



Social Support as A Protective Factor for Widows' Resilience: A Systematic Literatur Review

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Highlights

- This research presents the topic of resilience and social support for widows whose husbands have died.
- This topic has not been widely researched so that it can be used as a research suggestion by other researchers who wish to discuss what are the reinforcing factors felt by widow

Abstract

The most difficult loss is the loss of a life partner. The death of a spouse is not easily accepted by individuals, especially by women, because they have to bear all the stressors. After the death of a spouse, widows make adjustments in carrying out multiple roles, facing negative stigma from society related to their widowhood. Resilience is needed by individuals to be able to survive in difficult circumstances. The ability of resilience in individuals depends on how much social support is obtained as an individual protective factor in dealing with pressure. This study aims to determine resilience in widows after the death of their spouse based on social support. This study uses a systematic literature review method by reviewing research articles published from 2013-2023, using online databases including Science Direct, Scopus, ResearchGate, Academia, SAGE Pub. Based on review, we have found 10 articles are strongly selected to be reviewed. The keywords used to search for articles were "Resilience Widows" and "Social Support" and "Widowhood". The purpose of this study is was to determine the social support received by widows. The research design uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The criteria for articles reviewed are international based articles, using qualitative, quantitative and mix method with widow participants. The results found that the social support that widows need is social support that comes from family and relatives with the availability of sympathy, worry and attention to helps widows get through the grieving process and reduce the negative consequence of loss. Therefore, social support has an important role as a protective factor for widows' resilience in managing stressors and helping the proactive coping process.

Keywords: Social Support; Resilience; Widow; Systematic Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Families faced with loss experience unusual stressors and find changes in their lives. The loss of someone in the family causes changes in various aspects such as changes in structural and functional patterns and has the potential to cause a loss of roles and responsibilities that disrupt the normal functioning of the family (Bowen, 2018). This requires families to be able to adapt and reorganize roles and responsibilities with the aim of regaining coherence in the family. The most difficult loss is the loss of a life partner. The death of a spouse is not easily accepted by individuals, especially by women, because they have to bear all the stressors. After the death of a spouse, widows make adjustments in carrying out multiple roles, facing negative stigma from society related to their widowhood. Widowhood is considered the most stressful life event which influences mental and physical health of the individual negatively. Indeed widowhood is a natural phenomenon but it becomes a curse especially for a female who is already considered a secondary living entity in society, and demise of husband itself creates a vacuum in her life in the form of scarcity of emotional, mental and social support.

Grief is the process of dealing with death and each person has a different grieving process and duration. The grief process can be projected in various ways such as denial, anger, depression and acceptance. Death is a traumatic event that makes individuals feel lonely, devastated, and affects health conditions. As a predisposition, a person needs to face stressful situations or problems in life to know whether they are resilient or not. The process of adaptation in the face of stressful conditions is referred to as resilience (Masten, 2018). There are two types of factors that influence families to adapt after loss in order to be resilient, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors include the support of the nuclear family itself by working together and providing emotional support. While external support comes from extended family and friends (Greeff & Human, 2004; Purandare & Sathiyaseelan, 2018).

Social support acts as one of the interpersonal predictors of mental health and can help individuals recover from traumatic circumstances. Lack of social support can increase the risk of negative mental health outcomes in bereaved people (Houwen et al., 2010; Cao et al., 2018). Resilience is one of the intrapersonal predictors underlying individuals' recovery from stressful conditions. Social support has been examined as an exchange of resources between individuals, where social support is intended to increase the welfare of the recipient and is expressed both structurally and functionally (Shumaker & Brownell in Powers et al., 2014).

Social support is referred as a kind of help or assistance which is given by the family, friends, neighbors, fellows, colleague and society in the form of physical, emotional, financial or informational nature to the person who needs it in all circumstances. Support can increase emotional satisfaction, feelings of personal satisfaction, joy, value, and attachment to those closest to them. Social support is very important for widows in dealing with the loss of a spouse. Social support that comes from family and friends after the death of a husband, helps widows to recover from the grief of loss, and makes their psychological well-being better.

