Emotional Dynamics and Self-Identity of Boys in the Face of Losing Father Figures

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Abstract

This research aims to understand in depth the dynamics of emotions and the formation of self-identity in boys who experience the loss of a father figure. The approach used was qualitative with phenomenological methods, through in-depth interviews with 3 male participants aged 19–21 years who lost their father due to various factors, such as divorce, death or neglect. The results showed that losing the father figure gave rise to negative emotions such as sadness, longing and loneliness, but over time the participants were able to manage these emotions through adaptive coping mechanisms such as prayer, self-reflection and social support from the mother, friends and the surrounding environment. This process plays a role in forming self-identity as an independent, responsible and highly empathetic man. The experience of loss actually becomes a turning point in strengthening moral values and emotional maturity, indicating positive growth after loss (post-traumatic growth). These findings confirm the importance of emotional support and a positive social environment for boys who have lost their father figure, in order to enable them to develop healthily from both psychological and social aspects.

INTRODUCTION

Fathers have a very important role in the child's growth and development process, both physically, emotionally, socially and morally. In the context of family life, the father's role is not only limited to being a breadwinner who meets economic needs, but also includes very deep psychological and social functions. The father is a figure who provides a sense of security, protection, and is a role model in shaping the child's character and personality. The presence of a father provides a strong basis for children in building self-confidence, independence and understanding of life values. A warm, consistent and loving father figure is the foundation for children to form emotional balance and a positive attitude towards themselves and others. Furthermore, the role of the father cannot be separated from the moral and social formation of

the child. Through daily interactions, fathers function as behavioral models that instill values such as responsibility, honesty, discipline, determination, and hard work. In many families, fathers are also a source of strength in facing difficulties and conflicts, both within the family and outside the home environment. A father figure who is able to show firmness as well as warmth will help children understand the balance between firmness and empathy in social interactions. This plays an important role in the formation of children's self-control and emotional maturity later in life (Astagini et al., 2024).

In everyday life, fathers are often the main figures for boys in understanding the concept of healthy masculinity. Through example and direct guidance, boys learn how to be responsible, strong, and assertive individuals without losing their empathy and social sensitivity. According (Nurshabrina & Dariyo, 2024), interactions with fathers help boys get to know the values of courage, determination and the ability to control emotions in various situations. Apart from that, fathers act as a bridge for children to learn to face social pressure, solve problems rationally, and interact positively with the environment. Thus, the father not only influences the child's cognitive development, but also makes a significant contribution to his overall social and emotional development.

However, in the reality of modern life, not all children have the opportunity to feel the father's full presence in their lives. Loss of the father's role can occur due to various factors, such as divorce, death, work that demands time and distance (for example working outside the region or abroad), economic migration, and conditions of abandonment due to family conflicts. This condition causes the child to experience a vacancy in the father figure both physically and emotionally. The absence of the father not only affects the family structure, but also deeply affects the psychological dynamics of the child (Shifa & Suherman, 2024).

Children who grow up without a father figure often face major challenges in understanding themselves and their environment. They may experience confusion in recognizing their identity, feel insecure, and lose direction in forming moral and social values which are usually transmitted through the guidance of their father (Marssel Michael Sengkey et al., 2025). They also explained that fathers have a major contribution in forming a boy's self-identity, being the main figure in the process of internalizing moral values, and acting as a basis for emotional maturity and personality in adulthood. Without a father figure present, the child has the potential to experience an emotional void that can hinder his psychosocial development.

Phenomena in the field suggest that losing a father figure can lead to complex emotional struggles in boys. Many children show symptoms of feelings of anger, disappointment, sadness, and even low self-esteem due to losing the main role model in their lives. In some cases, this condition gives rise to aggressive behavior, irritability, or even withdrawal from the social environment because they feel they have no safe place to express their feelings. Boys who grow up without a father also often face difficulties in understanding their social roles and responsibilities as adult men, because there is no figure who directly exemplifies how to face life's challenges with a tough and wise attitude (Mufarrohah & Diana, 2024).

A number of studies show that father involvement has a strong correlation with a child's emotional and social balance. Children who have warm, communicative and supportive relationships with their fathers tend to be more confident, have good emotional regulation skills, and are able to establish positive social relationships with peers. On the other hand, the absence or lack of involvement of the father increases the risk of behavioral problems, difficulties in controlling emotions, and identity crises in adolescence. Putri dan Budi (2023) asserts that the loss of the father figure can hinder the child's psychosocial development, especially since the father acts as the main source of identification in the formation of the son's self-concept.

Although many studies have addressed the impact of father absence on children's academic achievement, social behavior, or psychological well-being, studies that exhaustively trace the subjective experiences of boys growing up without fathers are still relatively limited.

