

Comparison of Coping Styles and Grief Reactions in Mothers Who Are Heads of Families Due to Divorce and Death of Spouse

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Abstract

Introduction: The experience of loss is challenging, especially when it occurs due to divorce or the death of a spouse, and it can be a difficult experience for mothers. The research aims to compare the coping styles and grief reactions in mothers who are heads of families due to divorce and the death of spouse.

Research method: The current research is descriptive of causal-comparative type. The statistical population of the study included all the heads of families with the age range of 33 to 52 years residing in Karaj city during the 2022-2023 period which included two groups of divorced mothers and mothers whose husbands had died. The sampling method was of convenience type and consisted of two groups of 35 mothers who were heads of the family (one group due to divorce and the second group due to the spouse's death). The data collection tools used in the study were the Coping Strategies Questionnaire and the Hogan Grief Reaction Checklist. Data were analyzed using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and SPSS version 24.

Findings: The findings showed that mothers who are the head of the family due to divorce use more emotion-oriented coping strategies compared to mothers who are the head of the family due to the death of their spouse ($p=0.001$). Also, mothers who are the head of the family due to divorce experience more blame and anger, separation and withdrawal, as well as confusion compared to mothers who are the head of the family due to the death of their spouse ($p=0.001$).

Conclusion: Therefore, it can be concluded that the challenges faced by mothers who are the head of the family after divorce create different coping mechanisms and grief reactions compared to those due to the death of their spouses. The results of this research can be used by psychologists and family counselors.

Keywords: coping strategies, divorce, grief, head of the family

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Introduction:

The family is a basic social institution that acts as the primary platform for emotional support, socialization, and identity formation (1). Traditionally, the role of the head of the family has often been associated with the character of the father or man (2). However, the changes in social norms and family structure, such as grief or divorce, lead to the recognition of the role of mothers in taking on the responsibilities within the family unit (3). In these cases, mothers often become the main caregiver of the family and take responsibility for maintaining the stability and continuity of the family amid chaos and sorrow. In other words, mothers become the head of the family (4). In Iran, the number of official single-parent families headed by women is increasing. The ratio was 12.1% and reached 12.7% in 2015, when there were 3061.753 women heads of families.

Playing the role of a mother is inherently challenging, when mothers become the head of the family due to divorce or the death of their spouse, the situation can become even more difficult (5). This transition not only changes their family dynamics but also exposes them to unique and fundamental challenges (6).

They often have to act as emotional anchors and provide support, guidance and stability for their children and other family members (7). In many cases, mothers are responsible for managing the family's finances, making vital decisions, and ensuring the family's well-being (8).

While mothers who take care of the family due to divorce and mothers who do this because of the death of their husbands face challenges, it seems that the circumstances surrounding divorce and the death of their spouses are different for them (9). In the case of divorce, mothers often face emotional turmoil in addition to the practical aspects of being the head of the family (10). Pursuing joint parenting responsibilities, the legal and judicial process of divorce, and financial issues related to alimony and dowry are the major challenges of these mothers (11, 12).

In addition, they may face a sense of failure or stigma associated with marital dissolution, stereotypes, and misconceptions about their marital status and parenting abilities (13). On the other hand, the loss of a spouse due to death plunges mothers into the realm of grief and adaptation (14). These women are placed in roles that require not only nurturing and care but also financial responsibility and decision-making (15). Financial stability may also become a concern, especially if the deceased was the main breadwinner (16). Widowed mothers may receive sympathy (17) also experience the social circles that were previously shared with their deceased husbands (18).

In general, it can be said that mothers becoming the head of the family for any reason can be daunting because these mothers not only have to deal with their grief and adjustment but also they should support their children in this process as well (5). In other words, life-changing events such as divorce or the loss of a life partner often require the creation of coping styles that suit the specific needs of the family (9). Coping styles are a set of the individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts that are used to interpret and correct a stressful situation and lead to the reduction of suffering caused by it (19) and evaluate a wide range of thoughts and actions that people use when facing internal or external stressful conditions (20).

