

Interpreting Life as a Single Mother: A Phenomenological Study on the Experience of Early Adult Women in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the impact of social media use on the communication patterns of adolescents in Muara Binuangeun Village, Wanasalam District, Lebak Regency. Social media has become an essential part of adolescents' lives and plays a significant role in shaping the way they interact and communicate. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving 15 adolescents who actively use social media. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the criteria of being 17–23 years old and actively using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that social media has transformed adolescents' communication patterns from face-to-face interaction to more flexible and rapid digital communication. WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used platform for daily communication activities. Positive impacts include easier communication, broader social networks, increased access to information, and more frequent interactions. However, negative impacts were also identified, including reduced face-to-face communication, tendencies toward social media dependency, disruption of daily activities, and exposure to negative content and unverified information. The study concludes that social media significantly influences adolescents' communication patterns, highlighting the importance of digital literacy and guidance from families and communities to ensure its optimal use.

Keywords: Social Media, Communication Patterns, Adolescents, Digital Communication, Muara Binuangeun Village

Article History:

Received August 2024, revised August 2024, approved September 2024, published September 2024

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.60036/vf027449>

INTRODUCTION

The family is the first social institution that plays an important role in shaping individual identity, values, and interaction patterns. Through the family, a person receives emotional, social, and economic support that becomes the foundation for the development of their next life. In the family, the communication process takes place intensively and continuously, forming interpersonal relationships that affect the way individuals interpret themselves, carry out social roles, and adapt to the environment. Therefore, changes in family structure not only have an impact on economic and psychological aspects, but also affect the dynamics of communication and social relationships established in it.

One form of family structure change that is increasingly found in society is *single-parent families*. This condition arises when one parent has to carry out the functions of parenting, education, and meeting family needs without the presence of a partner. The phenomenon of single parents can be caused by divorce, death of a partner, or other factors that result in the end of the marital relationship (Hutasoit & Brahmana, 2021). In Indonesia, the increasing divorce rate in recent years shows that the phenomenon of single-parent families is no longer an incidental condition, but has become part of a social reality that needs academic and policy attention.

In this context, women who take on the role of single mothers face more complex challenges than women who live with their partners. In addition to being responsible for childcare, single mothers must also carry out family economic functions independently. This condition puts them in a vulnerable position to various social, economic, and psychological pressures. Various studies show that single mothers often face role conflicts due to the demands of work and family responsibilities that must be carried out simultaneously (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In addition, limited social support, economic pressure, and social stigma that are still attached to single parenthood can increase stress levels and decrease their psychological well-being (Cairney et al., 2003).

These challenges become even more complex when experienced by women in early adulthood. Early adulthood is a period of development marked by individual efforts to build economic independence, develop careers, establish intimate relationships, and form a stable family life (Santrock, 2019). At this stage, individuals are still in the process of adjusting to the various demands of adult life. When a woman has to take on the role of a single mother in early adulthood, she not only faces developmental tasks of a personal nature, but also has to bear the responsibility of caring for and meeting the needs of the family independently. This situation makes the life experience of single mothers in early adulthood a complex social phenomenon that deserves to be studied in depth.

From the perspective of Communication Science, the experience of being a single mother cannot be understood solely as an economic or psychological issue. The experience is also a communication process that involves the formation of meaning, negotiation of self-identity, and interaction with the social environment. Through interpersonal communication, single mothers build relationships with their families, children, neighbors, and the surrounding community. Interpersonal communication is also a means to obtain social support, manage stigma, and maintain social functioning in daily life. Thus, the experience of being a single mother is a reality that is constructed and interpreted through social interactions that take place continuously.

The phenomenon of single mothers is a relevant issue to be studied in the context of Lebak Regency, Banten Province. Based on data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) of Banten Province, Lebak Regency recorded a teenage birth rate of 32.20 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years in 2023, which is the highest rate in Banten Province. This condition is related to the still high practice of early marriage, which has the potential to increase the risk of divorce at a young age. Data from the Rangkasbitung Religious Court shows

that the number of divorce cases has increased from 1,244 cases in 2023 to 1,407 cases in 2024. Interestingly, almost half of the divorced couples are in the age group under 30 years old. This data shows that the number of women living as single mothers of productive age tends to increase from year to year.

