2023, Vol. 22, No. 64



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> Data zgłoszenia: 19.10.2023 Data akceptacji: 10.11.2023 Data publikacji: 29.12.2023

Dealing With Death: Crisis and Resilience in Adolescent Boys Radzenie sobie ze śmiercią. Kryzys i odporność u dorastających chłopców

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The research investigates how young boys progress in life after the loss of their fathers. It explores the adjustments they make, the coping mechanisms they develop to navigate life, and the male roles they assume in the family. Additionally, it examines how family can aid and support their coping and adjustment process.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: This study utilises a case study methodology focused on gaining an understanding of the lives of two adolescent boys who experienced the death of their fathers in the early formative years of their lives.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The paper focuses on five themes- family dynamics, life transitions with and without their fathers, post-loss reassignment of family roles, present circumstances, and future goals.

RESEARCH RESULTS: A qualitative analysis of the data revealed that participants' belief systems, family support, and striving toward future goals helped them to be resilient in this event.

CONCLUSIONS RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: While most research typically emphasises the negative impacts of death on people, this study demonstrates how individuals' can be resilient, dependent on both person-related factors and environmental factors. To help adolescents who are grieving become resilient, the paper offers intervention and coping strategies through counselling, the availability of support networks, and combined efforts by the state and educational institutions.

→ KEYWORDS :	ADOLESCENTS, DEATH, FATHER, RESILIENCE, CASE STUDY
STRESZCZENIE	

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest zbadanie sposobów radzenia sobie w życiu przez młodych chłopców doświadczających straty ojca. Artykuł koncentruje się na badaniu zmian wprowadzanych przez chłopców, rozwijaniu mechanizmów radzenia sobie w życiu oraz przyjmowanych męskich



rolach w rodzinie. Dodatkowo autor analizuje sposoby, za pomocą których rodzina może wesprzeć proces radzenia sobie w życiu i przystosowania po śmierci ojca.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: W niniejszym badaniu wykorzystano studium przypadku skupioną na zrozumieniu życia dwóch dorastających chłopców, którzy doświadczyli w dzieciństwie śmierci ojców.

PROCES WYWODU: Artykuł skupia się na pięciu tematach: dynamice rodziny, przemianach życiowych z ojcami i bez nich, zmianie ról rodzinnych po stracie ojców, obecnej sytuacji i przyszłych celach.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Jakościowa analiza danych ujawniła, że systemy przekonań uczestników, wsparcie rodzinne i dążenie do przyszłych celów pomogły im zachować odporność w tym doświadczeniu.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Chociaż większość badań zazwyczaj podkreśla negatywny wpływ śmierci bliskich osób na ludzi, niniejsze badanie pokazuje, w jaki sposób – w zależności zarówno od czynników osobistych, jak i czynników środowiskowych – jednostki mogą nabrać odporności na tak trudne doświadczenia życiowe. Pomocą w takich sytuacjach mogą służyć przedstawione w artykule strategie interwencji i radzenia sobie dzięki poradnictwu, dostępności sieci wsparcia oraz połączonych wysiłków państwa i instytucji edukacyjnych.

→ SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: MŁODZIEŻ, ŚMIERĆ, OJCIEC, ODPORNOŚĆ, STUDIUM PRZYPADKU

Introduction

Death is an unavoidable part of life, and its occurrence within a family triggers profound stress, marking a critical moment for those mourning a relative's passing. Comparable only to divorce, the impact of death demands the most significant readjustment, especially for children (Gersten et al., 1974). The advent of modernity saw the establishment of laws and institutions intended to lessen the significance of death in human affairs. The end of life became intimately associated with family emotions. With enhanced material security, death transformed into an entity perceived as wild, alien, and metaphysical – more a medical concern than a natural occurrence. By the early twentieth century, death had become a taboo, a subject not talked about, mired in silence (Ariès, 1975; Gulati, 2021).

