



## Personal Growth in Women After Husband's Death

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### ABSTRACT

The death of a spouse is one of the saddest major life events. These events can cause trauma and make the individual's life negative. This phenomenon is in sync with the aim of this study is to reveal the process of post-traumatic growth and describe the aspects that affect post-traumatic growth. This study uses a qualitative analysis of the type of phenomenology. Furthermore, the analysis used is a theme analysis of the major themes expressed by the respondents. The sample is 6 widows who have been collected using purposive sampling. The semi-structured interview involved 4 questions. The findings of this study are the process of discovering post-traumatic growth such as how to do self-disclosure, carry out deep reflection and manage emotions until growth is achieved. PTG in the context of this research, such as the establishment of relationships with other people, the existence of new possibilities, self-strength is increasingly visible, spiritual changes are getting better and the appreciation of life is getting stronger. Individuals who have achieved growth will also develop more abilities than before, namely increasing relationships with others, new possibilities and patterns, recognizing inner strengths, increasing spirituality, and having new life priorities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Families are formed from values that are built together. Two people who are united in a marriage bond have noble values and goals (Maiti & Innamuri 2020). In research Dherayanti et al (2021) the purpose of marriage is to form a happy and peaceful family forever. Every day there are moments that are created that give birth to warmth and togetherness among family members. Out of control, these conditions may change. As in research Parlia, Sari, and Roudhotina (2018) Married life can change with the death of a spouse. The death of a partner can bring bad psychological effects such as depression, disappointment, deep sadness and so on (Nurfitri & Waringah 2019).

Losing a partner in a marriage is an unavoidable condition (Sitepu et al., 2021). Death in adulthood is more common in men than in women. The death of a spouse cannot be prevented, the consequences of which involve the breakdown of long-standing ties, the emergence of new roles and new statuses, and financial deprivation (Nurfitri & Waringah, 2019)

The problems experienced by women who have lost their partners are very complex. They have to raise their children alone. This is not easy for a widow because after all children who are growing and looking for identity will need a father figure. For a mother, to create a father figure who can be used as an example for her children, especially sons, is certainly not an easy thing. If this problem is not handled properly by the mother, it is not impossible that it will cause an identity crisis in the child (Zulfiana, 2013).

The death of a spouse also triggers the surviving partner to cope with grief and emotional stress. Based on the research conducted by the author, it is known that death has an impact on changes in parenting patterns and relationships faced by couples

who are still living with other people and themselves.

The most difficult time is the transition to being a single parent that occurs after the death of a spouse because faced with the challenges of raising young children, wives tend to spend time working and taking care of children, so that their duties to do household chores are disrupted. Some of them are unable to re-engage in social relationships, even friendships with others diminish after the death of a partner.

A phenomenon that occurs in society still views women who are widows with a negative view. The name widow, regardless of social class is a disgrace. Various stigmas are placed on them by the community who considers the best place for women to be beside their husbands. With him the social burden is imposed. Widowed because of divorce or left behind, the social burden is just as heavy. Without ever wanting to see the various causes or conditions for widowed women, society tends to judge and give bad labels and be cruel to widows.

Based on this phenomenon, the researcher conducted a pre-eliminatory to find problems related to widowhood after the death of her husband that occurred in the community, especially in Yogyakarta. This initial interview was conducted with one of the widows, named Mawar (not her real name). Mawar is a young widow who is 40 years old. Based on interviews conducted, it can be seen that Mawar experienced various problems after her husband died.

"Yo, the main bar, Mas S, died when I was crying all the time, I don't want to hang out. It's a shame that the photo doesn't print and doesn't keep it on display. For months, I might cry and go to the changing room for my children, it doesn't open. I'm in a quandary, maybe I just stay in the room, I don't like manganese, I don't want to hang

out, I just cry" (Pre-eliminary/initial interview)

From the previous data, it can be seen that Mawar has had quite complex problems since her husband died, including economic problems, sadness and emotional stress and stigma from the community where she lives. Mawar also has not been able to rise from the traumatic event she experienced so she cannot sell to fulfill her daily life and gets various impacts negative as a result of the event.