Resilience involves two concepts of capacity, the first is being able to face, cope with, and adjust to stressful or traumatic conditions. The second is reconditioning oneself to be able to develop positively, including self-confidence, self-control, acceptance of change, and optimism (Cao et al., 2018). Nnodim and Ekumankama (2013); Rooks (1987) believes that any support given to a widow can restore her confidence and increase her sense of belonging to society and is often achieved through close and intimate relationships between the widow and important people in her life.

Widowhood is a social condition requiring attention and necessary support. The most important component in understanding and assisting widows is exploring the challenges and strengths found in widowhood. The loss of a life partner and what follows after, significantly impact every aspect of a widow's life. It alters the foundation of interpersonal relationships created and maintained throughout the marriage, affecting regulation, attachment, identity, and social roles (Karantzas et al., 2022). This study using a systematic literature review approach in order to get a comprehensive picture of the social support of widowhood. The population in this study were widows whose husbands had died and they have children.

This literature study research was conducted because researchers were interested in knowing what forms of social support were given to widows whose husband had died. And whether the person closest to the widow is the biggest social support provider in facing the bereavement period. Therefore, the purpose of this study is was to determine the social support received by widows. And the research questions is “What forms of social support do widows receive during their grieving period?”.

METHOD

The method used in this study is a Systematic Literature Review which will focus on social support widow. The data used from electronic journal conducted in March-April 2023 to identify peer-reviewed articles with English language. The database used in writing this article includes Science Direct, Scopus, Sage Pub, Academia and Research Gate. with a time span of searching for related articles to filtering selected articles for 2 Month, the articles was published within last 10 years, form 2013-2023. The keyword that used in this search was are “Widows, Resilience, and Social Support”.

The inclusion criteria applied in this study were: 1) Articles published in journals and written full in English, 2) Discussing the factors about social support among widows, 3) Published between 2013-2023, 4) Research using quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods, 4) Open access and full text.

The following table shows the screening and selection process for articles that will be used in the discussion:

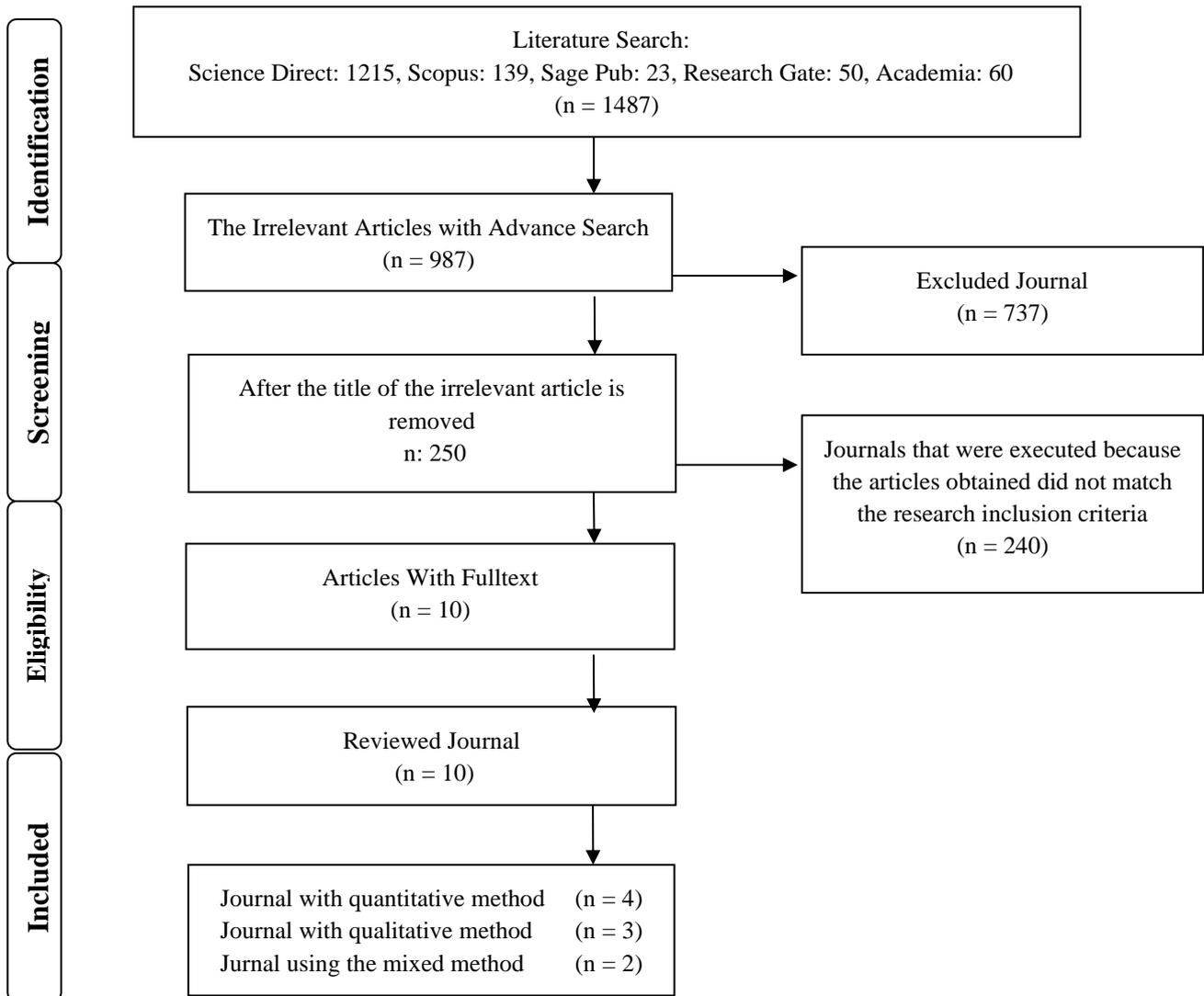


Figure 1. Flowchart in article selection

The articles that selected for topics are filtered through inclusion criteria such as the year of publication of the latest articles so that the data obtained are the latest data from 2013-2023, then the articles are focused discuss topic is about the social support for widows. From the results of the initial literature research, it was found 947 articles were irrelevant because they were not open access, and some journals could not be downloaded for free. After that, 737 journals were excluded because they did not discuss social support for widows and a total of 240 articles were found that were irrelevant and did not meet the study inclusion criteria. Until 10 journals are obtained that are suitable for review.

RESULT**Table 1.***Articles Discovered by the Researchers*

| No | Authors | Variables | Participants | Methods | Findings | Country |
|----|--|---|---|--|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Rosanne Freak-Poli, Claryn S. J. Kung, Joanne Ryan, and Michael A. Shields | Financial resources, Loneliness, Social isolation, Social support | 749 widowed (550 women & 199 men) and a comparison group of around 8,000 married individuals. | Quantitative: longitudinal research using nonparametric kernel-weighted local polynomial plots | Spousal death was strongly associated with increased loneliness for women and men, but also an increase in interactions with friends and family not living with the bereaved. For men, financial resources (both income and asset wealth) provided some protection against loneliness. | Australia |
| 2 | Stacey B. Scott, C. S. Bergeman, Alissa Verney, Susannah Longenbaker, Megan A. Markey, Toni L. Biscont | Social Support | 20 Widows, 4 months after loss | Mix Method: qualitative & quantitative | Support after the death was both instrumental and emotional. The plots of satisfaction with family and friend support revealed differences in within person variability. Some widows' satisfaction fluctuated daily. | Prancis |
| 3 | A. Ukachukwu Nnodim, Nwachukwu Ike, and O.O. Ekumankama | Support Systems | 300 rural women | Qualitative: descriptive survey | There are support systems for widows in the rural areas of Rivers State. Widows in this study receive supports which were neither adequate nortimely to meet their needs and therefore need more assistance from effective support systems. | Nigeria |
| 4 | Sara M. Powers, Toni L. Bisconti, and C. S. Bergeman | Social Support, Well-Being | 57 widows | Quantitative | Widows are inundated with multiple types of support surrounding the first months of the loss, but this support may dissipate as supportive individuals move on and subjectively perceive the widow to be adjusted with her new single lifestyle. | Amerika Serikat |
| 5 | Gulfisha | Religiosity, Resilience, Social Support, Wellbeing | 200 widows: institutionalized (N=100) and non- | Quantitative: correlational research design | Widows' well-being has been found positively and significantly correlated with religiosity, resilience and social support. However religiosity has shown insignificant correlation | India |