The loss of a family member precipitates a crisis both for the individual and the family unit. Yet, some family relationships and dynamics help individuals to confront life's adversities and emerge resilient. While research typically underscores death's negative effects on the family, there is a growing focus on familial strength and resilience. The 'salutogenic' model, introduced by Antonovsky and Sourani (1988) and prevalent in health sciences, reorients the emphasis on wellness rather than disease or suffering. Antonovsky's

(1987) study on Holocaust survivors suggests that resilience and positive outcomes are possible, underscoring the importance of understanding coping strategies in the face of life's adversities. Therefore, it is important to understand coping mechanisms as crucial to explore the negative consequences of stress. This viewpoint promotes resilience and optimism.

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover from life's setbacks, a trait observed in individuals who effectively overcome adversity (Garmezy, 1991; Werner, 1995; Walsh, 1996; Masten, 2001). Garmezy (1991) distinguished three protective factors – personal characteristics, familial relationships, and outside support networks – that enhance resilience. Additionally, resilient individuals often exhibit strong social skills, communicate effectively, pursue hobbies that enrich their lives, and possess a confident belief in their actions (Werner, 1995). It is the individual's responsibility to devise strategies or adopt practices that enable them to rebound from adversities and withstand stress. Children cultivate resilience through their thoughts, their physical well-being, and their interactions within their communities, families, and support networks. This resilience is embodied in the "everyday magic of the ordinary" (Masten, 2001).

This paper investigates how young boys progress in life after the loss of their fathers. It explores the adaptations they make, the skills they develop to navigate life, and the masculine roles they assume. Additionally, it examines the family's influence in supporting their coping and adjustment process.

Research Method and Tools

The paper is an excerpt from broader doctoral research on adolescent boys in an urban Indian setting, specifically focusing on a senior secondary school in urban Delhi. The school serves middle-income families from the surrounding area, with most children having one educated parent and another in active employment, typically with mothers not employed outside the home. The case study methodology centers on two young men from this school who experienced the death of their fathers due to medical conditions during their formative years. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, who formed the wider sample of the study.

Initial interviews were conducted face-to-face at the school to establish rapport, with subsequent interviews carried out telephonically, a method preferred for its convenience given the geographic dispersion of participants and the sensitive nature of the discussions. Over three weeks, semi-structured interviews were conducted using a general interview guide (Patton, 2002) to ensure comprehensive coverage of pertinent topics. These interviews aimed to explore the participants' life stories, focusing on five themes: family dynamics, life changes with and without their fathers, reallocation of familial roles post-loss, current circumstances, and future aspirations.

The first-person narratives were constructed to minimize the researcher's influence, fostering a document that emerged from the researcher-participant collaboration.



The telephonic interviews, each lasting between thirty to forty minutes, occurred over five sessions. This methodological choice promoted a comfortable atmosphere, enabling participants to disclose complex details of their lives. The interview questions were initially open-ended and evolved as the research progressed, following the direction indicated by the participants' responses.

Data analysis involved narrative analysis of the interview transcripts and manual coding in two cycles. The first cycle applied descriptive codes such as 'loss,' 'memory,' and 'support,' while the second cycle utilized analytical codes like 'beliefs in the face of trauma.' In the coding cycle, 'grief processing' captured participants' shift from sorrow to acceptance post-loss. 'Peer support' codes reflected the solace found in friends' companionship. 'Educational aspirations' were evident in the determination to excel academically in honour of their fathers. 'Problem-solving' codes denoted strategies like engaging in extracurricular activities for coping. Lastly, 'goal setting' highlighted their future planning, underlining a commitment to family stability and personal career success. These coding processes led to categories that encapsulated the study's significant findings.

The participants of the study hail from middle-class backgrounds, a demographic characterized by aspirations for rights, security, and economic stability (Solimano, 2014). Typically, these individuals are urban dwellers, engaged in white-collar professions, proficient in English, and thus, positioned to take advantage of new private sector opportunities (Fernandes, 2006). Amidst economic liberalization, this class continues to forge its identity.

