

It's Hard to Raise a Child Alone: Lived Experiences of Widowed Parents in Raising Their School-Age Children

Mahirap Magpalaki ng Anak na Mag-isa: Mga Karanasan ng Balo Mga Magulang sa Pagpapalaki ng Kanilang Mga Anak sa Edad na Mag-aaral

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of widowed parents in raising school-age children. The researchers employed a phenomenological design and reflexive thematic analysis. The in-depth interview participants included six widowed parents in Bayawan City, Philippines. The researchers generated three themes from the experiences shared by the widowed parents who are raising school-age children: financial difficulty, loss of marital and parental support, and adjustment to new parental roles. The death of a spouse meant a cut in the family income, thereby leaving the widowed parents struggling to raise their school-age children. Further, it also meant the loss of marital and parental support for the children since widowed parents have to accomplish various domestic and parental responsibilities all by themselves. Meanwhile, widowed parents' adjustments to the transitions before and after they lose their spouses are conveyed in the following subthemes: disparities between having and losing a partner, emotional distress, and adapting to new responsibilities left by their deceased partners. The researchers conclude that widowed parents who are raising school-age children experience financial difficulties, loss of marital and parental support, and the need to adjust to new parental roles left by their deceased partners. This study advances knowledge of the experiences of widowed parents of school-age children and their responses to one of life's most upsetting occurrences. Relevant programs and interventions, such as counseling and livelihood training, may be implemented using the study's findings to help this vulnerable population.

Keywords: widowed parenting; solo parenting; school-age children; lived experiences; phenomenology

ABSTRAK

Layunin ng pag-aaral na siyasin ang mga karanasang buhay ng mga nabiyudang magulang sa pagpapalaki ng mga anak na nasa edad-paaralan. Gumamit ang mga mananaliksik ng disenyong penomenolohikal at reflexive thematic analysis. Lumahok sa malalimang panayam ang anim na nabiyudang magulang mula sa Bayawan City, Pilipinas. Mula sa salaysay ng mga kalahok, natukoy ang tatlong pangunahing tema: kahirapang pinansyal, pagkawala ng suporta ng asawa at magulang, at pag-aangkop sa mga bagong tungkulin bilang magulang. Ang pagkamatay ng asawa ay nagdulot ng pagbawas sa kita ng pamilya, kaya nahirapan ang mga nabiyudang magulang na matugunan ang pangangailangan ng kanilang mga anak. Nawala rin ang suporta ng asawa sa mga gawaing pampamilya at pagpapalaki ng anak, dahilan upang akuin ng natitirang magulang ang lahat ng responsibilidad sa tahanan at pag-aaruga. Lumitaw din ang iba't ibang anyo ng pag-aangkop sa mga pagbabagong dulot ng pagkawala ng asawa. Kabilang dito ang pagkakaiba ng buhay na may kapareha at wala, emosyonal na pagdurusa, at pagharap sa mga bagong pananagutang naiwan ng yumao nilang asawa. Napagpasyahan ng pag-aaral na ang mga nabiyudang magulang na may mga anak na nasa edad-paaralan ay nakararanas ng kahirapang pinansyal, pagkawala ng suporta ng asawa at magulang, at pangangailangang umangkop sa mga bagong tungkulin bilang magulang. Nag-aambag ang pag-aaral sa mas malalim na pag-unawa sa kanilang mga karanasan at pagtugon sa isa sa pinakamabibigat na pagsubok sa buhay. Batay sa mga natuklasan, maaaring magpatupad ng mga programang tulad ng pagpapayo at pagsasanay sa kabuhatan upang makatulong sa pagpapabuti ng kanilang kalagayan.

Mga keyword: balo na pagiging magulang; solo parenting; mga batang nasa edad na mag-aaral; mga karanasan sa buhay; phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

The death of a spouse is one of the most painful things one can experience (George, 2023). For children who have lost a parent, this is a stressful life event (Bergman et al., 2017). Widowed parents frequently struggle to fulfill the tasks their partner formerly handled while also managing their sorrow, fostering family harmony, and providing for their children (Weber et al., 2019; Silverman & Thomson, 2018, as cited in Falk et al., 2021). Statistically, there are approximately 350 million widowed people in the world (Chamie, 2020); roughly 258 million of the 350 million widowed persons are women (United Nations Women, 2021).