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---------------------------------|---|------------|
| | | | institutionalized (N=100) | | with resilience and social support. Positive and significant correlation also emerged with resilience and social support. Non-institutionalized widows have shown significantly higher level on resilience, social support and found insignificantly higher on well-being in comparison to institutionalized widows who have been found significantly higher on religiosity only. | |
| 6 | Brian de Vries, Rebecca Utz, Michael Caserta, Dale Lund | Friendship, Family Support, Grief, Self-evaluation | Three hundred and twenty-eight widowed men (39%) and women aged 50 and older. | Quantitative | The above analyses report on the relative contributions of friends and kin to the well-being of those who recently lost their spouse or partner, along with the demographic variables that help define the situation. Social network contact, ease of contact, and the satisfaction with such support are associated with both affective and self-evaluative responses to loss | California |
| 7 | Gulfisha, Mahmood S. Khan | Widow, Social Support and Wellbeing | 100 Hindu and 100 Muslim widows | Quantitative | Demise of husband itself creates a vacuum in her life in the form of scarcity of emotional, mental and social support. Social support means any kind of verbal, physical, emotional, tangible or financial assistance provided by the significant one to the individual at the time of necessity to bolster up his morale and to make him able to deal with the situation effectively. Emotional support provides a sense of protection in stressful situation. | India |
| 8 | Soua'd Mansour Ghaith, Ghaleb Salman AL-Baddareen, Tagreed | Widows, Loss Perceived social support | 422 volunteered widows participated | Qualitative method. Instrument: | Results revealed that the level of perceived social support from family, friends and significant others among widowed women participated in the study was moderate. | Jordan |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|---|-------|
| | Mousa Al Ali, Mutasem Mohammed Akour | | | Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) | Jordanian society which adopts a positive attitude toward widow after losing her husband, by providing support from family members, friends, neighbours, colleagues especially days and months after the funeral. Unfortunately, most of them return to their routine and responsibilities, leaving the widow with just a little attention, support and care. Seeking help and support from family, friends, and significant others may play a role in receiving social support, which in turn enhance widowed women's perceptions toward the level of social support. | |
| 9 | Zoé M. Hendrickson, Jane Kim, Wietse A Tol, Lily Thapa, Nagendra Prasad Luitel, Pamela J Surkan | Bereavement / grief, Resiliemce, Widows | 4 widows that reflected resilient outcomes | Qualitative method. narrative analytical approach | These four widows described internal and external factors contributing to resilient outcomes after their spouses deaths. The four women were future oriented and connected the passage of time with efforts to forget, accept, and move forward. The presence of social support, efforts to help other widows through social engagement, and a strong emphasis on the well-being of their children were important to how these women explained the effects of widowhood on their lives | Nepal |
| 10 | Lenity K. Kathenya | Coping mechanisms, widowhood, resilience, death | 50 respondents | Mixed-method research | The study sought to investigate the coping mechanisms against social challenges faced by widows. It was established that widows face loneliness, discrimination, and lack of support from their in-laws, conflicts, rejection by the community members and intrusions by relatives. | Kenya |

To cope with these challenges, avoidance, engagement in economic activities, seeking divine intervention, seeking support from the authorities as well as learning to accept own situation were some of the coping mechanisms employed. Such strategies employed define resilience in the wake of social challenges.

DISCUSSION

Becoming a widow is a common transition that is difficult to deal with. Losing a spouse due to death causes loss of the routine interactions that accompany marriage and makes people feel lonely because they lose social, emotional, and instrumental support (Greenfield & Russell, 2011). Two general interventions that can be used to overcome loneliness include: (a) increasing social interaction and (b) providing social support (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Because social support is an important thing needed by widows. Freak-Poli et al. (2022), partner death is strongly associated with increased loneliness, but also increased interaction with friends and family who do not live with the bereaved, especially in the first year of widowhood. Bergeman (2013) showed result are support after the death was both instrumental and emotional. Families provided instrumental support after the deaths by offering money, helping with chores and maintenance, serving as liaisons, and simply being available as needs arose. Neighbors provided on-call support after the deaths: checking in on the widows, being emergency contacts, even taking care of things before the widows asked for help. Emotional support was clearly evident after the deaths. Families provided emotional support after the deaths through their company, check-in phone calls, and affection. However, there were considerable differences between individual satisfaction and support over time. Some widows reported consistently high levels of satisfaction, while others reported substantial fluctuations from day to day. Widows who believe they have control over their support will be satisfied with the support they receive and as time passes after death, the support available may not be as plentiful.