Anmol's story begins when he was just months old, as his father passed away. Raised in a joint family that includes his mother, two elder sisters, and his maternal uncle's family, Anmol sees his uncle as a paternal figure who guides and supports him in educational and financial matters. Anmol conjectures that his uncle may have provided him with a level of fatherly support that his biological father might not have matched. Currently, Anmol and his mother, in collaboration with his uncle, manage his father's business.

Conversely, Mrinal's nuclear family, which comprises his mother, younger sister, and himself, faced his father's demise when Mrinal was in the eighth grade. Their family stays connected with his paternal uncle's family, who live nearby. Mrinal's mother, a homemaker, oversees the family's financial welfare through the income generated from properties that his father had previously rented out.

Analysis

The following section discusses the analysis of the data. Discussions on Hindu belief system of detachment and fate recurred in Mrinal's conversations while a striving to become responsible by fulfilling set goals was dominant in Anmol's responses.

Fatalism

According to Dennett (1984), fatalism holds that certain things happen for a reason and cannot be changed. In Mrinal's narratives, this notion appears as a recurring theme. He shares: "Whatever is meant to happen, always happens, no matter what. The more I think about things that have happened in my life, the more I will feel bad about them. Whatever happens is for the best. God only knows that this was the best option possible." He acknowledges that fate plays a role in life's events, especially those beyond his control: "In events that are not in my control, what can I do? How can I react? The maximum I can do is cry. I could have not done anything more than this when my father died." He shares his approach to life's challenges: "I don't overthink about anything. Things take their course."

The concept of fatalism suggests that there is only one possible result, regardless of cause, particularly in significant life events such as death. Mrinal sees the death of his father through this lens. He remembers spending time with his father and his subsequent death during Mrinal's adolescence, "I spent twelve to thirteen years of my life with him. I remember that he passed away due to diabetes when I was in class eighth." His thoughts reveal a fundamentalist view of fatalism, where life's crucial events, such as his father's passing, are seen as predetermined. Mrinal's recollection of his father's life, tainted with health issues such as diabetes, chest pain, and addiction, unfolds a narrative where causation is observed but ultimately gives in to fate:

All these may have led to his ill health and possibly his death. But, I understand it only now, after his death. At that time, I was too young to intervene and maybe stop his drinking. What had to happen, happened.

Currently, Mrinal is dealing with a ligament injury in his right knee that has impacted his future plans. He is proactively adjusting his goals, and shares that he intends to study abroad: "I have undergone surgery. Now, I am planning to take up a course in Canada and achieve a work permit to manage my expenditures." He has taken concrete steps towards this goal, and has obtained an IELTS certificate.

He does not place blame since he believes that all of the events in his life – both good and bad – were predestined. This viewpoint also applies to his connections with other people, as he maintains a sense of detachment: "Life hasn't changed much for me. In my relationships with my mother, friends, and siblings too, I maintain a distance and make sure not to form a deep connection. It is because a connection leads to expectations and added pressure to fulfill those expectations."

In Mrinal's statements, fate and karma emerge as predominant beliefs. These ideas affect his belief that the things that happen in life are predetermined and will shape him in the future. He advocates a way of thinking that sees life developing calmly and sees every incident as a component of a bigger, predestined design.

His spiritual detachment acts as a coping mechanism for loss, grief, and uncertainty. By refraining from seeking detailed explanations and instead trusting in the power of



destiny, Mrinal prepares himself for whatever the future may hold. His convictions support the modern worldview where the spiritual is the central part of the narrative.

Responsibility and Aspirations

In contrast to Mrinal, Anmol's story paints a picture of a young man navigating the complexities of responsibility and aspirations within the fabric of family and society.

My mother provided me with everything I wanted, from food to leisure and travel. She sacrificed a lot for me. When there was a choice to be made about whether me or my sister will get the new book, or go to a better school, I was chosen. When there was a choice to be made about buying me a school uniform or buying extra groceries or utensils for the kitchen, I was given the extra privilege. My sister did not get the same privilege. So yes, both my mother and my sister sacrificed a lot for me

he shares, acknowledging the sacrifices made for his upbringing. Yet, he can realise his opportunities given his sister's limited educational options brought about by their economic situation, highlighting the differences in his family.