In fact, understanding children's subjective experiences is an important key to knowing how they interpret the loss of their father figure, how they adapt to the situation, and the coping strategies used to overcome the emotional difficulties that arise. An approach that examines subjective experiences will provide a richer picture of the child's inner dynamics in building identity and finding meaning in life in the absence of a father figure (Indra Abdul Majid & Mirna Nur Alia Abdullah, 2024).

In the context of today's modern society, where economic demands, urbanization, and social dynamics often change traditional family structures, the role of fathers is often marginalized or even ignored. This condition demands a new social awareness that the role of the father is not only a complement, but an essential component in a balanced care system (Jeni Fadhila et al., 2025). Research on the role of fathers and the impact of their absence is expected to open people's eyes to the importance of the father's emotional presence and active involvement in the child's development process. Thus, this research has high academic value as well as social relevance. Through a deep understanding of the experiences of boys growing up without fathers, it is hoped that concrete efforts will emerge to strengthen the system of psychological and social support for them. Ultimately, these children are expected to continue to grow into individuals who are emotionally mature, socially stable, and able to form a positive self-identity even without the presence of a father figure in their lives (Karmila et al., 2025).

In the context of today's increasingly complex social developments, the role of fathers is not only important in the nuclear family, but also in helping boys adapt to the demands and dynamics of modern society. When children lose their father figure, they not only face emotional emptiness, but also lose guidance in understanding their social role as adult men later in life. This can influence the way children view responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and values related to personality and morality. The absence of a father figure often leads to role confusion, where the child attempts to find a replacement or other form of identification to fill the void, either through peers, public figures or the media (Nurmalasari et al., 2024).

This process can work well if the child has a supportive environment, but can also cause identity distortion if it is not accompanied by adequate emotional and moral guidance. Apart from that, losing a father figure can also influence the development of a boy's self-concept in understanding the values of masculinity (Aulia et al., 2024). Children may interpret masculinity incorrectly, attributing it to a tough, dominant, or aggressive attitude, because it lacks a behavioral model that displays a healthy and balanced form of masculinity. In the long term, this has the potential to cause difficulties in managing emotions, building healthy social relationships, and making wise decisions (Yuliani et al., 2024). It is therefore important for the social and educational environment to play an active role in helping boys who have lost their father figure to enable them to build a positive understanding of themselves and their role in the Community.

Furthermore, the process of adapting the child to the loss of father is greatly influenced by the quality of relationships with other family members, especially the mother or primary caregiver. Emotional support, open communication, and unconditional acceptance can help children overcome feelings of loss as well as develop adaptive coping mechanisms (Putri & Budi, 2023). In this case, families, schools and social communities have a shared responsibility to create a supportive environment so that children can grow up with a sense of security and self-confidence even without the father's direct presence.

An approach that focuses on emotional well-being and character formation is very important in helping boys find direction in life and develop a solid self-identity. Taking into account these various dynamics, research on the loss of father figures and its impact on emotional development and the formation of the identity of boys is very relevant to study in depth. It is hoped that this research will provide a comprehensive picture of how boys interpret these experiences of loss, the adaptation process they carry out, and the sources of support that

help them survive and develop positively. Through a broader understanding of this experience, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found in providing psychological intervention, family assistance, as well as programs to strengthen the role of fathers in care so that young people can grow into mature, empowered and emotionally stable individuals (Nurjanah et al., 2023).

It is important for psychological research to look at the phenomenon of losing a father figure not only from the negative side, but also from the aspect of how children are able to discover new sources of strength. In a state of loss, some children are able to show resilience by getting support from their mother, extended family, peers, or father-substitute figures in social environments such as teachers, uncles, or community leaders. Understanding the adaptation mechanisms and sources of such support is essential to help the child develop a positive self-identity even in the absence of the father directly. Therefore, research on the loss of the father figure and its impact on emotional development and the formation of the son's identity is very important to carry out. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich studies in the fields of developmental psychology and family psychology, especially in understanding the important role of the father figure as a basic form of identity and emotional maturity. Meanwhile, practically, the research results are expected to be a reference for parents, educators, counselors and psychology practitioners in providing appropriate emotional and educational support for children who have lost their father figure.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. This approach was chosen because research focuses on understanding the meaning of individual subjective experiences in depth (Khalefa & Selian, 2021) not to statistically measure or test relationships between variables. The phenomenological method allows researchers to explore participants' life experiences (lived experiences) regarding a particular phenomenon, in this case the experience of boys in dealing with the loss of their father figure and its impact on emotional development and the formation of self-identity. Through this approach, researchers seek to understand how participants interpret loss, manage emotions, and discover their identity as men in the social and cultural context in which they live (Musthofa & Arfensia, 2025).

