

Mourning and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Literature Study

Fanny Eka Putri¹✉, Achmad Chusairi²

¹Magister Psikologi Profesi, Fakultas Psikologi, Universitas Airlangga, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

²Fakultas Psikologi, Universitas Airlangga Jawa Timur, Indonesia

Correspondence Author: fanny.eka.putri-2022@psikologi.unair.ac.id✉

Article history

Received : 2023-02-13

Revised : 2023-06-17

Accepted : 2023-07-27

Published : 2023-08-31

Keywords:

Covid-19; Grief;
Sadness; Loneliness

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many crises in various parts of the world, including in Indonesia itself. The various crises caused by the pandemic include social restrictions, changes in the education system, many individuals who have lost their jobs, and the most severe is the number of deaths. This article uses a systematic literature review method using 10 articles consisting of 2 articles obtained through the Science Direct site ([sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)), 4 articles obtained through the SAGE site (journals.sagepub.com), 4 articles obtained through the ResearchGate site ([researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net)). This article wants to see how the process experienced by individuals who are grieving as a result of the loss of a loved one during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the literature review show that the process of grief experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 period has become more complex and longer. This mourning process is caused by two things, namely the limitation of social interaction that makes individuals have to go through the mourning process without physical or emotional support from relatives and the limited implementation of the funeral process which creates special pressure for individuals who are left behind because they cannot pay their last respects to loved ones who have passed away.

Abstrak: Pandemi COVID-19 telah menyebabkan banyak krisis di berbagai belahan dunia, tidak terkecuali di Indonesia sendiri. Adapun berbagai krisis yang ditimbulkan akibat adanya pandemi antara lain pembatasan sosial, berubahnya sistem pendidikan, banyaknya individu yang kehilangan pekerjaan, dan yang paling parah adalah banyaknya angka kematian. Artikel kali ini menggunakan metode systematic literature review dengan menggunakan 10 artikel yang terdiri dari 2 artikel di dapatkan melalui situs Science Direct ([sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)), sebanyak 4 artikel di dapatkan melalui situs SAGE (journals.sagepub.com), sebanyak 4 artikel di dapatkan melalui situs ResearchGate ([researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net)). Artikel kali ini ingin melihat bagaimana proses yang dilalui individu yang sedang berduka akibat dari kehilangan orang terkasih pada masa pandemic COVID-19. Hasil telaah literatur menunjukkan bahwa proses duka yang dialami individu dimasa COVID-19 menjadi lebih kompleks dan lama. Proses duka ini diakibatkan dua hal yaitu pembatasan interaksi sosial membuat individu harus melewati proses duka tanpa dukungan fisik ataupun emosional dari kerabat dan terbatasnya pelaksanaan proses pemakaman yang membuat tekanan tersendiri bagi individu yang ditinggalkan karena tidak bisa memberikan penghormatan terakhir untuk orang terkasih yang tiada.



Available online at
<http://jurnal.unsyiah.ac.id/riwayat/>

INTRODUCTION

Speaking about the COVID-19 pandemic caused by coronavirus disease, this event first emerged in a city in China called Wuhan before eventually spreading worldwide. On March 11th, 2020, the World

Health Organization (WHO) officially announced it as a pandemic. This COVID-19 pandemic has led to various life issues affecting people all around the world. Individuals from various sectors, including education, have struggled together to

survive amid the global chaos (Nurmala et al., 2023). Notably, healthcare workers have stood on the frontlines in the battle against COVID-19. Despite the distribution of various medications and vaccines, the transmission and infection rates of COVID-19 continue to persist in various parts of the world. While some countries have successfully navigated through the crisis and entered a post-pandemic phase, others are still striving to reduce COVID-19 transmission rates.

The most significant impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is the high number of casualties. This, of course, affects the lives of many individuals worldwide. Based on statistical data, the global death toll due to the COVID-19 pandemic reached 4,111,838 in July 2021 (Kanozia & Arya, 2021). Meanwhile, in Indonesia alone, the number reached 158,143 in October 2022 (Kemenkes, 2021). In addition to the loss of lives, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected various aspects of life, such as job losses and restrictions on community mobility across different sectors (schools, transportation, industries) as preventive measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Hamid & Jahangir, 2022). These events have been accompanied by grief and loss, which can have physical and psychological health implications for individuals.