This reality was also found in Kadujajar Village, Malingping District, Lebak Regency. Some women who experience divorce have to live life as single mothers with various limitations that they face. In addition to being responsible for childcare, they also have to work to meet the needs of the family. Most work in the informal sector with relatively low income levels. This situation is exacerbated by the socio-economic conditions of Lebak Regency, which still faces a fairly high poverty rate compared to the average of Banten Province (Lebak Regency Central Statistics Agency, 2023). Economic limitations, low levels of education, and lack of access to social resources are factors that affect the quality of life of single mothers in rural areas.

Although studies on single parenting have evolved in a variety of disciplines, most previous research has focused more on aspects of psychological well-being, parenting patterns, and the impact of divorce on children. Fajri and Indrawati (2024), for example, examine the experiences of *single parent mothers* in middle adulthood from a psychological perspective, while Pratiwi and Dewi (2021) highlight the communication patterns of single mothers in shaping the character of adolescents. However, research that specifically explores the life experiences of early adulthood single mothers in the context of rural communities is still relatively limited. Furthermore, there have not been many studies that examine how single mothers interpret their life experiences, build new social identities, and develop coping strategies through interpersonal communication processes in facing various life challenges. These limitations show that there is a research gap that needs to be filled.

Based on the research gap, this study aims to understand the life experiences of single mothers in early adulthood in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency, through a phenomenological approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings formed by informants based on their first-hand lived experiences. This research focuses on the experience of being a single mother, the challenges faced in carrying out the role of a single parent, and the adaptation strategies used to maintain the sustainability of family life.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of Communication Science studies, especially in understanding the relationship between interpersonal communication, the construction of meaning, and the life experiences of individuals in vulnerable situations. In addition, this research is also expected to make a practical contribution to local governments, women's empowerment institutions, and the community in designing social support programs that are more responsive to the needs of single mothers in rural areas. Thus, this study not only enriches the academic literature on single mothers in early adulthood but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of their lives in the socio-cultural context of the people of Lebak Regency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Single Mothers in Early Adulthood

Single mothers are a social group that faces various challenges in carrying out family functions, especially when they have to carry out the role of the main caregiver as well as the breadwinner. This condition generally occurs due to divorce, the death of a partner, or separation that causes the mother to take full responsibility for the care of the child (Amato, 2000). In the context of the modern family, the phenomenon of single mothers is increasingly found and has become an important issue in the study of family, gender, and social welfare.

These challenges become more complex when experienced by women in the early adult phase. According to Arnett (2000), early adulthood is a period of development characterized by the process of identity formation, career development, the formation of intimate relationships, and adjustment to various social responsibilities. In this phase, individuals are still in the process of building economic and psychological stability. Therefore, when a woman has to undertake the role of a single mother in early adulthood, she is faced with the demands of personal development that intersect with the responsibilities of childcare and the fulfillment of family needs.

Various studies show that single mothers are vulnerable to economic stress, role conflicts, and psychological well-being problems. Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003) found that high parenting responsibilities often increase stress levels in parents, especially when spousal support is not available. In addition, single mothers also have the potential to face social stigma stemming from cultural constructions regarding the ideal family and gender roles in society.

In the context of rural communities, these challenges can become more severe because social norms and cultural values tend to influence the lives of individuals more strongly. Therefore, the experience of being a single mother is not only related to economic aspects, but also concerns the process of social adaptation, the formation of self-identity, and efforts to maintain family sustainability in a certain social environment.

Dual Roles and Challenges of Single Mother Life

One of the main characteristics of the life of a single mother is the existence of multiple roles that must be carried out simultaneously. In addition to serving as the main caregiver of children, single mothers are also required to meet the family's economic needs. This condition puts them in a vulnerable position to role conflicts and psychological distress.

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), role conflicts occur when the demands of two or more social roles cannot be fulfilled simultaneously. In the life of a single mother, such conflict arises when work responsibilities clash with the obligations of childcare and household management. Limited time, energy, and resources often cause single mothers to experience prolonged emotional distress.

This phenomenon can be understood through the Role Strain Theory proposed by Goode (1960). This theory explains that individuals will experience tension when they have to meet various role demands that exceed the capacity of their resources. In the context of single mothers, role strains arise due to the accumulation of responsibilities as breadwinners, caregivers, household managers, and community members simultaneously.

However, various studies also show that many single mothers can develop adaptation and *resilience strategies* in the face of life's pressures. Social support from family, friends, and the surrounding environment has proven to be an important factor that helps single mothers maintain psychological well-being and carry out their parenting functions effectively (House, 1981).

Phenomenology as an Approach to Understanding Life Experience

Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on understanding the life experience of individuals as experienced and interpreted by the individuals themselves. This approach departs from the thought of Edmund Husserl, who emphasized the importance of returning to direct human experience to understand social reality (Husserl, 1970).

