


An Overview of Social Support for Emerging Adults Who Have Lost a Parent Due to COVID-19

Aulia Arohadia Tusani¹, Luh Putu Ruliati², R. Pasifikus Ch. Wijaya³, M. Dinah Charlota Lerik⁴
^{1,2,3,4} Nusa Cendana University

E-mail: auliaardhtsni1501@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i4.6598>

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 10 Juni 2026

Revised: 19 Juni 2026

Accepted: 26 Juni 2026

Kata Kunci

Dukungan Sosial, Emerging Adulthood, Kehilangan Orang Tua, COVID-19

Keywords

Social Support, Emerging Adulthood, Loss of a Parent, COVID-19



ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui gambaran dukungan sosial pada emerging adulthood yang kehilangan orang tua akibat COVID-19. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam terhadap tujuh partisipan yang berada pada fase emerging adulthood (18–25 tahun), berdomisili di Kota Kupang, dan telah kehilangan orang tua akibat COVID-19. Teknik analisis yang digunakan adalah analisis tematik Braun dan Clarke (2006) yang terdiri dari enam tahapan. Hasil penelitian menemukan empat tema utama: (1) reaksi emosional awal berupa syok, marah, dan rasa hampa; (2) pengalaman keterasingan dalam relasi sosial akibat stigma COVID-19; (3) bentuk-bentuk dukungan sosial yang diterima, meliputi dukungan emosional, instrumental, informatif, dan penghargaan, dengan keluarga inti sebagai sumber utama; serta (4) proses penerimaan dan pemulihan yang berlangsung secara bertahap. Temuan baru penelitian ini adalah munculnya dimensi dukungan spiritual yang tidak tercakup dalam teori Sarafino, namun secara konsisten bermakna dalam konteks budaya masyarakat NTT yang religius.

This study aims to examine the profile of social support among emerging adults who have lost a parent to COVID-19. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven participants in the emerging adulthood phase (aged 18–25 years), residing in Kupang City, who had lost a parent to COVID-19. The analytical technique used was Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, consisting of six stages. The findings identified four main themes: (1) initial emotional reactions including shock, anger, and emptiness; (2) experiences of isolation in social relationships due to COVID-19 stigma; (3) forms of social support received, comprising emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support, with the immediate family as the primary source; and (4) a gradual process of acceptance and recovery. A new finding in this study is the emergence of a spiritual support dimension not covered in Sarafino's theory, yet consistently meaningful within the religious cultural context of NTT society.



This is an open access article under the CC-BY-SA license.

How to Cite Aulia Arohadia Tusani et al (2026) An Overview of Social Support for Emerging Adults Who Have Lost a Parent Due to COVID-19 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i4.6598>

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, first emerged in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. According to data from the Ministry of Health (2024), as of February 2024, there were 774,395,593 confirmed cases globally with 7,023,271 deaths, while in Indonesia, there were 6,811,945 active positive cases and 161,870 deaths. In East Nusa Tenggara Province alone, data from the Ministry of Health and the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) (2024) recorded 97,925 cases with 1,574 deaths due to COVID-19.

The loss of a parent is one of the most painful experiences an individual can endure. Santrock (2012) states that the loss of a loved one has a greater emotional impact compared to other forms of loss, such as deep sadness, anxiety, and feelings of despair. These impacts become even more severe when the individual experiencing the loss is in the emerging adulthood phase, specifically within the age range of 18–25 years (Arnett, 2006). Individuals in this phase are in the process of exploring their identity in the areas of work, love, and worldview; thus, the loss of a parent can significantly affect their overall psychological well-being. Although individuals begin to develop a sense of independence, they remain emotionally, socially, and financially dependent on their parents. Tedeschi and Moore (2016) state that the loss of a parent is not merely the loss of a family figure, but also the loss of a source of emotional support, self-identity, and life orientation.

Losing a parent to COVID-19 brings a far more profound dimension of grief than a typical death. During the pandemic, social restrictions and strict health protocols prevented families from caring for, accompanying, or even simply viewing the deceased before burial. Walsh (2020) notes that these conditions exacerbate the experience of loss because individuals are unable to say a final goodbye, which psychologically serves as the starting point of the grieving process. Furthermore, the stigma associated with COVID-19 adds to the burden of suffering, as bereaved families often face social avoidance from their surroundings due to fear of infection (Slomski, 2021).