Participants in this study were three boys aged between 19 and 21 years. Participant selection was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, namely sampling techniques based on certain criteria that are relevant to the research objectives. The participant criteria included: being male, 19–21 years old, experiencing the loss of a father figure due to death, divorce, distant work or neglect, as well as being willing to participate and being able to express his feelings and experiences verbally. The three participants were students from different universities in Banda Aceh. The number of participants was considered adequate because the data obtained had reached a saturation point (data saturation), where additional interviews no longer produced significant new information.

Research data was collected through in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews) with a semi-structured approach. This technique was chosen so that researchers can explore participants' emotional experiences and self-identity more flexibly and openly. Interview questions focused on the experience of losing a father, the emotions that arise, how to manage emotions, and how these losses affect participants' views of themselves and their role as men. In addition to the interviews, researchers also made nonparticipant observations to pay attention to participants' facial expressions, body language and emotional responses during the interviews. Documentation in the form of field notes, voice recordings and interview transcripts is also used as complementary data to strengthen the findings (Tallane, 2020).

Data analysis was carried out using phenomenological methods, the analysis process began by reading all interview transcripts repeatedly to gain a complete understanding of the participants' experiences (Abdul Nasir et al., 2023). Next, researchers mark important statements

related to the phenomenon of father loss, then formulate the meaning of each statement and group them into main themes. After that, the researcher compiles a thorough description that describes the emotional experience and the formation of the participant's self-identity in a comprehensive manner, until finally the essential structure of the phenomenon that is at the heart of the experience of losing the father figure is obtained. To ensure accurate interpretation, the analysis results are validated back to participants through a member checking process.

In order to guarantee the validity of the data, this study applied the criterion of trustworthiness (Enworo, 2023), which includes four main aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is achieved through the researcher's deep involvement during the interview process, triangulation of sources, and validation of results through member checking. Transferability is maintained by providing a detailed description of the research context and participant characteristics in order to apply the results to similar contexts. Dependability is obtained through systematic documentation of the research process (audit trail), while confirmability is maintained by carrying out researcher self-reflexivity (reflexivity) to minimize personal bias and clearly differentiate between empirical data and researcher interpretation.

DISCUSSION
Research Result

This research seeks to understand emotional experiences, the formation of self-identity, as well as coping strategies of boys who have lost their father figure. Based on in-depth interviews with three participants (RYK, MQ, and R), we obtained an overview of emotional dynamics, how to manage loss, and the process of forming self-meaning after loss.

RYK describes that losing a father creates feelings of emptiness and loss of direction. He said,

> *"I feel empty, like the house is no longer the same. Once every time I came home there was a father's voice, now it's quiet."*

He also expressed the difficulty of adjusting to the new atmosphere without a father figure who was a role model in the family.

MQ has experienced loss since childhood. He said,

> *"When I was little I didn't really understand it, but it just got bigger. Especially if you look at his father's friends, there is jealousy and sadness."*

He said that feelings of loss arise gradually, especially when he begins to realize the important role of fathers in shaping personality and life values.

Meanwhile, R reveals a more reflective emotional experience. He said,

> *"After my father wasn't there, I often thought about it. Sometimes I get angry with the situation, but over time I learn to accept it."*

He also said that losing his father made him more introspective and tried to understand the meaning of this loss in his life.

In the face of grief, the three participants showed different emotion management strategies. RYK draws closer to God by praying and participating in social activities so that his mind is calmer. He said,

"If I start to get sad, I pray or gather with friends so I don't think too much."

MQ prefers to carry out personal reflection by dialogue in the heart and trying to understand the meaning behind loss.

"I believe all this means something, God wants me to be stronger," he said.

R uses creative ways to channel his emotions through writing and listening to music. He said,

"If you write, it feels relieved, like chatting with your father in writing."

In terms of self-identity, the three of them are trying to build a new understanding of the meaning of being a man. RYK said that being a man means something

"dare to take responsibility for what is done." MQ argues that real men are the ones

"is mentally strong and can protect his family," while R emphasizes that a man for him is "who is patient, doesn't get angry easily, and can take care of other people's feelings."

Social support from mothers and the surrounding environment also plays an important role. MQ revealed,

"If not because of mother, maybe I can't be this strong. He always encouraged me."

RYK and R also admit that the presence of friends and extended family helps them get through difficult times. Overall, the experience of losing a father figure for the three participants not only caused sadness, but also became an experience that shaped maturity and emotional independence.