Parents who were recently widowed with young children described having a moderate-to-severe symptom load for sadness, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress (Falk et al., 2021). Families with young children experience severe disturbance when a parent passes away (Park et al., 2021), especially with certain aspects of the tragic event, such as the delivery and explanation of the grave news of the death of a parent, which can be traumatic when it happens unexpectedly, like an accident (Ellis et al., 2025). Widowed parents are essential in fostering family adaptability and helping their children cope with the loss of a parent (Yopp et al., 2019). For widows and widowers, dependent children posed a variety of additional difficulties (Anderson et al., 2023). Bereaved children are vulnerable to clinical mental health implications and can develop depression, intrusive grief, and suicidal ideation (Hoppe, 2025), thereby requiring a certain level of attention to help them develop protective coping processes to minimize long-term depressive symptoms. Increased caregiving obligations might make widowed parents feel pressured to make up for their co-parent's absence (Edwards et al., 2018). Children in other household types are more likely to have lower educational levels than those raised by their married parents. They will most likely become teen parents and experience health, behavior, and mental health issues. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood of poverty for kids in single-parent and cohabiting families (Parke, 2003).

Parents' engagement and responsibility in their children's education are essential, particularly during the formative years (Miñoza & Elloran, 2023). Parental self-efficacy can mitigate the risks posed by specific parent-child risk variables and act as a buffer against risk factors that have a negative impact, such as socioeconomic disadvantage (Scannell, 2021). Self-efficacy, a trait that guards against depressive symptoms, can be damaged by traumatic life experiences (Maciejewski et al., 2000). Currently, no studies are exploring the lived experiences of widowed parents raising a schoolchild. People who are widowed and parenting dependent children, especially the adjustments they have to make, are rarely known (Anderson et al., 2023).

Parents with high parenting self-efficacy (PSE) demonstrate excellent skills and sensitivity to their child's needs (Scannell, 2021). Lower self-efficacy is associated with greater grief and greater resource loss (Edwards et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2015; Witting et al., 2019, as cited in Xu et al., 2020). It is known that widowed fathers experience depressive symptoms and grief (Yopp et al., 2015), while widowed mothers experience somatic and mental distress (Morina & Emmelkamp, 2012). Both widowed genders are negatively affected by their mental health (Park et al., 2021) and their psychological well-being (Yopp et al., 2019). However, there is minimal information on those who are widowed and parenting dependent children (Anderson et al., 2023).

This present study aimed to explore their lived experiences using a phenomenological design. Specifically, the following research question served as a guide during the investigation: What is it like for widowed parents to raise their school-age children? Finally, the findings of this research may contribute to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as recommendations for measures and initiatives to improve and support widowed parents' welfare in raising school-age children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Becoming a widow is a highly stressful life event that can affect one's health and finances (Jain et al., 2022). Surviving spouses promote good family functioning in houses where there were previously two parents (Yopp et al., 2019). The surviving spouse can be overwhelmed by the sudden increase in workload and responsibilities that were previously under the purview of the dead partner, leaving them to feel exhausted and as if they have no time for themselves. In addition to that, there are the emotional factors, such as intense grief and depression, that overwhelm them, thus affecting their parenting (Donohue & Duffey, 2026). Thus, losing a spouse can be an emotionally draining experience (Amoo et al., 2022). Adults who are grieving and raising young children whose parents have passed away have high levels of despair and sorrow (Park et al., 2021). Young widows who have experienced numerous levels of loss are more vulnerable to mental health problems and poor health outcomes (Williams, 2023).