From a phenomenological perspective, reality is not understood as something objective and independent of humans, but rather as the result of meanings built through everyday life experiences. Therefore, phenomenology seeks to explore how individuals understand, interpret, and give meaning to the experiences they have.

Schutz (1967) developed phenomenology into a social science through the concept of the *life world*, which is the everyday world filled with subjective meanings. According to him, human actions can only be understood through the interpretation of the experience and meaning possessed by the individual. Thus, the phenomenological approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the life experiences of single mothers in specific social and cultural contexts.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

This study uses the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) approach developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Science is a phenomenological approach that focuses on how individuals understand and interpret life experiences that are considered important in their lives.

The science approach has three main characteristics, namely phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic. Phenomenological characteristics place participants' subjective experiences as the main focus of the study. Hermeneutic characteristics emphasize the process of interpretation of the experiences conveyed by the participants. Meanwhile, idiographic characteristics prioritize a deep understanding of each individual's unique experiences before making thematic generalizations.

In research on early adulthood single mothers, science is a relevant approach because it allows researchers to delve deeply into how single mothers understand the life changes they experience, interpret the roles they play, and face various social, economic, and psychological challenges in daily life.

Research Gap

Studies on single mothers have been widely conducted in various research contexts. Several studies focus on communication patterns between single mothers and children (Pratiwi & Dewi, 2021), the experiences of single mothers in middle adulthood (Fajri & Indrawati, 2024), and strategies for dealing with social stigma due to divorce (Suryana & Supratman, 2021).

However, there are still some research gaps. First, most previous studies have focused on the middle adult age group, while the experiences of single mothers in the early adulthood phase are still relatively limited to study. Second, previous research has tended to highlight certain aspects separately, such as communication, social stigma, or childcare, so there hasn't been much research that has explored the life experiences of single mothers holistically. Third, studies on the experiences of single mothers living in rural environments with strong local cultural characteristics are still relatively rare.

Based on these gaps, this study seeks to understand the life experiences of single mothers in early adulthood in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency, through the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) approach. The focus of the research is directed at the experiences, meanings, and challenges they face in living life as single mothers in the midst of the socio-cultural context of rural communities.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with an *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) design developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The IPA approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth how individuals understand, interpret, and give meaning to their lived experiences. The main focus of this study is to understand the subjective

experiences of single mothers in early adulthood in carrying out the role of single parent in the midst of complex social, economic, and emotional demands.

The interpretive phenomenological approach is relevant because the research does not aim to measure the frequency or relationships between variables, but rather to explore the meaning of life experiences constructed by participants based on the social realities they face on a daily basis. Thus, this study seeks to understand the *life world* of single mothers from their own perspective.

Research Paradigm

This research is based on a constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of individual subjective construction through social experiences and interactions (Creswell, 2013). In this paradigm, meaning is not considered as something objective and fixed, but rather is dynamically shaped through an interpretive process that takes place in a particular social and cultural context.

The selection of the constructivist paradigm is in line with the research objectives of understanding how early-adulthood single mothers interpret their experiences after divorce or the loss of a partner. Through this paradigm, life experiences are understood as a reality that is plural, contextual, and influenced by the socio-cultural background of the society where the participants live.

Research Location and Context

The research was carried out in Kadujajar Village, Malingping District, Lebak Regency, Banten Province. This location was chosen purposively because it has the characteristics of a rural community that still maintains traditional values and strong social ties. These conditions provide an important context in understanding the experience of single mothers, especially related to social roles, social support, and stigma they may face in their daily lives.

Data collection was carried out in the June-July 2025 period through in-depth interviews and field observations of participants who met the research criteria.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

The research participants were selected using the *snowball sampling technique*, which is a technique for determining participants that is carried out through recommendations from previous informants until the data obtained reaches a saturation level (*data saturation*) (Sugiyono, 2016). This technique was chosen because the single-mother group is a relatively sensitive population and is not always easy to identify openly.

Participant inclusion criteria include:

- 1) Women with the status of single mothers due to divorce, separation, or the death of a partner;
- 2) Aged 20–40 years (early adulthood);
- 3) Have been a single mother for at least one year;
- 4) Have at least one child;
- 5) Domiciled in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency;
- 6) Willing to participate and share their life experiences voluntarily.

The number of participants in phenomenological research is not determined based on statistical representation, but rather on the depth of data obtained. The study is estimated to involve 4–6 participants, in accordance with the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009) for science studies that emphasize in-depth exploration of individual experiences.