Lazarus and Folkman (21) proposed two strategies to deal with stress: problem-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles. Problem-oriented coping styles work to directly change stressors, while emotion-oriented coping styles focus more attention on changing emotions and feelings (22). Although people usually use a certain style for certain situations, problem-oriented coping styles work better for events that are not beyond their ability and control (23).

In other words, when people evaluate an incident as a controllable incident, they tend to use problem-oriented coping styles (24). But in other situations when they know that the performance will not produce a beneficial effect or may even make the situation and problem worse, they prefer to use emotion-oriented coping styles (25). Lazarus and Folkman (20), based on these two types of coping styles, have mentioned eight separate methods to deal with a stressful situation including confrontation, withdrawal, self-control, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escaping or avoiding, planning to solve the problem, and positive evaluation. Studies have shown that mothers who are in charge of the family due to the death of their husbands often tend to use emotion-oriented coping strategies to overcome intense feelings of sadness and loss (14).

Mothers who are the head of the family due to divorce and mothers who became the head of the family due to the death of their husband, both face a deep experience of loss and grief after the death of their spouse or termination of marriage through divorce (14). In general, mourning is a natural response to a loss, this loss can be due to the death of a loved one, disconnection, disability, or temporary loss (26). Mourning is a multidimensional phenomenon that causes different reactions in different people (27). For example, cognitive reactions refer to the fact that cause changes in people's cognition and way of thinking, such as creating pessimism towards the world, turning away from religion, suicidal thoughts, obsessions, delusions, and denials (27, 28).

Emotional reactions include despair, anger, loneliness, mood swings, anxiety, lack of self-esteem, numbness, difficulty in accepting grief, and trusting others (28). Behavioral reactions also refer to behaviors such as isolation, avoiding anything reminiscent of the deceased, crying, and self-destructive behaviors (27) and physiological reactions show that some people may experience physical symptoms after experiencing grief, such as low quality of sleep, pressure in the chest, throat tightness, and digestive problems, lack of energy, weight change and loss of appetite (29).

In other words, the death of a partner not only represents the loss of a loved one but also destroys the dreams of a shared future and forces mothers who have lost their husbands to face the bitter reality of life without a husband, the sadness of loneliness and the daunting task of family responsibilities (30, 14). Similarly, for women who divorce, the end of a marriage can evoke a range of emotions from sadness and despair to anger and resentment (31, 32).

A review of the research background showed that married mothers have more social support than single mothers, while single mothers experience more stress. No significant difference was observed in coping styles between these two groups (33). Also, studies indicated that widowed mothers are at risk of increasing poor adaptation. Approximately two-thirds of them reported functional decline and probable depression with high rates of psychological distress (34). Furthermore, research evidence showed that although coping strategies are important and unique predictors of well-being work, for single mothers, these strategies may not be enough to significantly reduce the specific stresses they face due to their unique circumstances (35). In addition, Saeed et al (36) showed that women who got divorced show self-destructive behaviors, denying and seeking emotional support and facing discrimination in the workplace, which leads to increased stress levels and disruptions in work-life balance, and coping strategies such as avoidance and identity concealment are usually used. Another study also showed that in stressful situations, the management of coping strategies by single mothers is highly dependent on the individual needs, age, and the influence of cultural background (37).

Despite the conducted research, most of the studies on female heads of the family are quantitative and experimental and are focused on their economic problems (38-40). Also, while both involve the loss of an important relationship, the circumstances surrounding each type of loss can be very different,

so it is necessary to conduct comparative research to further explore this issue. In addition, cultural norms, religious beliefs, and social support networks can all play an important role in shaping the way people are guided in the process of grieving and coping with loss. Since the majority of research have been conducted abroad, thus, it is necessary to test and investigate the aforementioned cases in the local context and in Iranian society. On the other hand, most of the researches were focused on women and not mothers who are heads of families due to grief and divorce so the purpose of the study is to answer the question of whether there is a difference between coping styles and reactions of grief in mothers who are head of the family due to divorce and death of spouse or not.