Children, for better or worse, will be witness to how the surviving parent copes with death and grief; at best they will see their remaining parent cope well and adjust to the additional roles and responsibilities, but the children are also just as likely to see their parents struggle whether it manifests as their parents trying to cry in secret or be exposed to psychological breakdowns or attempts at self-harm. Children may modify their behavior, such as trying not to be a burden or avoiding actions that could “upset” their parent, which may inadvertently lead to children masking or suppressing their emotions and grief (Wray et al., 2025). The bereaved parent is now also tasked with needing to manage their children’s grief in addition to their own because they have to be the one to deliver the tragic news, have to be conscious of how their own grief affects their parenting, and understand that this will change their child, and they will need to learn how to maneuver through that turmoil (Ellis et al., 2025). When compared to their married counterparts, being a widow is strongly linked to deprivation in at least some areas (Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2015). An example of this is financial deprivation; oftentimes, when the wife loses a husband, they are more susceptible to financial problems, which puts them at risk of poverty (Hossain & James, 2024, as cited by Shoko, 2025).

When a parent with dependent-age children passes away, intra-family dynamics are disrupted, and the surviving family members are at risk of suffering adverse psychological and physiological effects (Yopp et al., 2019). Widowed parents have to take additional responsibilities for the upbringing of their children, adjust to their new positions in the family, and cope with their children's unhappiness. Widowed parents may experience high levels of parenting-related stress. Grieving parents who have children at home must adjust to circumstances that are very different from and may even be more complex than those faced by an older widow or widower.

A person's assessment of his/her capacity to carry out the parenting duties required to raise a child successfully is referred to as parenting self-efficacy (PSE) (Edwards et al., 2018). Parents with high PSE are more competent and attentive to their child's needs (Scannell, 2021). A higher sense of effectiveness in the parenting role may have resulted from the Family Bereavement Program's focus on assisting bereaved parents in fostering their relationships with their kids, which might have eventually resulted in decreased levels of depression (Sandler et al., 2016). “Lower parenting self-efficacy was also linked to female gender and unexpected loss— factors independently associated with a higher risk of grief distress” (Park et al., 2021).

Moreover, decreased self-efficacy is linked to more severe sadness and resource depletion (Edwards et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2015; Witting et al., 2019, as cited in Xu et al., 2020). The psychological suffering of widowed fathers does not soon subside within the first two years after a loss; it might be due to particular grieving difficulties faced by bereaved parents, including

having to support their child's loss, take on solo parental duties, and manage a family by themselves (Yopp et al., 2019). Upon their spouses' deaths, many widows find it challenging to provide for their children (Dube, 2022). When compared to children brought by widowed mothers, children raised by widowers have a higher likelihood of suffering more prominent disturbances in their everyday lives, as well as poorer self-regard and assurance. In comparison to widowed mothers, widowers are less inclined to use a child-centered parenting style that has been demonstrated to improve the psychological well-being of children of bereaved parents (Haine et al., 2006; Kwok et al., 2005 as cited in Yopp et al., 2019).

Poorer parental adjustment to bereavement was closely correlated with lower parenting efficacy and increased parenting concerns in early grief (Park et al., 2021). Findings revealed that children's behavioral issues are both a cause and a result of parenting-related stress (Neece et al., 2012). Moreover, when widows contrasted their pre-loss parenting style to their ability as single parents, they felt inadequate and disappointed about the upbringing they were provided with their child(ren) (Williams, 2023). Based on the study of Fang et al. (2021), there was no indication of a connection between a child's gender, age, marital status, and PSE in either the mothers or the dads; between a mother's ethnicity, age, or job status and her family income; or between a parent's educational level and their degree of parenting exhaustion.

With these existing studies, however, there is minimal information on those who are widowed and parenting-dependent children (Anderson et al., 2023). Compared to other facets of grieving, the difficulty of parenting a widow has received far less study attention (Edwards et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN

This study utilized a phenomenological design through an unstructured, in-person, in-depth interview. The researchers deemed this design appropriate for this kind of study, as it aims to explore the lived experiences of widowed parents raising a schoolchild, allowing participants to speak freely and share their experiences.

SETTING

This study was conducted in six elementary schools in Bayawan City, Philippines. One widowed parent of a student from each school was invited to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants who voluntarily consented to participate in the in-depth interview included six widowed parents who met the criteria. This number is an acceptable size for identifying patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The in-depth interview inclusion criteria were: (a) being widowed for at least two years during this study, and (b) being resident in the urban or rural areas of Bayawan City. Those who meet the criteria above did not qualify as participants if: (a) their spouse died in February 2021 up to the present, (b) they are cognitively impaired, and (c) they cannot communicate properly.