Data Collection Techniques

The research data was collected through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation.

- 1) In-depth interviews: *In-depth interviews* are the main method of data collection. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using interview guidelines designed based on the research focus, namely the experiences, meanings, and challenges experienced by single mothers. The semi-structured approach provides flexibility for participants to develop a narrative of their experiences in a broader and reflective way (Seidman, 2013). All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes.
- 2) Observation: Non-participant observations were made to gain a contextual understanding of the participants' lives. Observations are used to identify nonverbal expressions, social interactions, and environmental conditions that can help researchers understand participants' experiences more comprehensively (Spradley, 1980).
- 3) Documentation: Documentation is used as a source of supporting data in the form of field notes, photos of research activities, and other documents relevant to the participants' life experiences. Documentation data serves to enrich interpretation and support the triangulation process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) approach developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The analysis is carried out through the following stages:

- 1) Read and reread transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' narratives.
- 2) Initial *noting* by identifying the descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments of each transcript.
- 3) Development of emerging themes based on patterns of meaning that emerge from the participants' experiences.
- 4) Seeking the connection between themes so that a broader and more organized theme structure is formed.
- 5) *Cross-case analysis* to identify similarities and differences in experience between participants.
- 6) Interpret meaning by linking empirical findings to relevant theoretical frameworks.

The analysis process is carried out iteratively and reflectively to ensure that the resulting interpretation remains rooted in the participant's experience.

Data Validity

To increase the credibility of the research, several data validity strategies that are prevalent in qualitative research are used, namely:

- 1) Triangulation of methods, through a combination of interviews, observations, and documentation;
- 2) *Member checking*, by asking participants to review the summary of the interview results to ensure the suitability of the researcher's interpretation;
- 3) *Peer debriefing*, through discussions with supervisors or fellow researchers to reduce interpretation bias;
- 4) *Trail audit*, by documenting the entire research process systematically from data collection to analysis.

Research Focus

This research focuses on three main aspects that are the basis of phenomenological exploration, namely:

- 1) Life experience of early adulthood single mothers in living daily life as a single parent;
- 2) The meaning is built on the status and role of a single mother;
- 3) The challenges faced include economic, social, psychological, and strategies used to maintain the sustainability of family life.

Through this focus, the research is expected to produce a deep understanding of the life dynamics of single mothers in early adulthood in the context of rural communities in Lebak Regency.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Informan Characteristic

This study involved five participants who were single mothers aged 20–40 years and lived in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency. All participants had been single mothers for more than a year and had at least one child. Single mother status is obtained due to divorce or the death of a partner. To maintain identity confidentiality, all participants were given codes P1 to P5.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participants	Age	Long Time Being a Single Mother	Number of Children	Causes of Being a Single Mother
P1	28 years old	3 years	1	Divorce
P2	32 years old	5 years	2	Divorce
P3	35 years old	4 years	2	Death of a spouse
P4	26 years old	2 years	1	Divorce
P5	38 years old	7 years	3	Death of a spouse

The analysis using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) produced three main themes that describe the life experiences of single mothers of early adulthood, namely: (1) the experience of living a dual role, (2) the meaning of the status of single mothers, and (3) challenges and survival strategies.

Experience in Dual Roles

All participants described significant changes after becoming single mothers. They are not only responsible for childcare, but are also the main source of family income.

Participants explained that the responsibilities that were previously shared with the couple now have to be carried out alone. This condition has led to an increase in workload, both in the domestic and economic realms.

P1 reveals:

"If I used to have a husband who helped, now I have to do everything myself. Work, take care of the children, take care of the house, everything."

Similar findings also appeared in P4, which stated that rest time is very limited because it has to balance work and children's needs. In addition to economic demands, participants also

highlighted emotional responsibility in assisting children's development. They feel that they must be present as a mother figure as well as a father figure in their children's lives.

Interpretation of Single Mother Status

Although at first the status of single mothers was seen as a tough experience, most participants showed a process of self-acceptance over time.

For some participants, the experience of being a single mother is interpreted as a form of life test that encourages them to become more independent and stronger. P3 states:

"At first, I felt like my life was ruined after my husband died. But over time, I realized that I had to stay strong for the sake of the children."

Other participants interpreted this status as a form of responsibility that must be lived with patience. They put the welfare of children as a top priority in daily life. In addition, there is also a meaning about increasing self-capacity. The experience of facing various difficulties makes participants feel more able to make decisions independently and more confident in their own abilities.