Research Method:

The current research is fundamental in terms of its purpose, and descriptive of the causal-comparative type in terms of method of collecting and analyzing information. The statistical population of the research includes all the heads of families aged between 33 and 52 who lived in Karaj city in the 2022-2023 period, which consists of two groups of divorced mothers and mothers whose husbands had died. Based on the causal-comparative methodology, a sample size of 70 heads of families was selected, 35 of them due to divorce and 35 of them due to the death of spouses were considered for each group. The sampling method was also non-random and of disposability type. Measuring tool:

A: Coping styles questionnaire: Coping strategies questionnaire was prepared by Folkman and Lazarus (41). The questionnaire contains 66 questions and is scored in the form of 4 options: zero (I did not use it), 1(I used it to some extent), 2 (I used it most of the time), and 3 (I always used it). The questionnaire evaluates 8 coping methods which are divided into two categories: problem-oriented and emotion-oriented. Problem-oriented coping methods include seeking social support (items 8, 18, 21, 42, 45), responsibility (items 9, 29, 25, 51), planned problem-solving (items 1, 26, 39, 48, 49, 52) and positive re-evaluation are (items 6, 7, 17, 28, 34, 46). Emotion-oriented coping methods include confrontation (items 6, 7, 17, 28, 34, 46), inaccessibility (items 12, 13, 15, 21, 41, 44), avoidance (items 11, 16, 33, 40, 47, 50, 58, 59) and self-control (items 10, 14, 35, 43, 54, 62, 63).

The minimum and maximum scores in this questionnaire are zero and ۱۹۷ respectively, and getting a score less than half of the total score of each component indicates less use, and getting a score more than half of the total score of each component indicates more use of that strategy. Terhorst and Mitchell (42) in their study on 60 people with suicidal experiences in the state of Pennsylvania confirmed the construct validity using the convergent validity method of the coping strategies questionnaire with the Beck Depression Inventory, Complicated Grief Inventory and the short form of the medical outcomes study without providing relevant coefficients. Also, reliability was calculated by internal consistency method with calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient in the above sample for the component of seeking social support is 0.80, responsibility 0.57, planned problem solving 0.71, positive reappraisal 0.87, confrontation 0.68, segregation 0.69, avoidance 0.82 and restraint 0.73. In Jafari's research (43), reliability was calculated 0.82 using the internal consistency method by calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the coping strategies questionnaire in a sample of 120 participants living in Tehran.

B: Hogan grief reaction checklist (HGRC): HGRC is a 61 item self-report checklist developed by Hogan et al. (46). The inventory examines several common reactions to grief. The items on the scale are the list of common thoughts and feelings among the bereaved. Participants are asked to rate the intensity of their feelings over the past two weeks on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (it does not describe me at all) to 5 (it describes me very well). The scores on the scale range from 61 to 305.

The main subscales include frustration, panic behavior, blame and anger, withdrawal, confusion, and personal growth. In Hogan et al.'s study (44), Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales of frustration 0.89, panic behavior 0.9, personal growth 0.82, blame and anger 0.79, withdrawal 0.87, and confusion 0.84 were reported in the research. In the research by Sharifi et al. (45), internal consistency coefficients were obtained by Cronbach's alpha for four factors between 0.92 and 0.98. The results of the criterion validity study showed that there are high and significant correlations between the factors of the Hogan Grief List with the General Health Questionnaire and the scale of depression, anxiety, and mental stress.

The present research was started by obtaining the necessary permits from Islamic Azad University, Tehran branch. By referring to girls' secondary schools of Karaj city, first, the list of the mothers of the head of the family was prepared, then during a meeting, the mothers who were head of the family was asked to fill out paper questionnaires. Two mothers who were not present and had no sufficient literacy answered the questionnaires by phone. About 86 questionnaires were completed, of which 70 questionnaires were valid and complete. Finally, the correct information was examined with great care in collecting information and removing the questionnaires that were filled in hastily and followed the repetitive response pattern. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 24 software and based on descriptive and inferential statistical methods (multivariate analysis of variance).