It is within this context that social support plays a crucial role. Sarafino (2012) defines social support as the assistance and comfort an individual receives from those around them, encompassing emotional, instrumental, informational, and evaluative support. Cohen and Syme (1985) state that social support functions as a psychological buffer that protects individuals from the adverse effects of stress and facilitates recovery. However, during the pandemic, the function of social support was hindered by lockdown policies and restrictions on social interaction. Safitri's (2021) research found that social support was shown to facilitate coping and accelerate recovery from grief in young adults, although it could not prevent the direct impact of loss.

Although research on social support and parental loss due to COVID-19 has begun to emerge in Indonesia, studies focusing on a qualitative description of social support experiences within the local context of East Nusa Tenggara remain very limited. East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), particularly the city of Kupang, possesses unique cultural characteristics marked by strong tolerance and spirituality, which are integral parts of daily life. These cultural values likely shape how individuals interpret and accept social support following the loss of a parent. Based on this description, this study aims to identify and describe the nature of social support among emerging adults who have lost a parent due to COVID-19 in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. The study included seven participants selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) individuals aged 18–25 years; (2) residing in Kupang City; (3) having lost a parent due to COVID-19; and (4) willing to sign an informed consent form. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face, with an average duration of 60–90 minutes per participant. All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded.

The data analysis technique used was Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which comprises six stages: (1) familiarizing with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. Data validity was assessed using member checking, which involved returning the analysis results to the participants for confirmation of their accuracy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Brief Description of Research Participants

Initial	Parent Who Passed Away	Age	Year	Gender	Religion
---------	------------------------	-----	------	--------	----------

RE	Father (COVID-19)	24	2021	Male	Christian
FF	Mother (COVID-19)	21	2021	Female	Christian
AT	Father (COVID-19)	20	2021	Female	Christian
MG	Mother (COVID-19)	20	2020	Female	Christian
FM	Mother (COVID-19)	20	2021	Female	Islam
AS	Father (COVID-19)	20	2020	Male	Islam
NM	Parent (COVID-19)	21	2021	Female	Christian

Initial Emotional Reactions to Loss

All participants reported strong emotional reactions in the immediate aftermath of losing a parent to COVID-19. These reactions included shock, denial, anger, and a sense of emptiness. The sudden nature of the loss and the inability to say a final goodbye were the primary triggers for the intensity of the emotions experienced. Participant AT described that the entire ordeal unfolded over just four days—from the parents’ hospitalization to their death—without the chance to see their face one last time. This aligns with Walsh (2020), who noted that loss during a pandemic exacerbates the grieving experience because individuals are unable to have a final farewell, which psychologically serves as the starting point of the acceptance process.

Feelings of anger and frustration were also prominent, particularly regarding COVID-19 protocols perceived as denying families the space to grieve appropriately. Participant NK expressed frustration far greater than the sense of loss itself, especially regarding funeral procedures that did not align with cultural and religious customs. The funeral was held at 2:00 a.m., and the family could only watch from a distance in their vehicles, unable to approach the grave. Participant MG was the only family member present in the isolation room with her mother until her death, making her a direct witness who had to bear the immense psychological burden alone.

This finding aligns with Santrock (2012), who states that the loss of a loved one has a greater emotional impact than other forms of loss. Additionally, research by Chen and Tang (2021) indicates that individuals grieving due to COVID-19 are at higher risk of experiencing prolonged grief and PTSD, particularly among those who had a close relationship with the deceased and were unable to conduct a proper funeral ritual.

Experiences of Isolation in Social Relationships

Nearly all participants experienced social rejection and avoidance from their communities following the loss of a parent to COVID-19. The negative stigma attached to COVID-19 caused neighbors, friends, and even extended family members to distance themselves from the grieving family. Participant MG recounted that the local neighborhood head turned away people who tried to visit his home; even the church did not come to offer comfort as is typically done when a congregant passes away. This situation caused MG to experience severe stress for three months, resulting in a drastic weight loss from 62 kg to 48 kg.

Participant NM recounted that neighbors even deliberately took a detour along a longer route just to avoid passing in front of her house. The extended family from the late father’s side could not come either, as they were barred by the village head, who feared the disease would spread to their village. Meanwhile, participant FM revealed that she chose to withdraw from social interactions because she felt ashamed and did not want to become the subject of neighborhood gossip due to her mother’s death from COVID-19.

