into the participants' experiences and their individual journeys toward resilience.

2. Research Findings

a. Psychological Impact of Losing a Father Figure

The loss of a father figure had a significant psychological impact on the participants, particularly in terms of emotional and mental well-being. Most participants expressed deep feelings of sadness, emptiness, and emotional pain. Respondent A stated, *"At first, I felt empty and often cried alone because I lost the person who had always protected me."* (Respondent A). These feelings are in line with resilience theory, which posits that early traumatic experiences can trigger intense emotional stress (Connor & Davidson, 2016). This psychological impact became the initial challenge that participants had to overcome in their journey toward building resilience.

b. Coping Strategies and Adaptation Mechanisms

To overcome the emotional impact, participants employed various coping strategies and adaptation mechanisms that helped them endure and recover. Respondent B shared, *"I often talk with close friends and join campus communities so I don't stay trapped in sadness."* (Respondent B). These coping strategies highlight the vital role of social support in enhancing resilience (Fitri et al., 2025). Other strategies included engaging in positive activities, such as exercising and pursuing hobbies. These approaches demonstrate the creativity and determination of the participants in navigating difficult emotional experiences.

c. Social and Environmental Support

Support from family, peers, and the educational environment played a crucial role in fostering resilience. Respondent C noted, *"My extended family and friends were always there for me, giving encouragement and support that made me feel less alone."* (Respondent C). The presence of such support systems emerged as a key factor in strengthening psychological adaptation and recovery. These findings are consistent with social support theory, which emphasizes that strong social networks can mitigate the negative impact of trauma (Thoits, 2015).

d. The Role of Guidance and Counseling

University-based guidance and counseling services played an essential role in helping Generation Z students process the psychological impact of losing a father and in developing their resilience. Based on interview results, all three participants reported having accessed counseling services, albeit to varying degrees. Respondent C shared, *"I started going to counseling because I couldn't manage my sadness. The counselor helped me understand my feelings and gave me relaxation techniques that really helped."* (Respondent C).

These interventions provided students with a safe space to express emotions and learn effective coping strategies. Respondent B also emphasized the role of counselors in helping students rebuild motivation and set new goals: *“The counselor helped me focus on the future, not just the loss. That gave me more motivation for my studies.”* (Respondent B).

These findings support the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and other counseling methods in fostering student resilience (Aziz et al., 2024). However, some participants suggested that counseling services should be expanded and more tailored to meet the unique needs of Generation Z students.

3. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the resilience of Generation Z students who have lost their fathers is influenced by various interconnected internal and external factors. The significant psychological impact poses an initial challenge; however, through effective coping strategies, social support, and guidance and counseling services, students are able to build psychological resilience. These findings enrich the literature on guidance and counseling and underscore the importance of a holistic approach in addressing loss and trauma among university students.

Recent research by (Putri et al., 2025) highlights that one prominent internal factor in the resilience formation of Generation Z students is optimism toward the future. Students who are able to maintain positive expectations despite their loss tend to exhibit better emotional and cognitive recovery (Putri et al., 2025). This aligns with the current study’s respondents, who reconstructed life goals and enthusiasm through involvement in social activities, hobbies, and community support.

(Ulfa, 2024), in her study, also emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation and self-efficacy as dominant coping strategies among students from fatherless families. Students in such situations develop new ways to manage stress, such as through supportive interpersonal relationships and structured academic planning (Ulfa, 2024). This demonstrates that coping strategies are not merely reactive but also evolve proactively in response to psychological pressure.

Social support and guidance and counseling interventions play significant roles in fostering resilience among Generation Z students, as described by (Connor & Davidson, 2016) and (Aziz et al., 2024). In this context, counseling services function not only as a space for emotional venting but also as a means of emotional transformation and reconstruction of life meaning after loss. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based counseling has been proven effective in helping students manage cognitive distortions, develop self-efficacy, and design realistic long-term goals (Aziz et al., 2024).

(Lubis et al., 2025) assert that students experiencing fatherlessness are vulnerable to emotional disturbances such as feelings of inferiority, internalized anger, and difficulties adapting within academic environments. Therefore, empathetic and adaptive counseling services tailored to Generation Z’s characteristics are essential in campus settings (Lubis et al., 2025). The adaptation processes undertaken by participants also indicate that Generation Z possesses unique traits in responding to trauma, including a tendency to seek horizontal support (peer groups), use digital media as a means of expression, and rely on online communities as

psychosocial support. These aspects require deeper understanding by counseling practitioners to ensure intervention approaches are aligned with the values, language, and preferences of this generation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this qualitative study on the resilience of Generation Z university students who have lost a father figure, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. The loss of a father has a significant psychological impact, including feelings of sadness, emptiness, and loneliness, which affect students' mental well-being.
2. Students adopt various coping strategies, such as seeking social support from family and friends, engaging in positive activities, and shifting focus toward future goals as adaptive responses to trauma.
3. Social support from family, peers, and educational institutions plays a vital role in strengthening the resilience-building process.
4. University-based guidance and counseling services are effective in helping students manage their emotions and develop resilience through structured psychological interventions.
5. There is a growing need to expand and adapt counseling services to be more responsive to the unique characteristics and needs of Generation Z students.

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for the development of guidance and counseling services in higher education institutions. Universities should enhance both the accessibility and quality of counseling services using approaches that are tailored to the psychological profile of Generation Z students. In addition, training programs for counselors are essential to deepen their understanding of grief-related trauma among students, ensuring that the interventions provided are accurate, empathetic, and targeted. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to improve the overall quality of psychological support services for students who experience parental loss, enabling them to optimize both their academic and social potential.

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