Ethical considerations: All the ethical considerations were taken related to the research, including keeping confidential the personal information of the research participants, making appropriate references to the sources used, and obtaining the consent of the participants.

Findings:

In the present study, 70 female heads of the family participated, 35 of whom had separated from their husbands, and the spouses of the other 35 had died. The mean and standard deviation of the age of the participants in the group of mothers who were the heads of the family due to divorce were 40.54 and 7.18 years respectively, and the mean and standard deviation of the age of the participants in the group of mothers who were the heads of the family due to death of the spouse were 43.57 and 6.60 years respectively. The mean and standard deviation of the time elapsed since divorce were 5.49 and 3.04 years, respectively and the average and standard deviation of the time elapsed since the death of the spouse of the participants in the group of mothers who were the heads of the family due to the death of the spouse were 6.46 and 3.12 years, respectively. In the group of mothers who are the heads of the family due to divorce 23 people (65.7%) had one child, 11 people (31.4%) had two children and 1 people (9.2%) had more than two children. In the group of mothers who were the heads of the family due to the death of spouse, 16 person (45.7%) had one child, 14 person (40%) had two children, and 5 people (14.3%) had more than two children. In the group of mothers who were heads of the family due to divorce, the level of education 4 people (4.11%) of the participants had under high school diploma, 5 people (14.3%) had a high school diploma, 3 person (8.6%), 14 person (40%) had a bachelor's degree and 9 people (25.7%) had a master's degree or higher.

In the group of mothers who were heads of the family due to the death of spouse the level of education 7 people (20%) of the participants had under high school diploma, 8 people (22.9%) had high school diploma, 5 people (14.3%) had post diploma, 13 people (37.1%) had bachelor degree and 2 people (5.7%) had post graduate and higher. Finally, in the group of mothers who were heads of the family due to divorce, 9 people (25.7%) of the participants were housewives, 15 people (42.9%) were employees, 10 people (28%) were self-employed and 1 people (2.9%) were retired. In the group of

mothers who were heads of the family due to the death of spouse, 13 people (37.1%) of the participants were housewives, 10 people (28.6%) employees, 9 people (25.7%) self-employed and 3 people (8.6%) were retired. Table. 1 shows spouse mean and standard deviation of coping styles and grief response components in two groups of mothers who head the family due to divorce and death of spouse.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the research variables in two groups of mothers who head the family

Variable	Component	Divorce		Death of wife	
		Mean	The standard deviation	Mean	The standard deviation
Coping styles	Total problem-oriented score	41/14	8.13	44.51	7.05
	Total score of emotional orientation	42/00	7.04	35.37	8.14
Grief reaction	disappointment	33/45	8.00	35.77	7.84
	Panic	29.77	8.94	33.71	10.81
	Personal growth	23.77	6.69	26.91	7.48
	Blame and anger	18.48	3.57	16.54	3.90
	Separation and withdrawal	18.03	4.66	14.51	3.98
	Confusion	19.00	3.84	15.86	4.40

Table.1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the research variables in two groups of mothers who head the family due to divorce and due to the death of the spouse. Before comparing the dependent variables in the two groups, the assumptions of multivariate analysis of variance were examined. To evaluate the assumption of normality of the data distribution, the Shapiro-Wilk values of each variable in the two groups were examined separately. The results showed that the Shapiro-Wilk index for the components of despair ($P= 0.027$) in the group of heads of families due to divorce and panic ($P= 0.033$) in the group of mothers who are the head of the family due to the death of a spouse are significant.

Although this issue indicates that the distribution of the data of those two components in the previous groups is not normal, despite this, due to the equality of the sample size in the two groups, the resistance of the statistical tests of the analysis of variance family against the deviation from the assumption and the obtained significance level of Shapiro-Wilk values can be expected that this amount of deviation from the assumption does not invalidate the results of the analysis.