This phenomenon of social isolation aligns with the findings of Testoni et al. (2021), who found that individuals grieving due to COVID-19 in Italy experienced dehumanization of the deceased and persistent rumination due to a lack of direct social support. Social avoidance from the surrounding community—which should have been a source of support—actually exacerbated the participants’ psychological condition at a time when they needed it most.

Forms of Social Support Received

Despite experiencing social isolation, all participants continued to receive various forms of social support, particularly from their immediate families and close friends. Table 2 below provides a summary of the themes and examples of social support received by the participants:

Table 2. Themes of Social Support Received by Participants (* = New Finding)

Type of Support	Source of Support	Concrete Form
Emotional	Nuclear family, partner, close friends	Physical presence, hugs, willingness to listen, and crying together
Instrumental	Government, campus, extended family, parents' close friends	Condolence money, transportation to the funeral, administrative assistance for death certificates, and providing temporary shelter
Informational	Close friends, family members in healthcare, pastor	Advice on coping with grief, guidance on maintaining health, and provision of positive affirmations
Appraisal	Friends, social media community	Condolence messages, positive affirmations, and acknowledgment that the participant is a strong person
Spiritual*	Nuclear family, pastor, church congregation	Communal prayer every night, memorial worship services, and spiritual strengthening by religious leaders

Emotional support in the form of physical presence, hugs, and a willingness to listen was the most needed and meaningful form of support for all participants. Participant FF shared that having a friend who was willing to sleep with her and eat with her was one of the things that made her feel least alone. Participant AT stated that all they needed was a simple hug without the need for many words. This aligns with Baron and Byrne (2005), who define social support as the physical and psychological comfort provided by friends or family.

Instrumental support comes in various forms. Participant FF received a death benefit from the government and from the university where their mother taught as a lecturer. Participant FM received transportation assistance to the funeral from her best friend’s mother, as well as help with handling the administrative paperwork related to the death, which significantly lightened her burden. Meanwhile, participants NM and AT did not receive any instrumental support from outside their immediate family, including from the hospital.

Informational support was received through advice and guidance from various sources. Participant NM received meaningful advice from a middle school friend who told her that sadness is natural, but that God will not let that sadness last forever. For participant AS, advice from peers who

usually just joked around together but suddenly were able to provide appropriate and meaningful support became an unexpected and deeply memorable experience.

Spiritual Support as a New Research Finding

One of the most important findings in this study is the emergence of a dimension of spiritual support that is not covered in the four aspects of social support identified by Sarafino (2012), yet consistently emerged and was meaningful to all participants. Spiritual support includes activities such as communal prayer, comforting worship services, and encouragement from religious leaders such as pastors.

For participant AT, daily family prayer near the church became the only coping strategy perceived as effective due to limited social interaction during the pandemic. Participant FF, a prospective pastor, revealed that prayer and faith in God served as the primary support preventing him from giving up at the lowest point of his life. Participant NM recounted that for two full months, their immediate family held a communal prayer of consolation every night together as a substitute for the funeral rituals that could not be conducted normally. This activity provided a space to express emotions, offer mutual support, and make sense of the loss through a faith-based perspective.

These findings reflect the local wisdom of the highly religious NTT community, where spiritual life is an inseparable part of daily life. This dimension of spiritual support needs to be considered as a relevant additional aspect in the development of psychological interventions that are contextual and responsive to local cultural values, particularly for the NTT community.

The Process of Acceptance and Recovery

All participants demonstrated a gradual recovery process, albeit with varying dynamics. Acceptance did not come suddenly, but rather through a long process supported by the presence of loved ones, spiritual activities, and the self-awareness to keep moving forward with life. The protective factors that fostered recovery varied among participants: a mother who remained resilient served as a strong motivation for NM; a promise to God to serve became a pillar of support for FF; the consistent presence of a biological sibling acted as a lifeline for FM; and the steadfast support of peers became a source of strength for AS.