All participants experienced the death of a partner at least two years before being interviewed. Participants had at least one schoolchild. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before being interviewed. Four mothers and two fathers who experienced a partner's death from 2 to 11 years ago participated; all identified as being in heterosexual relationships. To ensure anonymity in reporting, participants are identified as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on.

Participant 1 is a 43-year-old female housekeeper who has been widowed for three years. She has two school-age children (one in fourth grade and one in eighth grade).

Participant 2 is a 41-year-old male housekeeper who has been widowed for 2 years and has one child, a second-grade pupil.

Participant 3 is a 39-year-old female utility worker who has been widowed for 11 years. She has two school-age children (one in sixth grade and one in eighth grade).

Participant 4 is a 34-year-old female housekeeper who has been widowed for four years. She has three school-age children (one in first grade, one in fifth grade, and one in eighth grade).

Participant 5 is a 44-year-old male mechanic who has been widowed for three years. He has three school-age children (one in ninth grade, one in sixth grade, and one in fourth grade).

Participant 6 is a 43-year-old female who is self-employed and has been widowed for 2 years. She has two school-age children (one in fifth grade five, and one in sixth grade).

Parents with school-age children were intentionally selected as participants because this group is situated at a critical stage where parenting demands are both emotionally and structurally intense, especially after the loss of a spouse. The study specifically aimed to understand how widowed parents navigate daily responsibilities such as providing education, emotional guidance, and financial support to children who are still dependent and actively engaged in schooling. School-age children require consistent supervision, academic involvement, and developmental support, making the absence of a co-parent more visible and impactful in everyday life. By focusing on this group, the researchers were able to capture the depth of disruption and adjustment widowed parents experience as they assume dual roles in both caregiving and decision-making. Ultimately, these participants provided rich and meaningful accounts that directly align with the study's goal of exploring the lived realities of widowed parenting in a context where responsibilities are both immediate and demanding.

DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE

The researchers sought approval from the Department of Education, Bayawan City Division, after the College of Teacher Education at Negros Oriental State University, Bayawan – Santa Catalina Campus, approved the conduct of this study. The researchers consulted the widowed parents who fit the inclusion criteria for this study.

An unstructured, face-to-face, in-depth interview was conducted. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and share personal experiences in their own words. Each interview lasted for at least 45 minutes. The interview was recorded, translated, coded, and then analyzed. Regarding the translation process, a multilingual translator proficient in Cebuano and English was used to double-check each transcript. The data collection took place in April 2023.

ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), representing their process for reflexive thematic analysis. The process includes the following steps: (1) familiarization, (2) formulation of codes, (3) creation of themes, (4) review of themes, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) report creation. Credibility was established by having the participants examine the interview descriptions to ensure that what was written down was intended to be conveyed, similar to the study by Kwi-Soon and Bok-Sun (2009).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study's participants read and signed an informed consent form before participating voluntarily. The participants' identities were protected so that nothing in this work can lead to their identification. Participants' decisions were respected, even if they had signed the consent form, and they could withdraw at any time. Any information provided by the participants was kept anonymous. Only the researchers had access to the participants' information. Lastly, the Negros Oriental State University Research Ethics Committee granted ethics approval before the start of fieldwork to ensure that no ethical standards would be violated when conducting research with participants (REA-2023-EXE-S-0034).

RESULTS

The researchers generated three themes using the reflexive thematic analysis of in-depth interviews about the lived experiences of widowed parents raising their school-age children. These themes are financial difficulty, loss of marital and parental support, and adjustment to new parental roles.

THEME 1: FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY

The major problem the participants experienced in raising their school-age children was financial difficulty. Participants struggled most with money because their late spouses were the family's primary financial contributors. So, when their spouses died, their income was affected. They ran into difficulties in raising their school-age children. What was a routine task before becomes challenging to accomplish. Money is needed to survive, which led some participants to ask their children to temporarily stop going to school to reduce costs and help them get by in their daily lives. A participant admitted: *"I asked [my child] to stop his studies because what will I do, I can no longer afford to send him to school"* (Participant 6).