The existence of demands and the phenomenon of labeling from the community, it is necessary to have self-ability so that widows can rise from the pressures and trials of life they are facing, even though the death of a spouse can cause trauma and a negative influence on individuals, but not a few individuals can grow and develop. develop positively, and far from negative things as described by describing the experience or expression of positive life changes as a result of facing a crisis or traumatic event with the term Post Traumatic Growth. Post Traumatic Growth occurs because individuals rethink the meaning and purpose of life and assess their life priorities.

*Post-traumatic growth* begins with a period of crisis due to a shocking traumatic experience. Traumatic events often occur due to natural disasters, accidents, fires, rape, divorce and the death of a spouse (Hatta, 2016). Post traumatic growth is important for widows after the death of their husbands so they can rise and develop positively after going through the crisis struggles in their lives.

Furthermore Rahayu (2016) explaining post-traumatic growth will be meaningful if it coexists with conditions that are threatening and devastating and sometimes even coexist with psychological stress. Women who have lost a partner not only struggle with their problems but turn the traumatic experience into one that is

valuable and beyond their previous capabilities.

Of course there are significant changes when a wife experiences loneliness, deep sadness, difficulty getting a job, and so on. Widows need to get up and do activities that can trigger the stability of thoughts and feelings. That way, widows don't need to feel worried or worried about their previous helplessness. As in research Fernandez and Soedagijono (2018) related to this research, namely when the wife gets a disaster for the death of her husband, the longer her mind can accept this fact, and try to become a better person and rise from adversity through resilience. The women in this study made major changes in their lives to continue living.

Unstable conditions and not handled properly will have an impact *snowball* against suicide, *severe stress or post-traumatic stress disorder*. If this condition is not taken seriously, the impact of snowball on this case will be even greater, one of which will experience *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* (Rahayu, 2016). The impact of the husband's death may lead to pessimism, trauma, decreased life expectancy and so on so it is necessary to prevent it by supporting the widow psychologically.

Based on the previous explanation, post-traumatic growth is needed by widows after the death of their husbands so that in the future widows can rise up, receive positive impacts and function better than before. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting research with the title "**Personal Growth in Women After Husband's Death**" Because there is still little research on this phenomenon in Indonesia. So far, previous researchers have only focused on the negative impact after an individual experiences a life crisis.

This study aims to reveal how the process of personal growth in women who experience the death of their husbands. The

second is to describe aspects of personal growth in widows.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The variable in this study is single, namely personal growth or post traumatic growth. Through qualitative study methods so that this research can be completed. Qualitative research is this research design that uses a phenomenological approach. This approach was chosen because the researcher wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the individual towards himself. Researchers try to understand the subject from the point of view of the subject itself, by not neglecting to make interpretations, by making conceptual schemas.

The subjects in this study were 6 widows according to the characteristics determined by the researcher. The characteristics of the research subjects used in this study are:

- a. A widow (husband dies)
- b. Experienced a traumatic event (husband dies) at least 1.5 years from now.
- c. Domiciled in Central Java
- d. Willing to be a research subject indicated by the informed consent signed by the subject.

The data collected is in the form of subject experience data through interviews and observations. The measurement tools are using interview guides and recording devices. Researchers in this study bring important things that contain the main topics that will be asked. The important things contain the main topics that will be asked, namely:

- a. What happened to the subject at the time of the death of her husband?
- b. How is the process of the subject in dealing with traumatic events until finally experiencing growth?
- c. What factors made the subject able to get through the crisis? And

- d. What positive impacts or lessons can be taken by the subject?

*Thematic analysis* one way to analyze data with the aim of identifying patterns or to find themes through data that has been collected by researchers. This method is a very effective method if a study intends to explore in detail the qualitative data they have in order to find the linkage of patterns in a phenomenon and explain the extent to which a phenomenon occurs through the eyes of the researcher. By using a phenomenological perspective, in this process the researcher takes important statements that arise, then group them into larger units of information called the "theme" unit.