Lune's test was used to test the establishment/non-establishment of the assumption of homogeneity of error variance. The results showed that the error variances of none of the variables in the two groups are not significant at the 0.05 level, this indicates that the assumption of equal error variances for the coping styles and each of the components of the grief reaction in the two groups of mothers who are heads of the family due to divorce and death of the spouse. The Box's M^2 statistic of both coping styles and grief reaction variables was statistically insignificant, and this finding means that the assumption of homogeneity of the covariance matrix of the dependent variables in the two groups is

established for those two variables. Finally, the chi-square result of Bartlett's sphericity test was significant for both variables. So it can be said that multivariate variance analysis was a suitable method to compare the levels of dependent variables in two groups.

After ensuring that the assumptions of the analysis were established, the data related to the two variables of grief reaction and coping styles were analyzed using the multivariate analysis of variance method. Table 2 shows the results of a multivariate analysis of variance comparing coping styles and grief reactions in two groups of mothers who head the families due to divorce and the death of the spouse.

Table 2: Results of multivariate analysis of variance comparing coping styles and grief reaction in two groups

	Components	Value	F	Degree of freedom assumed	Error degree of freedom	P	η^2
Coping styles	Pillai effect	0.25	11.19	2	67	0.001	0.250
	Wilks Lambda	0.750	11.19	2	67	0.001	0.250
	Hotelling's work	0.334	11.19	2	67	0.001	0.250
	The largest zinc root	0.334	11.19	2	67	0.001	0.250
Grief reaction	Pillai effect	0.387	6.62	6	63	0.001	0.387
	Wilks Lambda	0.613	6.62	6	63	0.001	0.387
	Hotelling's work	0.630	6.62	6	63	0.001	0.387
	The largest zinc root	0.630	6.62	6	63	0.001	0.38

Table 2 shows that the F value obtained from multivariate analysis of variance for coping styles ($F(2,67)=11.19$, $P=0.001$, $\eta^2=0.025$, Wilks Lambda=0.0750) and grief reaction ($F(6,63)=6.62$, $P=0.001$, $\eta^2=0.387$, Wilks Lambda=0.613) are significant in two groups of mothers who head the family by divorce and by the death of their spouses. The finding shows that there is a significant difference in at least one of the coping styles and one of the grief response components in the two groups. In the following, a one-way analysis of variance was performed to determine which of the coping styles and grief response components is statistically significant in the two groups. Table 3 shows the results of a one-way analysis of variance in comparison of coping styles and components of grief reaction in two groups of mothers who are head of the family due to divorce and the death of their spouses.

Table 3: One-way analysis of variance comparing coping styles and grief reaction

Variable	Component	Mean square	Mean squared error	F	p	η^2
Coping style	Orbital problem	198.91	57.87	3.44	0.068	0.048
	Excitement	768.89	57.94	13.27	0.001	0.163
Grief reaction	Disappointment	93.73	62.78	1.49	0.226	0.021
	Panic	272.06	98.40	2.77	0.101	0.039
	Personal growth	179.20	50.32	3.56	0.063	0.050
	Blame and anger	66.06	13.96	4.73	0.033	0.065
	Separation and withdrawal	216.13	18.79	11.50	0.001	0.145
	Confusion	172.86	17.06	10.13	0.002	0.130

Note 1: In the one-way analysis of variance, the degree of freedom between groups was 1 and the degree of freedom of error was 68.