Challenges and Survival Strategies

The third theme describes the various challenges faced by participants while living life as a single mother.

1) Economic Challenges

All participants mentioned the economic aspect as the main challenge. Household needs, children's education, and health costs must be met with limited resources.

P2 reveals:

"The most difficult thing is the problem of school fees and daily needs. Sometimes you have to really manage expenses so that you have enough until the end of the month."

2) Social Challenges

Some participants reported experiences of receiving negative stereotypes and judgments from the surrounding environment, especially for those who were widowed due to divorce.

P4 explains:

"Sometimes there are still people who like to be prejudiced or talk about my personal life."

However, the intensity of the stigma experienced differs in each participant depending on the conditions of their respective social environment.

3) Emotional Challenges

Participants also reported experiences of loneliness, anxiety, and psychological exhaustion, especially in the early days after the loss of a spouse or divorce.

P5 states:

"There were times when I felt tired and wanted to give up, but I had to stay strong because the kids depended on me."

Survival Strategy

In facing these challenges, participants developed a number of adaptation strategies. The most commonly found strategies are to increase economic activity, strengthen relationships with extended families, and seek social support from neighbors and close friends.

In addition, some participants used religious values as a source of psychological strength. Religious activities and spiritual beliefs help them cope with the pressures of daily life.

Summary of Findings

This study identifies three main themes in the experience of single mothers of early adulthood in Kadujajar Village, namely the experience of living a dual role, the meaning of the

status of single mothers, and challenges and survival strategies. The findings suggest that dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers become dominant experiences shaping participants' lives. Despite facing various economic, social, and emotional challenges, participants demonstrated adaptability through social support, increased independence, and strengthening personal and religious values.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to understand the life experiences of single mothers in early adulthood in Kadujajar Village, Lebak Regency, through the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) approach. Based on the results of the study, three main themes were found that shaped the participants' experiences, namely the experience of living a dual role, the meaning of the status of single mothers, and challenges and strategies for survival. These three themes show that the life of a single mother is not only filled with various social, economic, and emotional pressures but also becomes a space for the formation of identity, self-resilience, and a new meaning in life.

Experience of Undergoing Dual Roles as a Form of Role Strain

The study's findings showed that all participants experienced significant changes in their lives after becoming single mothers. They must carry out the dual function of earning a living as well as being the main caregiver of the child. This condition puts them in a situation that demands the ability to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

The results of this study are in line with the theory of social roles put forward by Biddle and Thomas (1966), which explains that individuals can perform several social roles at once according to their position in society. However, when the various demands of these roles cannot be carried out in a balanced manner, *role conflict* arises. In the context of this study, role conflicts were seen when participants had to divide their time between work and childcare responsibilities.

These findings also support the concept of *role strain* introduced by Goode (1960), which is a condition in which individuals experience tension due to the demands of various roles that must be performed simultaneously. Limited time, energy, and resources make single mothers vulnerable to physical and emotional exhaustion. This condition can be seen in the experience of participants who admitted that it was difficult to divide their time between work and meeting the needs of their children.

In addition, this study reinforces the findings of Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003), who stated that single mothers have a higher level of parenting stress than mothers in whole families because they have to bear all family responsibilities independently.

The Meaning of Being a Single Mother as a Process of Constructing Meaning

The results of the study showed that the participants not only experienced various difficulties, but also carried out a process of reflection on their life experiences. At first, the status of a single mother was interpreted as a painful experience full of uncertainty. But as time went by, most of the participants began to build a new, more positive meaning to the conditions they were living in.

These findings are in line with the constructivism paradigm that is the basis of the research. According to Creswell (2013), social reality is formed through individual experiences and interpretations of the world they experience. Thus, the meaning of being a single mother does not arise automatically, but is formed through a process of social interaction and life experiences that continue to develop.

In the perspective of interpretive phenomenology developed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), a person's life experience is not only understood as an event experienced, but also

as something that is actively interpreted and interpreted. Therefore, the change in participants' perspective on the status of single mothers indicates that there is an interpretive process that allows them to build a new identity as independent and responsible women.

The results of this study also have similarities with the research of Hidayatunnajah (2022), which found that single-parent women build the meaning of life through the process of self-acceptance, struggle, and the development of personal resilience. In this study, children were the main factor that encouraged participants to continue to survive and interpret their experiences positively.

From the phenomenological perspective of Alfred Schutz (1967), the meaning constructed by participants cannot be separated from the *life world* they experience daily. The experience of being a single mother is influenced by interactions with children, families, social environments, and economic conditions that shape the way they understand the realities of life.