A study conducted in the United States revealed that every COVID-19-related death would cause deep mourning among those close to the deceased (Verdery et al., 2020). This experience could be even more profound in societies with strong collective values and close familial ties, where the sense of mourning would be amplified. A study highlighted the unique challenges of grieving and loss during the pandemic, including the enforcement of isolation and limitations on interactions, making it difficult to bid farewell and properly prepare for funerals (Sumarni & Sjaaf, 2022). The sorrow felt by individuals who experience loss and grief for their loved ones can potentially be exacerbated by the constant flow of news and death statistics appearing on screens.

Several studies have found that the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to various losses in life, also have an

impact on individuals' mental health. A study in the US on individuals born between 1998-2000 who experienced trauma due to the death of their grandparents revealed symptoms of depression resulting from the experienced grief (Livings et al., 2022). Another study in America found that COVID-19 brought mourning and despair to individuals who lost their loved ones, which was associated with depressive symptoms and a tendency to engage in drinking (Grace, 2021). Furthermore, research conducted in the US and Canada found that individuals facing the negative experience of losing loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced increased stress (Ansari, 2022).

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that the grieving and sadness experienced by individuals who lose loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those directly caused by the pandemic itself, indirectly affect the mental or psychological health of the individuals involved. When discussing the theory of grief, there are several perspectives that explore the understanding of mourning. One prominently discussed theory is the five stages of grief proposed, which divide grief into denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, this theory has been criticized for not universally applying to all individuals, especially across different cultures. This is because different cultures have varying concepts and understandings of grief, and not all individuals will experience these five stages (Maciejewski et al., 2007). Some individuals may directly enter advanced stages, bypassing the earlier stages, due to their unique processes of responding to grief.

One theoretical model that can be used to understand grief during the COVID-19 pandemic is the one proposed by (Chater, 2020), suggesting that individuals might not be able to overcome their sadness and accompanying pain. However, when they try to view the world from a broader perspective, their grief may seem smaller and easier to cope with. This perspective is highly relevant to the current situation that requires individuals to face various challenges such as job losses, the loss of loved ones, and significant life events (Chater, 2020).

In recent times, numerous studies have examined the experience of grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article will focus on providing insights into the dynamics of the grieving process during the COVID-19 situation based on existing literature, which will then be analyzed. The research question posed is: How does the grieving process experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic differ from other situations?

METHODS

The article being written is a systematic literature review. During the process, the author will conduct a search for journal articles through two international journal websites, namely Science Direct (sciencedirect.com), SAGE (journals.sagepub.com), and ResearchGate (researchgate.net). The search for journal articles as study material will be conducted for one week, starting from September 28th to October 4th, 2022. The keywords the author will use for the search include "grief in COVID-19" AND "grieving in COVID-19 on individual". The articles to be used in this writing will be those published between 2020 and 2022. Additionally, the author will utilize the PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) 2015 guidelines for conducting the systematic literature review.

In the selection of journal articles, several inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied, including: (1) research articles on mourning the loss of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) research articles on mourning the loss of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic in early adulthood, (3) empirical studies (both qualitative and quantitative), (4) international journals (in English), (5) open-access journals, (6) full articles that are downloadable. Currently, the author has obtained 10 out of 50 research articles for review. These 10 articles consist of 2 articles obtained from the Science Direct website

(sciencedirect.com), 4 articles from the SAGE website (journals.sagepub.com), and 4 articles from the ResearchGate website (researchgate.net).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the existing literature review, various findings have been discovered regarding the grieving process experienced by individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a study conducted by (Goveas & Shear, 2020), COVID-19 has shattered the world, causing individuals to witness a high number of deaths within a short period. Many individuals have had to struggle alone and be separated from their families during their loved ones' final moments to comply with health protocols. For those grieving, they are required to navigate through mourning rituals that differ from local customs and cultures, while minimizing social interactions. The grieving process is further burdened by stressors originating from external policies aimed at managing the pandemic. In other words, the pandemic situation increases the risk of prolonged grief disorder, resulting in a different experience of grief compared to normal circumstances prior to the pandemic (Goveas & Shear, 2020).

Furthermore, in a study by (Ansari, 2022), it was found that healthcare workers who experienced various negative events during the COVID-19 pandemic, including witnessing deaths and losing loved ones, underwent a profound grieving process. This is exacerbated by factors such as limited social interaction, which could have provided social reinforcement during their mourning. The inability to be with loved ones during the grieving process has hindered the individual's ability to process their grief, impeding their recovery from the experienced sadness (Ansari, 2022).

Research by (Shahini et al., 2022) revealed that grief resulting from the death of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to prolonged sorrow, and individuals have lost social support from close relatives throughout their mourning period. This is driven by social restrictions, leading to limited funeral processes without the same

rituals as in normal situations, restricted presence of relatives and loved ones during funerals, and societal stigma avoiding families of COVID-19 victims. The loss of physical or emotional support from close relatives and limited social interaction has led individuals to experience a much longer and more challenging grieving process than in normal conditions before the pandemic (Shahini et al., 2022).