## RESEARCH RESULT

### Research subject

This study was conducted in Yogyakarta and Sukorejo, Central Java, on widows who experienced major life events in the death of their husbands. The reason the researcher chose the cities of Yogyakarta and Sukorejo was because in both areas there were several widows who were willing to be research subjects. The subjects in this study were 6 women aged 40 years and over and were widows who experienced major life events or were left by their spouse due to death. 3 subjects are domiciled in Yogyakarta while the other 3 subjects are domiciled in Sukorejo, Central Java.

### Self-Disclosure with a Specific Theme Post Traumatic Growth Process

This theme describes the process through which subjects who experience traumatic events in their lives can finally grow from the traumatic experience. Traumatic experiences are also known as shocking experiences, major life crises, stressful circumstances and unwanted

negative experiences. One of the traumatic events is the death of a spouse.

Subject 1.

"I was hospitalized 10 days later, complications, previously there was a disease but healthy once every month, control and take medicine, the medicine is dexamethasone if you don't take it, you are afraid of inflammation, but the drug causes your immune system to decrease. In the last 10 days, complications between the liver and lungs continued to enter the ICU at 11 o'clock in the afternoon but when I was still conscious, I didn't think I was going to die, at that time my son wanted to take a national exam for junior high school, Ms.

At the beginning of the crisis situation the subject constantly thinks about the problems he faces and interferes with the subject's life. This distracting contemplation causes emotional stress such as decreased physical health, namely weight loss of up to several kilos and having to take sedatives. Subjects also experienced feelings of loss, lack of confidence in living without a husband, lost interest in carrying out daily activities and received negative stigma from the environment. Here is an excerpt from his interview:

Subject 5.

"I was so devastated, I was so down I couldn't even think at that moment I was in shock.." (NJ: W1: L:196-217)

"In the beginning, when I remember cooking, I cry..."

"If I remember every day I remember, especially when I bring my father's cellphone and see the status of his office friends, I'm on the road if someone wears doreng clothes like that, I immediately feel bad"

"It's lonely, if the children are playing alone and at home I feel lonely, oh God, apparently not having a husband,

it feels different, there is no friend in life, there is no friend to confide in"

"At first I was sad, so stressed, now when I'm stressed, I don't play right away"

"The economy, the nominal is really drastically different, I'm down and in shock"

While struggling with emotional stress, the six subjects were also involved in self-disclosure such as talking/telling to friends or children, praying and expressing sadness to Allah SWT as well as working and meeting other people in an activity as an effort to reduce their distress.

Along with self-disclosure, the six subjects were also assisted by support from the social environment (family, children, friends) who were able to increase their sense of enthusiasm. Support from the social environment makes the subject more motivated to fight. The findings in this study also reveal that the support of a new person (lover) can help them to rise. The subject also has a desire / drive in himself, as well as a spiritual role that can provide peace.

With self-disclosure, it makes negative assumptions that have been formed previously, such as doubts about being able to continue living without a husband, losing their dependents, and confusion turning into more positive ones. The subject also begins to break away from the previous life goals and changes the schema about the traumatic event. The subject begins a deeper contemplation such as the death of the husband is part of God's destiny, and the subject must continue to struggle because the children still need them. This makes the subject rethink his experience and encourages cognitive changes that lead to positive self-development. The following is an excerpt from the interview with the subject:

Subject 2.

"I'm sad but immediately remember my child I can't be sad I have to be excited if I get sick later what now I and my child if I want to play I go straight away tomorrow I think tomorrow"

*"The point is, every time I remember my child, my child will immediately rise even though it was dim"*

"if I'm down, feel sorry for the child"

The existence of contemplation and changes in destructive ways of thinking to better ways of thinking, as well as self-disclosure by praying and telling stories and getting support from the social environment are able to make subjects manage their distress and reach the stage of achieving positive post-traumatic changes, namely being able to undergo live with more enjoyment.

Subject 2.

"If you want to play now, if you're sad, it's still there, but life goes on now, let's just enjoy it."

### **Self-Disclosure and Main Themes in Post Traumatic Growth**

This theme discusses the improvement of aspects possessed by the subject after developing post traumatic growth.

#### **a. Relationships with other people**

One aspect of post-traumatic growth is relationships with other people where individuals have closer, more intimate, and more meaningful relationships with other people. In this study the subject improves relationships with family, friends, and children. Changes in the relationship with the family are shown by maintaining communication even though they are far apart so that the relationship is closer.