This study supports Safitri's (2021) findings that social support has been shown to facilitate coping and accelerate recovery from grief in young adults. The recovery process was also marked by the presence of post-traumatic growth in some participants. Participant FF became more sensitive to others' suffering and more capable of empathy. Participant FM became more accepting and more motivated to achieve life goals, even successfully passing the civil service exam as a result of the determination that emerged following the loss of her mother. This finding of post-traumatic growth aligns with Tedeschi and Moore (2016), who state that traumatic loss experiences can catalyze more positive personal development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the profile of social support among emerging adults who lost a parent to COVID-19 in Kupang City encompasses four main themes. First, intense initial emotional reactions such as shock, anger, a sense of emptiness, and disbelief, exacerbated by the inability to have a proper final farewell. Second, experiences of social isolation due to COVID-19 stigma, which caused the surrounding community—including neighbors and religious groups—to distance themselves at a time when individuals needed support the most. Third, the diverse forms of social support received, including emotional, instrumental, informational, and appreciative support, with the nuclear family as the primary and most meaningful source. Fourth, a gradual process of acceptance and recovery, which for some participants was accompanied by post-traumatic growth.

A key finding of this study is the identification of the dimension of spiritual support as a new aspect not covered in Sarafino's (2012) theory. Spiritual support, in the form of communal prayer, comforting worship, and encouragement from religious leaders, consistently emerged and held significance for all participants, reflecting the religious cultural characteristics of the NTT community. This study is expected to serve as a reference for the development of contextual psychological interventions that are grounded in local culture and responsive to the needs of emerging adults who have lost a parent in a crisis.

REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood: Understanding the new way of coming of age. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 3–19). American Psychological Association.
- Baron, R. A., & Byrne, D. (2005). *Psikologi Sosial* (Edisi 10). Jakarta: Erlangga.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Calsum, U., & Purwandari, E. (2024). Dukungan sosial dan resiliensi remaja pascakematian orang tua. *Jurnal Psikologi Indonesia*, 13(1), 45–58.
- Chen, C., & Tang, S. (2021). Profiles of grief, post-traumatic stress, and post-traumatic growth among people bereaved due to COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.McD2021>
- Cohen, S., & Syme, S. L. (1985). *Social support and health*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia & BNPB. (2024). *Data COVID-19 Indonesia per Februari 2024*. Jakarta: Kemenkes RI.
- Manalu, G. R., & Kusumiati, R. Y. E. (2023). Hubungan antara dukungan sosial dengan resiliensi pada emerging adulthood yang mengalami kehilangan akibat kematian orang tua. *Jurnal Psikologi Kristen Satya Wacana*, 5(1), 12–24.
- Mattson, M., & Hall, J. G. (2011). *Health as communication nexus: A service-learning approach*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Omniara, D., Wijaya, R. P. Ch., & Lerik, M. D. Ch. (2019). Dukungan sosial pada mahasiswa rantau di Kota Kupang. *Jurnal Psikologi Undana*, 10(2), 55–67.
- Ramadhanti, M., & Satiningsih. (2022). Gambaran grief pada emerging adulthood yang mengalami kematian orang tua akibat COVID-19. *Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, 13(2), 87–99.
- Safitri, A. (2021). Dukungan sosial dan coping pada dewasa awal yang kehilangan orang tua. *Jurnal Psikologi Klinis Indonesia*, 6(1), 30–42.
- Santrock, J. W. (2012). *Life-span development* (14th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sarafino, E. P., & Smith, T. W. (2012). *Health psychology: Biopsychosocial interactions* (7th ed.). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Slomski, A. (2021). Even after COVID-19, grief for lost parents may persist years. *JAMA*, 325(15), 1493. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.4696>
- Smet, B. (1994). *Psikologi kesehatan*. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Widiasarana Indonesia.
- Taylor, S. E. (2009). *Health psychology* (7th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Tedeschi, R. G., & Moore, B. A. (2016). *The posttraumatic growth workbook: Coming through trauma wiser, stronger, and more resilient*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Testoni, I., Azzola, C., Tribbia, N., Biancalani, G., Iacona, E., Orkibi, H., & Azoulay, B. (2021). The COVID-19 disappeared: From traumatic to ambiguous loss and the role of the internet for the bereaved in Italy. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 620682. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.620682>
- Walsh, F. (2020). Loss and resilience in the time of COVID-19: Meaning making, hope, and transcendence. *Family Process*, 59(3), 898–911. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12579>
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak*. Geneva: WHO.