Additionally, a study by (Buldukoğlu, 2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the grieving process for individuals who lost loved ones during the pandemic. The experience of grief reactions in individuals facing the death of a loved one during the pandemic is much more complex compared to non-pandemic situations. The burial process and social context in this study did not significantly impact the individual's grieving process (Buldukoğlu, 2021). Similarly, research by (Mortazavi et al., 2021) indicated that the pandemic has altered various aspects of individuals' lives, including the grieving process when facing the death of a loved one. Lack of social support during the grieving period due to limited social interaction during the pandemic has caused individuals to feel lonely, thereby making the grieving process more challenging (Mortazavi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a study conducted by (Weinstock et al., 2021) revealed that adolescents and adults are at risk of experiencing profound sadness due to the loss of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited social interaction and the breakdown of collectivity that could help individuals manage grief during the pandemic have increased loneliness among young people, resulting in complex and prolonged grief (Weinstock et al., 2021). Research by (Albuquerque et al., 2021) found that deaths related to the COVID-19 pandemic have been a heavy process, particularly for families. Limitations in self-efficacy, support, and control contribute to a heightened experience of profound and painful grief (Albuquerque et al., 2021).

In the study conducted by (Breen et al., 2021), it was found that individuals who experienced grief due to the loss of close relatives during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic are more susceptible to

experiencing deep grief pressure and post-traumatic stress due to the limitations imposed during the pandemic (Breen et al., 2021). Additionally, (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020) found in their research that individuals grieving the death of a loved one during the COVID-19 pandemic experience much deeper sorrow than those grieving in normal situations. This is due to the lack of social support received during the mourning period and the limited funeral processes, which hinder the release of the deceased as a final tribute, contributing to the complex grieving process (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020).

Based on the above findings, it is evident that diverse results have been obtained. However, among the studies reviewed, there are several common contexts between one study and another. During the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals undergo a more complex grieving process compared to grief experienced in normal situations. During the pandemic, individuals are forced to limit social interactions to prevent the spread of the virus. Consequently, individuals must go through the grieving process or struggle with their sadness without sufficient physical or emotional support. The study conducted by (Goveas & Shear, 2020) reveals that the grieving process during the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly challenging due to the necessity of limiting social interactions, causing individuals to undergo the grieving process alone without physical or emotional support from loved ones (Goveas & Shear, 2020).

The findings of this study align with the research conducted by (Ansari, 2022), which specifically illustrates the profound grief experienced by individuals working in healthcare. The study highlights that these individuals undergo prolonged and profound sadness during their recovery due to social restrictions, leading to limited interactions between individuals. This results in a lack of social support received by these individuals (Ansari, 2022). (Shahini et al., 2022) also revealed in their study that the pandemic situation has led to limited funeral processes for deceased relatives, deviating from customary practices, and the reduced interactions have caused individuals to

receive less emotional support from loved ones (Shahini et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted and influenced various aspects of individuals' lives. The limited activities and restricted social interactions also impact the grieving process individuals go through after losing loved ones. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that grief experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic is more intense and complex due to the unique circumstances prevailing during the pandemic. Several factors contribute to the increased weight of the grieving process in this situation, including the restricted funeral or final farewell rituals that differ from normal customs or culture. Additionally, the most evident factor is the limited social interactions, which lead to a scarcity of emotional or physical support for individuals undergoing mourning or grief, thus prolonging and complicating the grieving process (Albuquerque et al., 2021); (Breen et al., 2021) (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020) (Mortazavi et al., 2021).

Consequently, the aftermath of the grieving and sadness experienced by individuals also triggers post-loss stress,