Currently, Anmol is studying aviation and hospitality and manages his expenses of rent, food, and travel from the stipend he receives. He declined to accept any financial assistance from the family. He acknowledges that money is a problem, but managing with limited resources is his only option. He says, "Lack of money does create problems for me but I will have to sacrifice to live." Instead of spending money on leisure and timepass (Jeffrey, 2010); he wants to utilise it for helping his family, upgrading their financial status, and fulfilling their aspirations. He says, "I now realise the importance of money in times of need. In future, I will always use money judiciously, spend it only when needed and not on anything unimportant." The eligibility for the course he is pursuing is a secondary school certificate. He is now acquiring skills and on-the-job training-operating computer software, personality grooming, and nuances of public relationships. He intends to learn the German language and seek training in a computer course that he dropped to pursue hospitality training.

Keeping his family at the centre, Anmol wants to take decisions that ensure the well-being, safety, and quality of life of his family members. He understands that in a neoliberal economy, an individual cannot expect the welfare state to take complete responsibility for the solution of social problems such as in the case of unemployment. There is a 'privatization of risk management;' which suggests that it is the duty of citizens to make plans for the future while considering the risks that are related to their current situation (Miller & Rose, 2008, pp. 214–215). Anmol believes that his family's status will improve with multiple sources of income. In addition, he speaks English well, which raises his status and makes it more likely that he will be hired and paid higher. His 'fitness' for the workforce (Fernandes, 2006, p. 91) would be assessed based on these achievements and values of freedom, responsibility, personal growth, capability, and decisiveness (Gooptu, 2013; Lukose, 2009).

In addition, he aspires to be a better version of himself – one who makes judgements with greater maturity and insight. He admits,

with responsibilities, we learn new things. We see the world differently than how we saw it as a child or teenager [...] now I focus on ways to improve myself. I was hesitant to talk to people earlier. But I have gotten over that fear now. I deliberately try to meet new people everyday... I want my family to see that I have done good for myself. I want to hear that Dipen Mehta's son [he is referring to his father, name changed] is doing well in his life.

Dickey (2010) talks about the pressures placed on the middle class to uphold social norms, spend responsibly, be moral, and never make errors. The middle class occupies the centre and is constantly under surveillance.

Anmol works towards his dream of becoming significant and visible, every single day. He wants to get to the point where his identity is shaped by his work and income. He says

like when you have to climb up a mountain, you need to put one forward, and gradually you reach the top. I think in the same manner for my progress now. I will progress a bit every day. The sooner I become mature, the sooner my family will be relieved.

He clearly voices a need for recognition. The three most obvious indicators of middle-class status are employment, family income, and small-property ownership (Dickey, 2010). Without them, middle-class people risk becoming marginalised, invisible to society, and hated as the underclass. This impacts them emotionally and motivates them.

Anmol shares

Up until class XII, I hadn't thought of earning. But then I realized that if I don't earn, I will not be independent. Even my own family will not want to respect me. They will ridicule me. I should work. So now, the stipend that I get from my training gives me a sense of 'being', I don't feel like a burden, I don't feel useless.

The idea of work and earning the respect of family get inextricably linked, a feature of the 'modern.' The Webererian "spirit of capitalism" is evident in Anmol's narrative as he upholds values of hard work, discipline, and rational pursuit of economic gain (Weber, 1958). The Protestant work ethic helped to create a cultural framework that fostered the development of capitalism by encouraging these behaviors. Over time, this ethic itself became more secularized. The 'spirit of capitalism' thus, became an autonomous force, and the pursuit of wealth for its own sake became a central aspect of modern economic life, regardless of religious background. The value of life itself and success is drawn from economic productivity and Anmol has internalised this.