Changes in relationships with friends are shown by increasing friendship and

maintaining communication through social media. Meanwhile, changes in relationships with children are shown by increasing the time spent with children such as going out, playing, and sharing so that the relationship becomes more meaningful.

#### **b. New possibilities**

The subject begins to discover new possibilities in his life or takes on a new and different pattern of life after experiencing a traumatic experience such as having new interests, new activities and starting life in a new way. Interests and new activities carried out by the subject such as cultivating orchids, playing social media, selling durian and tempeh and being interested in routinely participating in gymnastics and cycling. The new pattern of life is indicated by a change in a more adaptive mindset such as not thinking about other people's views of him and making himself more useful.

#### **c. Strength within**

Another aspect that shows that the subject has experienced growth is a change in the form of increasing personal strength or being able to recognize their own strengths such as being more independent in improving household affairs which are usually handled by their husbands (electricity), taking care of their own home, being stronger and patient in dealing with children. , can control themselves and can seek help when needed.

#### **d. Spiritual change**

Subjects also showed changes in development in terms of spirituality and religion such as stronger belief in religion, improvements in worship such as obligatory prayers at the beginning of time, and performing Duha and Tahajud prayers. Subjects also feel closer to Allah, become more grateful, attend recitation

activities every week, desire to learn the Koran, believe that Allah is the only helper, and can take lessons from traumatic events.

e. Life award

Another aspect that is owned by the subject is a change in what is a priority and important in his life. Subjects also experienced an increase in appreciation for the things they had. Changes in priorities and important things in life are shown by focusing on children, partners, and work. While the increase in appreciation is shown by appreciating and being grateful for whatever they have in life.

## DISCUSSION

The six subjects revealed that they experienced emotional stress in the form of protracted sadness, loss of interest in carrying out daily activities, feelings of loss, negative stigma from the environment due to being a widow, neglecting children, self-isolation, loneliness, and destructive thoughts such as feelings of disloyalty. , life becomes chaotic and worries about the future. Same with research results Pitarasari and Cahyono (2014) which supports the findings of this study that individuals feel loss, feelings of being unwilling to accept reality, and deep sadness. Individuals also feel that their lives are messed up by taking sleeping pills every day.

From this research, it is known that self-disclosure in someone can reduce emotional stress. Individuals carry out appropriate coping strategies so that they can reduce their emotional stress. The same coping strategies are also addressed in the same way as the research results Lubis (2018) with this research, namely by selling or being more productive to meet daily needs. The results of this study are also appreciated from the results of research Jonathan and Herdiana (2020) that planned problem solving, coping, seeking social

support, positioning oneself, positive reassessment, self-control, responsibility and acceptance.

Seeking social support can be done by telling the story to others. Trauma and efforts to survive can help trauma survivors to bring out their emotional side about the events they experienced. In addition, through stories, trauma survivors can create intimacy and feel more accepted by others.

Social support or close relationships with other people are an important part of PTG. This statement was confirmed by Nalle and Soetjningsih (2020) that social support from family, friends or other people significantly reduces negative and traumatic stigma on individuals. Individuals who lost their husbands no longer feel lonely and look forward to tomorrow for the sake of their families. Social support is not always positive, research results Fitri et al., (2020) contrary to the results of this study. The study explained that there was no significant effect of social support on reducing anxiety in the elderly.

In addition to social support, another important part is the emergence of self-power. In accordance with the findings of this study, individuals find their strength and self-control in dealing with difficult situations. No wonder the results of this study are the same as the findings Sari et al., (2019) that a widow is strong, able to overcome her difficulties effectively and resiliently.

From the research, it is known that the drive or desire in oneself as well as a sense of optimism have a large enough contribution in achieving growth. Individuals are aware that before becoming a wife, they both go through the process of marriage. Significant growth in widowhood was initiated by individual beliefs at the beginning of marriage as well as research results Permana and Medynna (2021) that marriage is a commitment to understanding

each other, tolerating differences, trusting each other, and being faithful forever.