REFERENCES

- Albuquerque, S., Teixeira, A. M., & Rocha, J. C. (2021). COVID-19 and disenfranchised grief. *Frontiers in Psychiatry, 12*, 638874.
- Ansari, D. (2022). An accumulation of distress: Grief, loss, and isolation among healthcare providers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *SSM-Mental Health, 2*, 100146.
- Angela, V. F. (2023). Strategi Pengembangan Ekowisata dalam Mendukung Konservasi Alam Danau Tahai. *JIM: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Pendidikan Sejarah, 8*(3), 984–993.
- Asril, A., Jaenam, J., Syahrizal, S., Armalena, A., & Yuherman, Y. (2023). Peningkatan Nilai-Nilai Demokrasi dan Nasionalisme Pada Mahasiswa Melalui Pembelajaran Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan. *JIM: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Pendidikan Sejarah, 8*(3), 1300–1309.
- leads to the onset of depression, and intensifies feelings of loneliness due to the lack of support during the difficult period of losing loved ones in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ## CONCLUSION
- The COVID-19 pandemic situation results in a much heavier and prolonged grieving process for individuals who lose loved ones during the pandemic. Several factors contribute to this, including: (1) limited social interactions to prevent virus transmission, leading to reduced support for individuals during their mourning period, thus potentially triggering feelings of loneliness due to the absence of physical or emotional support from close relatives; and (2) restricted funeral processes as a final tribute to deceased loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can lead to a heavier and longer grieving process. These limitations are driven by the necessity to avoid gatherings and public interactions due to the pandemic crisis, resulting in fewer attendees and less support for individuals experiencing grief.
- <https://doi.org/10.24815/jimps.v8i3.25109>
- Breen, L. J., Lee, S. A., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2021). Psychological risk factors of functional impairment after COVID-19 deaths. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 61*(4), e1–e4.
- Buldukoğlu, K. (2021). Grief Rituals and Grief Reactions of Bereaved Individuals During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Omega, 302228211037591–302228211037591*.
- Chater, A. M. (2020). *Let's talk about death openly: when the world is grieving, please don't walk on eggshells*.
- Eisma, M. C., & Tamminga, A. (2020). Grief before and during the COVID-19 pandemic: Multiple group comparisons. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 60*(6), e1–e4.
- Goveas, J. S., & Shear, M. K. (2020). Grief and the COVID-19 pandemic in older adults. *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 28*(10), 1119–1125.

- Grace, M. K. (2021). COVID-19 bereavement, depressive symptoms, and binge drinking. *SSM-Mental Health*, 1, 100041.
- Hamid, W., & Jahangir, M. S. (2022). Dying, death and mourning amid COVID-19 pandemic in Kashmir: A qualitative study. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 85(3), 690–715.
- Indriati, K. I., Muchlas, M., & Syuti, M. (2023). Kebiasaan Belajar Siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Saat Pandemi Covid-19 Di SMK Muhammadiyah Purwodadi Purworejo. *JIM: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Pendidikan Sejarah*, 8(3), 1319–1332. <https://doi.org/doi.org/10.24815/jimps.v8i3.25117>
- Kanozia, R., & Arya, R. (2021). “Fake news”, religion, and COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. *Media Asia*, 48(4), 313–321.
- Kemendes, R. I. (2021). *Peta Sebaran Transmisi Lokal dan Wilayah Terkonfirmasi*.
- Livingston, M., Smith-Greenaway, E., Margolis, R., & Verdery, A. M. (2022). Bereavement & mental health: The generational consequences of a grandparent’s death. *SSM-Mental Health*, 2, 100100.
- Maciejewski, P. K., Zhang, B., Block, S. D., & Prigerson, H. G. (2007). An empirical examination of the stage theory of grief. *Jama*, 297(7), 716–723.
- Mortazavi, S. S., Shahbazi, N., Taban, M., Alimohammadi, A., & Shati, M. (2021). Mourning during corona: A phenomenological study of grief experience among close relatives during COVID-19 pandemics. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 00302228211032736.
- Nurmala, N., Abdullah, S., & Ibrahim, R. (2023). The Influence of Budget Size on Budget Performance with Budget Changes as a Moderator. *International Journal of Social Health*, 2(7), 456–462.
- Nurlailah, N., & Ardiansyah, H. (2022). The Influence of the School Environment on Character Form Students in PKN Lessons. *Riwayat: Educational Journal of History and Humanities*, 5(2), 281–289. <https://doi.org/10.24815/jr.v5i2.27347>
- Shahini, N., Abbassani, S., Ghasemzadeh, M., Nikfar, E., Heydari-Yazdi, A. S., Charkazi, A., & Derakhshanpour, F. (2022). Grief experience after deaths: Comparison of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 causes. *Journal of Patient Experience*, 9, 23743735221089696.
- Sumarni, S. T., & Sjaaf, A. C. (2022). Factors Affecting Hospital Business Continuity in Indonesia During the COVID-19 Pandemic: a Scoping Review. *Journal of World Science*, 1(12), 1246–1254.
- Verdery, A. M., Smith-Greenaway, E., Margolis, R., & Daw, J. (2020). Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(30), 17695–17701.
- Weinstock, L., Dunda, D., Harrington, H., & Nelson, H. (2021). It’s complicated—adolescent grief in the time of COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12, 638940.