Results

Responsibility

In modern capitalism, young men often navigate their worth through the prisms of their production and labour, which is further exacerbated by middle-class ideology. The unique position of these 'boys-at-risk' with little parental support, accentuates their sense of responsibility, value drawn from work, productivity, and economic contribution to the family. The evolving nature of work shapes personal values, highlighting a corrosion of character in the face of the new capitalism's flexibility demands. We find Young's (1958) idea of meritocracy at play here, where success supposedly stems from one's intelligence and effort. This is a beguiling yet reductionist view that underlies the complexities of social mobility. At the same time, we find that social capital is dwindling, which once buttressed the individual's sense of worth beyond mere economic outputs (Putnam, 2000). It is through work and economic productivity that validation and self-worth are derived.

Following Putnam, we may argue for a social realignment and recalibration where an individual's sense of worth is drawn not merely from the money he/she earns, but instead is drawn from social bonds and community engagement. Especially in the context of young people who have suffered the loss of an earning parent, counseling and social support need to emphasize these aspects, which enhance individual well-being and the robustness of the broader society.

Family

Participants of this study, Anmol & Mrinal, display resilience in the event of loss of their earning parent. The existence of social connections and familial bonds with mothers, siblings and extended family help develop this resilient attitude emphasized by Trask-Tate et al. (2010), Yates et al. (2003), and Walsh (2012), which is directly in line with Antonovsky's (1987) concept of Sense of Coherence. This model proposes that in coping with stressful situations individuals understand the situation (comprehensibility), handle it (manageability), and make sense of the experience of it (meaningfulness). The boys are able to find predictability and emotional consistency in their family, leading to a sense of comprehensibility. They also find financial support and mentoring that reinforces the manageability component of Sense of Coherence by assuring them that they have the means to overcome their obstacles. This network of support embodies the belief that they can overcome their challenging circumstances.

Fatalism

Finally, the boys', especially Mrinal's, search for comfort in spiritual practices and beliefs, reflects the meaningfulness element of Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence. In the

face of hardship, Mrinal is able to find meaning and purpose in life. In the Hindu concepts of detachment and accepting fate's dominance, Mrinal finds peace and direction. Their general resilience can be attributed to this spiritual viewpoint in conjunction with the caring support of his family and friends, which is consistent with Garmezy's (1991) protective factors. When taken as a whole, these components create a powerful Sense of Coherence that helps both young men to navigate their loss and maintain a trajectory towards positive development and well-being.

Conclusion

The present research highlights the experience of the death of a family member and the display of resilience by young boys. It can be concluded that resilience is dependent on factors both internal and external to the individual. Trait resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993), based on personality-related factors such as attitudes of belief in a higher power, dedicated efforts, responsible conduct, and external factors such as emotional support from family, guidance from mentors, and availability of financial means contribute to navigating crisis situations.

Popularising counseling services for individuals who have experienced the loss of a family member can be a positive step in encouraging resilience. It can enhance resilience by providing individuals with the required support, skills, and strategies. Specific therapies that modify cognitive processes (Kalisch et al., 2015) leading to control of stress reactions can be employed. Affected individuals can be supported to modify maladaptive cognitive processes into more adaptive patterns of thought to produce positive emotional and behavioral responses (Beck, 1964). Teaching acceptance and mindfulness skills (Hayes, 2006) can also help foster resilient responses and better adjustment to conditions arising from the loss.

In practice, interventions aimed at improving health should focus on enhancing an individual's sense of coherence by providing tools to understand and manage stressors and by reinforcing the belief that life's challenges are meaningful and worth engaging with (Antonovsky, 1987). Some useful strategies can be offering clear and comprehensive information about the loss and its implications to facilitate comprehensibility, teaching effective problem-solving, stress reduction, and self-care techniques, strengthening individuals' support networks, and allowing expression of emotions to facilitate manageability and discussing and exploring individuals' values and beliefs while connecting the loss to a broader sense of purpose of life to facilitate meaningfulness. Walsh (1996) also proposes an outline of key processes effective in building resilience focusing on belief systems such as developing transcendence and spirituality, organizational patterns of openness to change and mobilization of community networks, and problem-solving techniques focusing on helping individuals make new goals and achieve them.

Facilitation of resilience in adolescents must be a shared responsibility of the state, school, and community. Interventions at each level ensure stronger support and navigation for adolescents.



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Source of funding Lack of funding sources.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).