Surviving parents juggle earning money and caring for their children. Some opted to pay for a babysitter. Thus, losing a spouse cuts the late partner's financial contribution and the surviving parents' income. As conveyed by the participant:

"I did struggle...of course, in raising my children because I don't have a partner to help me. It is very difficult when I earn money that is supposed to be used for feeding my children, but I cannot save it since I still have to pay somebody to look after my (little) child"

(Participant 4)

Surviving parents struggled to provide for their children's needs, especially now that they are on their own. They experienced situations they did not think would happen to them, such as being left with empty pockets. As expressed by the participant: *"I have problems mainly with money for the expenses and daily needs of my children. There are times that we have zero money with us"* (Participant 5).

THEME 2: LOSS OF MARITAL AND PARENTAL SUPPORT

This theme points out the need for widowed parents to have a partner's support in raising their children. The death of their spouses causes them to lose the support the deceased used to provide. They no longer have support in raising their children. Due to the loss of their late spouses, the surviving parent has to fill the void their children are feeling while battling their struggles for the same reason.

The loss of marital support made the surviving parents always think of their late spouses. Since the loss of their partners, surviving parents are all alone with their problems, and every time there is a situation that is linked to their late spouses, their memories can be easily triggered, so they can do nothing but think of their late partner, whose presence continues to exist. Most of the participants admit that they do not think their spouses died because they can still feel their late spouse's presence. As conveyed by the participants:

"He was no longer here; however, I still think that he is still here, and I felt like he is still alive"
(Participant 4)

"And now I keep on thinking that my spouse did not die; it was not in my mind that she was dead. I felt like she is still here"
(Participant 5)

"Although his wake was not held in our home, we always remember him as if he were still alive. Even after a year, we can still sense his presence"
(Participant 2)

THEME 3: ADJUSTMENT TO NEW PARENTAL ROLES

The third theme shows the surviving parents' affliction and challenges after their late partners left them. Widowed parents' adjustments to the transitions before and after they lose their spouses are conveyed in the following subthemes: disparities between having and losing a partner, emotional distress, and adapting to new responsibilities left by their deceased partners.

DISPARITIES BETWEEN HAVING AND LOSING A PARTNER

Back when widowed parents still had their spouses, they did not have problems dealing with the roles assigned to them, especially since they had their partners to rely on. However, after losing their spouses, all of the responsibilities piled up on the surviving parent, and they got to touch things they had not touched before. Their lives transitioned from being carefree to fully occupied and anxious, as participants conveyed that their lives are more challenging now compared to when they still had a partner, where responsibilities are shared:

"Now, everything is my responsibility. That's why I think that it's just really different. I'm really having a hard time now compared to before"

(Participant 4)

When the dead spouse is male, the surviving parent struggles to discipline their children, mainly because they used to listen more to their deceased father than their mother when they still had both parents:

"The difference is that you are the only one who will discipline [them]... It's quite different when they [children] have someone, they are afraid of. Now, they will feel scared, but it's different"

(Participant 6)

A participant also observed that the behavior of their children has changed since their mother died, referring to one of the scenarios they experienced:

"Before, when his mother was still alive, when we asked him to come with us, he would immediately go with us. However, now that their mother is gone, he'd be like, 'Just go with them, Daddy.' He likes being alone rather than going with us, because before, when we took him with us, he would really enjoy it"

(Participant 5)

In terms of the financial aspect, the surviving parent has to go through different approaches in life to survive their daily lives, which includes trying things they had not tried back when they still had their late partner, as the participant recounted:

"No one else is earning; it's just me. That's why it's different when you have a husband. Of course, when my husband was here, I didn't go through any situation like this where I had to do everything on my own; I had no problems, like life was so easy"

(Participant 6)

EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

The loss of their partner impacted the lives of the surviving parents, leaving them in such deep sorrow that some participants thought of stopping their lives, and some experienced a loss of interest in their hobbies. The emotional distress widowed parents suffer interrupts their sleep, which pushes them to establish new activities as their coping mechanisms, particularly drinking, to survive their wakeful nights. As expressed by the participant:

"I can't sleep, and when I drink, that is when I can feel relaxed, so I would drink to fall asleep because if I don't drink, I could not sleep as I would keep on crying. It was really excruciating"

(Participant 4)

Undeniably, the surviving parent experiences an influx of emotion after losing a spouse. In addition, they are worried about how to care for their children. This workload caused them to feel pressure, as one participant stated:

"It is really stressful; it is tiring to think about how to raise them, how to take care of them; it is stressful to think about"

(Participant 3)

Widowed parents greatly suffer the loss of their spouses. A passion that used to give them happiness can no longer give it, as a participant said:

"When I get frustrated, there are many places to wander in Cebu, like in PC X. I do have a motorcycle, so I would travel by myself, yet the road still seems gloomy even when doing things that used to excite me"

(Participant 2)

Surviving parents struggle to deal with their emotions after the deaths of their spouses, leaving them feeling numb and hopeless. As expressed by some participants:

"It was so different—really unusual—that I could not even understand my feelings. I could not feel hungry at that time with all the stress"

(Participant 6)

"I felt I was hurt, and I lost hope after what happened"

(Participant 3)

Surviving parents show there is no gender in the tormented situation and note the importance of having family in this toughest battle of their lives. A participant admits that:

"We cannot always avoid having a heavy heart. I cry a lot, even though I am a man. I shed a lot of tears. I often tell my parents that I am exhausted. My children gave me courage, and my parents encouraged me by saying, 'You can get through this. Without them, I would have given up long ago'"

(Participant 5)

ADAPTING TO NEW RESPONSIBILITIES LEFT BY THEIR DECEASED PARTNERS

The responsibilities left by the deceased parent must go entirely to the surviving parent, who is unaccustomed to them, so they suddenly become heavier for them. A participant admitted that they feel burdened in adapting to new roles left by their deceased partners, such as when the children are primarily cared for by their late parents, and they have to adapt to this role, which they are not used to. A participant shared:

"My children are closer to my late partner, my husband. They were the ones who were close, and I did not have a hard time with them because when they were younger, my husband was the one who managed any problems with the children. That is why it's a heavy responsibility for me because I am not used to it; it was all new to me, but I'm trying my hardest to discipline them"

(Participant 4)

As surviving parents adapt to new roles, they struggle to simultaneously manage the responsibilities previously performed by their late partner, as some participants shared:

"It is challenging; I still have to wash, cook, and do everything else, and you still have a job to do and kids to pick up from school"

(Participant 2)

"If [you] are alone for sure, you will have a hard time figuring out how you are going to raise, feed, and clothe your [children]"

(Participant 1)

In addition, the previous experiences of widowed parents are also determinants of how they feel towards the responsibilities left by their late spouses, as evidenced by this participant, who expressed that:

"When I cook, facing the products, my tears drop because I do not know anything about cooking. I really do not know"

(Participant 6)

The same participant admitted that the new responsibilities were burdensome:

"It is extremely heavy for me—really heavy"

(Participant 6)

DISCUSSION

The current study identified three themes, expressed by the interview participants, representing the experiences of widowed parents raising their school-age children. Widowed parents have come across challenges as they continue their lives without their spouses. Also, the study found evidence from the participants' experiences that the adjustment to new roles has overwhelmed the surviving parents.

The findings highlight the struggles encountered by widowed parents in raising school-age children. The most prominent theme was financial difficulty, which all the participants first mentioned. Being a widow is a stressful life experience that negatively affects a person's health and finances (Jain et al., 2022). The occupation of widowed parents plays a role in this problem, as most of the respondents' occupations do not guarantee enough salary to support their families. Also, most of the participants were at the stage one or two years after their spouse's passing, which is one of the factors of financial difficulty, and this is consistent with the findings of Fazoranti and Aruna (2007), which revealed that numerous financial, social, and psychological issues arise with being a widow, especially in the initial year or two after the spouse's passing. Furthermore, this aligns with our findings that the loss of a spouse has cut family income, as they still have to pay for services that could have been provided by the late spouse, leaving the surviving parent struggling to get by. This finding supports the study by Biever et al. (2021), which reported that when a spouse passes away, the widow may develop negative financial views and concerns. Additionally, this is also consistent with the findings of Vo et al.'s (2023) work, where widows are relatively vulnerable to poverty.