Table. 3 shows that unlike the F score related to the problem-oriented coping style, the F value obtained from the one-way analysis of variance is significant for the emotion-oriented coping style ($F(1,68)=13.27$, $P=0.001$). Table. 3 also shows that the F score related to the components of blame and anger ($F(1,68)=4.73$, $P=0.033$) and separation and withdrawal ($F(1,68)=11.50$, $P=0.001$) and confusion ($F(1,68)=10.13$, $P=0.002$) are significant. In the following, to evaluate the direction of differences, Ben Feroni's post hoc test was used, the results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Ben Feroni's test for emotion-oriented coping style and the components of blame and anger, detachment and withdrawal and confusion of grief reaction

Component	Group difference	Mean difference	Standard error	Significance level
Emotional coping style	Divorce-death of spouse	6/63	1/89	0.001
Blame and anger component of grief response	Divorce-death of spouse	1/94	0/89	0.033
The separation and withdrawal component of grief reaction	Divorce-death of spouse	3/51	1/04	0.001
The disorganized component of the grief response	Divorce - Death of spouse	3/14	0/98	0.002

The results of the Ben Feroni test in the table.4 shows that mothers who head families due to divorce have obtained higher average scores in terms of emotion-oriented coping style compared to mothers who head families due to the death of their spouses. Also, the results of Table 4 show that the mothers who head the family due to divorce have obtained higher average scores in the three components of blame and anger, separation and withdrawal, and the confusion of the grief reaction compared to the mothers who were the head of the family due to the death of their spouse. According to this, it was

concluded that the mothers who head the family due to divorce use emotional coping strategies more than the mothers who head the family due to the death of their spouse, and former mothers use blame and anger, detachment and withdrawal as well as confusion more than the mothers who head the family due to the death of their spouse.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The research was aimed to compare coping styles and grief reactions in mothers who are the head of the family due to divorce and the death of spouse. The results showed that according to the findings of the research, it can be concluded that there is a difference between the coping strategies of the mothers who head the family due to death and due to divorce, and the mothers who head the family due to divorce are compared to the mothers who head the family due to the death of their spouse from emotional coping strategies more than mothers who head the family due to the death of their spouse. In line with the research findings, Majul and Premi (45) who investigated depression and coping strategies among widowed and divorced working women, concluded that the emotion-oriented coping style is more common in divorced women than in widowed working women. The research of Shah Beyk et al. (46) states that divorced women have obtained higher scores in emotion-oriented coping strategy than women who were not divorced. Safaah and Saidah (47) suggested that choosing the right strategy to deal with stress and stress levels in women after divorce is very important. Zare et al. (48) also found that divorced women use strategies such as hiding the divorce, female limitations, avoidance behaviors, replacing the loss, seeking support, role-playing, managing tensions, and defending themselves against the failure of the divorce.

In the explanation of the research finding, it can be said that divorce can endanger the performance of a person's life and the tension caused by this issue plays an essential role in the lives of divorced people, especially mothers, and this group of people should prepare and adapt themselves with the conditions and life after this crisis (49). However, since emotional and physical pressures caused by tension are unpleasant and annoying, thus people are motivated to perform activities to reduce their tension and inevitably have to tolerate and use tension-reduction methods such as emotion-oriented coping strategies (50).

In other words, following the divorce incident, a divorced person loses his support network and inevitably forgets many of his friends, loses contact with his wife's family and faces financial problems that did not exist before and all these issues are the basis for the creation of negative emotions of anxiety and depression (51). It can be said that divorce is a phenomenon that causes the loss of a common life and the end of a sincere relationship. In addition to family disintegration, this issue, as one of the interpersonal losses, causes divorced people to engage in abnormal behaviors such as drinking, smoking, and other risky behaviors compared to normal people (52, 36). According to Folkman and Lazarus' theory of coping styles (20), when people consider a situation unchangeable or out of their control, they tend to use emotion-oriented coping styles. In the context of divorce, mothers may be affected by emotional turmoil and uncertainty surrounding the dissolution of their marriage. In addition, divorced mothers, regardless of their experiences of marital violence, tend to use emotion-oriented coping styles along with other protective measures during the divorce process (54). Therefore, emotion-oriented coping styles are a common approach for mothers following the challenges of divorce and help them deal with the emotional turmoil associated with relationship dissolution and its aftermath.