Discussion

The findings of this research show that effective self-management techniques help teenagers reduce online gaming addiction by increasing self-awareness and the ability to regulate behavior. This technique is based on the operant conditioning theory from BF. Skinner, who emphasized the importance of strengthening (reinforcement) adaptive behavior and self-control over environmental stimuli. Through the application of self-management, teenagers learn to recognize excessive gaming habits, monitor their own behavior, set change targets, and reward positive achievements that have been made. Previous studies have reinforced these results. According to Komalasari (2015), self-management strategies can help individuals modify non-adaptive behavior in a systematic and gradual way. Apart from that, Ratna (2020) emphasized that this technique forms awareness and control of thoughts, speech and actions, so that individuals more easily limit unproductive behavior such as excessive gaming. In line with Corey's (2017) view, a behavioral approach allows counselees to learn through hands-on experience and positive reinforcement, rather than just through advice. Cognitively, this approach helps teens replace the irrational mindset related to satisfaction in playing games into a

more realistic understanding of the consequences for learning time, health, and social relationships. This is supported by research results by Young (2017) which show that online gaming addiction is rooted in the need for escape from psychological and social stress, so that self-control-based interventions are crucial. In this context, self management helps individuals develop awareness of the emotions and internal drives that trigger addictive behavior (Harvien, 2019). Apart from the psychological aspect, the successful application of this technique is also influenced by social factors. Support from family, friends and teacher environments largely determines the success rate of behavior change. According to Orzack and Scolari (2018), a social environment that reinforces positive behavior can significantly reduce the frequency of digital addiction. In contrast, social isolation exacerbates dependence on the virtual world. Therefore, the application of self-management techniques needs to be combined with external support so that the results are more optimal. From the perspective of adolescent development, this is a critical period in the formation of self-identity and impulse control. Santrock (2019) emphasizes that teenagers tend to seek new experiences and instant gratification, including through online games. This is also explained by research by Kim and Lee (2020) who found that adolescents with low self-control were more susceptible to digitally addictive behaviors compared to those with high self-regulation.

Self-management techniques provide space for teenagers to get to know their own behavior and assess its consequences rationally. Individuals involved in the process of self-monitoring (self-monitoring) and behavioral evaluation tend to show significant reductions in gaming intensity (Prayitno, 2017). Additionally, the use of positive reinforcement in the form of rewards for small accomplishments helps increase internal motivation to change (Coon & Mitterer, 2018). From a counseling perspective, this technique not only lowers the duration of gaming, but also increases a teenager's self-confidence, discipline, and social skills. Similar findings were reported by Widyastuti (2022) who found that students who attended self-management-based group counseling showed significant improvements in time awareness and learning responsibilities. Thus, the application of this technique can be considered as one of the effective strategies in school counseling guidance interventions, especially in the face of the increasingly widespread problem of digital addiction among adolescents. Overall, the application of self-management techniques helps Tomoli Village teenagers not only reduce the duration of playing online games, but also improve daily lifestyle patterns such as sleeping, studying and social interaction. This approach is relevant to be applied by BK teachers and school counselors in various regions, especially with family and community support. Therefore, counseling based on self-management techniques needs to continue to be developed through counselor training, program adaptation in schools, and regular evaluation so that the results are sustainable.

CONCLUSSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that losing a father figure has a profound impact on the emotional development and formation of a boy's self-identity. The three participants in this study showed that the absence of the father's role gave rise to feelings of sadness, longing, loneliness and psychological emptiness in the early stages of loss. However, along with the time process and social support from their family and surrounding environment, they are able to develop adaptive coping mechanisms to manage emotions and find the positive meaning of these events. Losing a father not only creates emotional vulnerability, but also opens up opportunities for the formation of a more reflective, independent and emotionally mature male identity. In addition, support from mothers, siblings and peers plays an important role in assisting the participants' adjustment process. The presence of a warm and supportive environment is a determining factor in strengthening emotional resilience and speeding up the acceptance process. The experience of losing a father figure ultimately becomes

a turning point for stronger personal development and is oriented towards the values of responsibility, empathy and emotional maturity.

Nevertheless, this study has some limitations that should be noted. The relatively small number of participants and uniform background (students aged 19–21 years in Banda Aceh) mean that the results of this research cannot be widely generalized. In addition, this research focuses on boys who have lost their father due to death, so it does not describe the experiences of children who have lost their father's role due to other factors such as divorce or emotional neglect. Therefore, subsequent studies were suggested to involve participants with more diverse age ranges and social backgrounds in order to enrich the understanding of the dynamics of losing father figures. Future studies may also further trace the role of father surrogate figures, such as grandfathers, uncles, teachers, or mentors, in helping boys establish their identity and emotional balance. Moreover, it would be particularly beneficial if subsequent research integrated psychological approaches with local cultural contexts and values that influenced perceptions of fatherhood and masculinity. Overall, the results confirm that losing a father figure is not the end of a boy's psychological development, but rather part of a journey towards emotional maturity and the formation of a stronger self-identity. Through appropriate social support, deep self-reflection, and a loving environment, boys can make the experience of loss a source of strength, wisdom, and determination in living life in the future.

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