The Challenges of Single Mother Life in a Rural Social Context

This study found that the main challenges faced by participants included economic, social, and emotional aspects. Of these three aspects, economic problems are the most dominant challenges. All participants revealed that they had to meet the needs of their families with limited resources after losing their source of income from their spouses.

These findings support the opinion of Ghani, Roeswardi, and Aziz (2014), who stated that single mothers face a heavier economic burden because they have to be responsible for all household needs. This condition is increasingly complex because most of the participants also have to allocate time to babysitting, so the job opportunities they can take become more limited.

In addition to economic challenges, this study found that there is social pressure in the form of stereotypes and stigma on widow status, especially for participants who became single mothers due to divorce. Although the level of stigma differs in each individual, the experience of receiving negative judgments from the environment shows that the status of single mothers is still viewed ambivalently in society.

These findings are in line with Henderson et al. (2003), who explain that women who are widows or single parents often face social discrimination and negative judgments from their surroundings. In the context of Kadujajar Village, which still has strong traditional cultural characteristics, social norms regarding the whole family are still an ideal standard in people's lives.

From the perspective of Geertz (1973), local culture plays a role in shaping the way society gives meaning to a person's social status. Therefore, the experience of stigma experienced by participants can be understood as a consequence of the social value system that develops in rural communities.

The next challenge is emotional distress in the form of loneliness, anxiety, and psychological exhaustion. Losing a spouse not only impacts the economic aspect but also reduces the emotional support previously available in the family. This condition shows that the experience of being a single mother is a multidimensional experience that affects various aspects of an individual's life simultaneously.

Survival Strategy as a Form of Adaptation and Resilience

Despite facing various challenges, the results of the study showed that the participants had quite good adaptability. They develop various strategies to maintain the survival of the family, both through economic efforts, social support, and strengthening spirituality.

These findings support the theory of social support put forward by House (1981), which explains that support from family, friends, and the social environment plays an important role in helping individuals cope with the pressures of life. In this study, extended families became the

main source of assistance for some participants, both in the form of emotional support and practical assistance in parenting.

In addition to social support, spirituality was also found to be a source of psychological strength that helped participants face various difficulties. Religious activities provide a sense of calm, hope, and confidence that they are able to live a better life. These findings are in line with research by Lobo (2024), who shows that spiritual values can be an effective coping mechanism for single mothers in the face of life's pressures.

The ability of participants to continue to carry out family functions, raise children, and maintain economic life indicates resilience that develops through their life experiences. This resilience does not appear instantly, but is formed through a long process of facing various challenges and life changes.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the results show that the experience of being a single mother in early adulthood is a complex and multidimensional experience. The dual role carried out gives rise to various forms of economic, social, and emotional pressure that have the potential to cause *role strain*. However, through the process of constructing meaning, social support, and developing adaptation strategies, the participants were able to build a new identity as more independent, resilient, and responsible individuals. These findings confirm that the experience of being a single mother is not only related to the loss of a partner but is also a process of self-transformation that shapes the way individuals understand their lives, families, and futures.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the experience of being a single mother in early adulthood is a complex and multidimensional life process, including psychological, social, and economic aspects. Through the *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) approach, it was found that the participants experienced significant changes in roles after losing their spouses due to divorce or death. They must play the dual role of breadwinner as well as primary caregiver of children, which often leads to emotional stress and economic limitations.

The findings of the study show that these experiences not only present various challenges but also encourage the formation of new meaning in life. Single mothers interpret the role they play as a form of responsibility, struggle, and a process of self-strengthening. The experience of facing various difficulties gradually forms a more independent and resilient identity in daily life.

The study also found that the main challenges faced include economic instability, the burden of parenting, psychological pressure, and the social stigma that is still attached to the status of single mothers. In dealing with these conditions, participants developed various survival strategies through strengthening family support, increasing economic independence, utilizing social networks, and strengthening spiritual values.

Theoretically, the results of this study strengthen the perspective of interpretive phenomenology, which views life experience as a process of forming meaning that is subjective and contextual. In addition, the findings of the study confirm that the experience of being a single mother is not solely related to the loss of a partner, but is also a process of self-transformation that results in adaptability and resilience in the face of various demands of life.

This research contributes to the development of communication studies, social psychology, and family studies, especially in understanding the life experiences of single mothers in rural environments. These findings also indicate the importance of strengthening economic empowerment programs, psychosocial support, and efforts to reduce social stigma to improve the well-being of single mothers and their families.

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