Research by Powers et al. (2014) support the prediction that widows experience decreased rates of depression over time. Usually widows are inundated with various types of support in the first months after bereavement and are able to maintain a steady level of support during the first two years of being a widow, both structurally and functionally. Structural support is provided by people in social networks and is related to the frequency of contact within the network. Functional support includes emotional and instrumental support as well as perception (Holm et.al., 2019). The results of Gulfisha's research (2020), show that resilience has a positive and significant correlation with social support and well-being. These results support the findings of O'Rourke (2004) which shows that widows with higher psychological resilience are correlated with higher well-being, with social support in the form of emotional, informational, or practical assistance from the closest people, such as family members, friends, or co-workers.

Gulfisha, et al. (2018) social support is very important for widows in dealing with the loss of a partner, especially support from family and friends which helps them to recover from the grief of loss and improves their psychological well-being. Emotional support as a component of social support has a positive impact on mental health, physical health, life satisfaction, motivation and well-being. Social support is often described as assistance provided by one's social network (Haber et.al., 2007). Research conducted by De Fries, et al. (2013), indicating friendship seems to be a more significant predictor. Friends have been said to function significantly in the effective domain. Where members receive and offer compassion, appreciation and empathy or assistance in other ways, enjoy recreation, and exchange beliefs. Friends have something special to contribute in this context through their voluntary, fluid and reciprocal forum.

According to Kathenya (2022), making new friends is one of the coping mechanisms used by widows to overcome the challenges of loneliness. These friends form a social network and widows rely on them for social support to cope with the risk of loneliness. Vedder et al. (2022)

found that widows formed support groups from which they found friends to share problems with. The existence of social support helps widows to be able to focus on positive emotions through social involvement in order to be able to accept, and move forward. Social resources can improve the health and well-being of widows over time (Hendrickson et al., 2017). Resilient widows were more likely to report lower levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, psychological resilience, agreeableness, and levels of neuroticism. They also report higher levels of social support, and higher levels of positive emotional valence (Bennett et al., 2020). Widows in Nnodim et al. (2013) received inadequate or untimely support to meet their needs, therefore needing more assistance from an effective support system. Abolarin in Nnodim et al. (2013) argues that effective social support practices are also based on adequacy and proportion of what is needed, timeliness and sincere intentions without demeaning or humiliating.

Based on the results of reviews from several journals, most of the journals said that social support for widows was obtained the most from family and friends. The social support that widows receive after losing their husbands is structural support provided by people in social networks and functional support which includes emotional and instrumental support. Emotional support offers care and affection, whereas instrumental support takes the form of direct assistance such as monetary donations or job assistance to those who are grieving. This is reinforced by several findings which show that most widows experience quite a long period of grief and make widow need someone who can understand their feelings, support them emotionally and receive support from their families to feel the warmth of togetherness again. Future studies that will conduct similar research can enrich the literature from various other databases because in this study only used five database sources. Furthermore, other studies can also examine other protective factors that can increase the resilience of widows.

CONCLUSION

Widow is a social condition that requires attention and support. Social support after bereavement plays a role by offering money, helping with housework & maintenance, serving as a contact person, and simply being available when the need arises. Social support can be in the form of emotional, informational or practical help from those closest to you (family members, friends or co-workers). Peer support functions significantly in the affective domain (where offering affection, appreciation, empathy, or assistance in various ways: recreation or exchange of trust). Social support, especially from family and friends, is especially important for widows who have experienced the loss of a spouse. Social support helps them recover from grief and improves their psychological well-being. A positive attitude towards widows after loss, especially in the first few days or months is shown by providing support from people around them such as family, friends, neighbours, co-workers. Making new friends is one of the coping mechanisms widows use to overcome adversity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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