In addition to social support and inner desire, individuals often turn to religious and spiritual beliefs when facing problems (Milam & Schmidt, 2018). In this study, spiritual factors also help the subject overcome the crisis. This is indicated by the six subjects who are automatically moved to carry out spiritual and religious activities in the form of contemplation, *istighfar*, surrender to Allah, prayer and reading the Qur'an when remembering their late husband. Subjects revealed that doing spiritual and religious activities can give them inspiration and serenity. Spiritual factors also help the subjects to be grateful because even though their husbands are dead, Allah still gives them the blessings of health and sufficient fortune.

With the blessings of Allah, the individual feels a positive impact in his life such as being able to interpret his life perfectly. The subject also initiates deeper contemplation. This makes the subject rethink his experience and encourages cognitive changes that lead to positive self-development. The subject also experienced a change in schema from the initial belief that they would not be able to live without a husband to positive thoughts such as if the subject did not rise and continued to fall, they could get sick and die and would neglect their children. The statement is marked significantly by the results of the study Sholehuddin (2021) that blessing is an incomparable gift of God so that individuals feel their lives are better.

The subject also continues to develop a schema that children still need love, need protection from a mother, and need fulfillment because life goes on, so that if the subject does nothing and only sinks into stressful events, the negative impact will be experienced. become bigger. This cognitive reconstruction and schema change then

lead the subject to rise from the crisis, and start working and fixing the life that had been neglected. Differences in research findings Lely et al., (2022) much different from this study. These differences occur because individuals are not able to develop better personal growth such as a decrease in self-ability and quality of life.

Another aspect that the subject has is a change in priorities such as focusing more on children (including providing for, caring for, educating children) and focusing on developing the work they have and themselves. Prioritizing children, work and themselves is an important thing in their lives today.

Apart from that, being a single parent requires all research subjects to play a dual role as father and mother for their children. The existence of these dual roles initially made all subjects feel quite difficult because they could not carry out the role of a mother as a whole because their children were in a period of development that needed the attention and care of a mother to foster a sense of security. subject also works.

The findings in this study state that the time interval required for an individual to be able to grow is different. Individuals can achieve growth soon after the traumatic event occurs, but some individuals take longer. This study found that post-traumatic growth can be achieved after 6 months of facing a crisis period. Furthermore, the emergence of post-traumatic growth in the six subjects was influenced by two factors, namely internal factors (desire or encouragement in oneself, spiritual roles) and external factors in the form of social support from children, friends, and family. In addition, the existence of self-disclosure in the six subjects is also an important role in achieving growth.

The death of a husband is an event that makes a wife very sad. Sadness does not need to be pushed aside but felt



(Lianawati, 2020). A woman must take action to move on with her life. In fact, one journal saw that women were more independent even without a partner. As in research Florence and Hasanuddin (2021) that women carry out positive activities to relieve their sadness by being active in village activities, entrepreneurship and working as laborers. Women seem to rediscover their strength from sad events in the past.

The strengths of this study include revealing the process of post-traumatic growth in widows of major life events, husband's death, which had not previously been studied by using data collection methods in the form of interviews to obtain in-depth and complete data regarding post-traumatic growth. However, this study has a weakness, namely that interviewing data for several subjects can only be done after the subject has finished working so that the subject is quite tired during the interview.

## CONCLUSION

Post-traumatic growth in widows after major life events husband's death can be described by a positive increase in the six subjects. As for the positive aspects of improvement in the findings of this study, among others, is the increase in relationships with other people, namely the subject is able to establish closer relationships and is able to spend time with other people (children, family and friends). Subjects also experienced an increase in aspects of new possibilities in the form of their ability to change their lifestyle for the better and have new interests in activities, organizations, businesses and other activities that have never been followed before.

Another aspect of improvement found in this study is inner strength in the form of the subject's ability to recognize their inner strength. Next is the improvement of aspects in matters of spirituality and

religion. There was a positive increase achieved by the subjects with a process that was not easy starting from experiencing a traumatic event that caused emotional distress, negative reflection, making self-disclosure to others and God, and going through a process of deeper reflection until finally being able to grow through the wound. and develop positive improvements.

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