Also, another result of the present study was that mothers who head the family due to divorce experience more blame and anger, separation, withdrawal, and confusion compared to mothers who head the family due to the death of their husbands. In line with the research findings, the studies of Jimerson and Dreman et al. (55, 56) show that these women may face blame and anger, as well as feelings of separation and withdrawal, depending on the stage of divorce and the post-divorce period they are in.

In addition, Driman et al. (57) showed that divorced women may face psychological failures during the divorce process, external interventions, and issues related to property sharing, which lead to confusion and distress. Another research of Davarinejad, Ginn and Price (58, 59) also shows that compared to married women, divorced women experience more emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and high levels of anger, which highlights the post-divorce emotional turmoil and the social stigma towards divorced women, financial struggles and psychological breakdowns are among the important problems that divorced women face after divorce and contribute to their confusion and distress.

A study by Naderi Nobandaghani and Dehghani (60) showed that divorced people are faced with feelings of anger, sadness and psychological effects, which affect their self-esteem and identity. In addition, divorced women show high levels of anger even years after divorce, which affects their self-esteem, perception of coherence and compatibility with the proportions of blame for divorce (56). Furthermore, post-traumatic feelings of dissociation in the context of intimate partner abuse show common feelings of anger, shame, and separation among women with a history of divorce (61). In addition, compared to married women, divorced women experience more emotional issues, such as depression, anxiety, stress, and loneliness which indicates the existence of blame and anger after divorce (62).

In explaining the research findings, it can be said that when a woman becomes the head of the family due to divorce, she often faces a set of unique challenges that can intensify the feeling of blame and anger (9, 55). Many cases of divorce such as interpersonal conflict and blame leads to feelings of failure or personal inadequacy (62). Based on the grief theory, such as Kubler-Ross' stages of grief (63), these feelings are part of the process of coping with loss, but in divorce, they may remain due to continuous interactions with the ex-spouse and the social stigma around the divorce (59). In addition, the sudden disintegration of the family unit can lead to feelings of separation and isolation, because mothers not only lose their life partner but also destroy their joint life and future plans (58). In contrast, when a woman becomes the head of the family due to the death of her husband, the process of grieving may be different.

While there is still deep loss and grief, there will be a more pronounced sense of closure compared to divorce (9). In many cases, social attitudes toward widowhood are more sympathetic and less blame is placed on the surviving spouse. In addition, the grieving process may be supported by rituals and social structures designed to help people cope with the loss of a loved one. This can provide a sense of validation for the widow's grief and a framework for guiding her new role in the family (17). Meanwhile, the conditions related to divorce often create confusion and uncertainty for the mother as the head of the family. Unlike death, which is considered a natural part of life, divorce can be associated with feelings of rejection, betrayal, and unanswered questions about the breakup of the relationship (13). In contrast, widowed mothers may experience a simpler narrative about their loss which allows them to create a clearer path toward acceptance and adaptation to their new role create in the family structure (9).

Research limitations: The current research, like other research, had limitations. One of the limitations was not taking into account factors such as the length of time that has passed since divorce or the death of a spouse, which can affect the level of grief reaction or coping strategies. Another limitation was not considering the cultural, economic, and social situation as well as the age of the subjects as a moderating variable. It is suggested that in future research, the interview method should be used along with the implementation of the questionnaire to be able to generalize the results with more confidence.

In future researches, modulating or disturbing variables such as economic cultural variables and the age of the subjects should also be considered. Also, the duration of the spouse's death or divorce of the participants should be studied as a variable affecting the results. In addition to these, it is suggested to evaluate research variables on single fathers in future research. Based on these findings, it is suggested to strengthen coping strategies to reduce the mental problems of divorced mothers and mothers who have lost their spouses. It is suggested to provide the necessary training in the form of educational workshops regarding variables such as appropriate and problem-oriented coping strategies as well as increasing the evolutionary capacity of divorced mothers or lost spouses.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that the research work does not have any conflict of interest with other organizations and individuals.

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