Widowed people suffer from the loss of marital and parental support. They no longer have the support to fulfill their various responsibilities, which makes them always think of their late spouses, as their memories live in every corner of their house. Their children likewise keep longing for their deceased parents. This finding is consistent with the various psychosocial responses to particular types of bereavement, as described in the book by the Institute of Medicine (US) Committee for the Study of Health Consequences of the Stress of Bereavement (1984) that the sense of being connected to the lost figure persists—sometimes exacerbating a sense of having been abandoned, other times contributing to a sense of continuing in a relationship, even with an absent partner—even after the death of a spouse.

Widowed parents frequently struggle to fulfill the tasks their partner formerly handled while also managing their sorrow, fostering family harmony, and providing for their children (Weber et al., 2019; Silverman & Thomson, 2018, as cited in Falk et al., 2021). The same experience was documented in this present study, where widowed parents struggled to adjust to new parental roles. They feel burdened by the responsibilities left by their deceased partners, and as a parent alone with their children, it also takes up all their time and energy. Some widowed parents have changed the way they discipline their children since their spouses died; for example, some widowed parents have become less strict in disciplining their children because they feel pity for their children. Having to face all the responsibilities at the same time as dealing with sadness, widowed parents develop new activities as their coping mechanisms, like drinking alcohol, and some lose interest in things they used to do. Surviving parents admit that there is a big difference when your spouse accompanies you in raising your children.

The findings of this study directly respond to its central objective of understanding the lived experiences of widowed parents raising school-age children, revealing that the loss of a spouse reshapes parenting into a more complex, demanding, and emotionally-charged role. The emergence of financial difficulty, loss of marital and parental support, and adjustment to new parental roles reveals that widowed parents are not only grieving but are simultaneously managing intensified responsibilities tied to their children's schooling, daily needs, and emotional development. These impacts are particularly pronounced among those with school-age children because their parenting extends beyond basic care into educational support, discipline, and continuous emotional reassurance, especially as children actively express longing, ask questions about the deceased parent, and exhibit behavioral changes. In contrast, while widowed parents with non-school-going children may also experience grief and financial strain, the present findings suggest a qualitatively different burden for those with school-age children, as they must navigate structured demands such as schooling expenses, academic guidance, and social development, which intensify both financial pressure and emotional labor. Thus, the study demonstrates that widowhood in the context of school-age parenting is not merely an experience of loss but a sustained process of role reconstruction, where the parent is compelled to function simultaneously as sole provider, emotional anchor, and educational guide, making their experience more layered and demanding compared to those raising younger or non-school-going children.

LIMITATIONS

Certain limitations of this study could be addressed in future research. For example, there was an uneven gender distribution among participants, as the number of women (4) was higher than that of male participants (2). Despite these limitations, the present study has enhanced our understanding of the lived experiences of widowed parents raising their school-age children. This research could stimulate further investigation into the crucial areas the researchers did not address (e.g., participants with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds).

CONCLUSION

Widowed parents who are raising school-age children experience financial difficulties, loss of marital and parental support, and the need to adjust to new parental roles left by their deceased partners. This study advances knowledge of the experiences of widowed parents of school-aged children and their responses to one of life's most upsetting occurrences.

Based on the study's results, the Philippines' Department of Education may offer programs for widowed parents, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development may consider counseling programs for widowed parents and their school-age children. They can also conduct livelihood training and workshops for widowed parents in coordination with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to help them financially, in addition to government financial support or subsidies to help raise the school-age children of this deserving population. In terms of future research, extending the current findings by examining the different types of single-parent families' experiences in raising school-age children would be helpful. Examining differences in parenting self-efficacy among these groups could provide valuable insights for developing tailored support programs.

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