

## Dynamics of Resilience Formation in Single Parents Who Have Child with Special Needs

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### Keywords

Resilience, Single parent, Special needs children, Literature review.

### Abstract

Single parents with children with special needs face complex challenges that create social and psychological burdens, impacting their physical health and parenting styles. However, the resilience development process among single parents with children with special needs is not yet fully understood. This study aims to explore the dynamics of resilience development in single parents with children with special needs, enabling them to navigate these challenges. The method used was a literature review of various studies related to the process of resilience development in single parents. The results indicate four phases in resilience development: the surrender phase, the survival phase, the recovery phase, and the thriving phase. In the surrender phase, parents feel overwhelmed by the situation they are facing. The survival phase is characterized by efforts to meet their child's and their own basic needs despite limitations. In the recovery phase, parents begin to accept their child's condition and develop more adaptive parenting strategies. The thriving phase demonstrates the ability of parents to find meaning, enhance their capacity, and support optimal child development. This study emphasizes the importance of resilience development in single parents with children with special needs to prevent psychological problems and improve family well-being. The implication of these findings is the need for psychosocial support and empowerment of single parents in community-based intervention programs to strengthen their resilience in facing various parenting challenges.

## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a relationship that involves physical and emotional aspects with the aim of forming a harmonious and prosperous family (Sissilia & Falah, 2020). Having children who are perfectly healthy physically and emotionally is a common expectation for every parent. However, not all children are born in ideal conditions as expected by parents in general (Dwitya & Priyambodo, 2020). Children who are born with physical or biological disorders experience obstacles in their development due to limitations that have been owned since birth (Edyta & Damayanti, 2016). Children with these limitations are called children with special needs (Sriwahyuni & Rusli, 2023). The presence of children with special needs will certainly provide greater challenges and responsibilities for parents because children with special needs require more incentive and individualized attention.

The challenges faced by parents can certainly trigger negative emotions and high levels of stress, but this is part of the conditions that must be faced. If the pressure is not managed well, it will certainly interfere with the continuity of daily activities (Sriwahyuni & Rusli, 2023). This situation may make some parent couples feel unprepared to deal with it, especially for single parents. A single parent is also responsible for earning income to meet daily needs, managing finances, and making family decisions, in addition to having to carry out the responsibility of caring for, educating, and providing knowledge, experience, and mentally strengthening children (Putri et al., 2022). Being a single parent is a situation that is not always experienced by every individual and can cause various problems that need to be faced both socially, economically, and psychologically, especially if they have children with special needs (Swagery & Husna, 2017).

Resilience is very important for single parents, especially in educating and supporting the development of their children. For single parents with children with disabilities, resilience and adaptation from pressure not only provide benefits for themselves but can also support optimal development for their children. According to Reivich & Shatte (2022), resilience is defined as the ability of individuals to respond healthily and productively to adversity or trauma situations they face (Reivich & Shatte, 2022). Achieving resilience in oneself is not easy, especially for a single parent who has children with disabilities because individuals must face various burdens that are quite complex in life both socially and psychologically, so that they can have an impact on physical health and affect development in caring for children with special needs.

Individuals with low resilience usually take longer to adapt to stress, while those with high resilience recover more quickly and find effective solutions, influenced by the risk and protective factors they possess (Murray, 2003). Resilience is crucial for single parents raising children with special needs, as it enables them to face various pressures and challenges in caregiving. However, although resilience plays a significant role in helping parents manage stress, previous studies have

rarely explored how resilience specifically develops in single parents with children with special needs, particularly regarding the social and psychological challenges they experience. In practice, these parents often face multiple pressures and limited support, which can affect their ability to adapt and maintain resilience in daily life. Therefore, this literature review aims to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of resilience formation in single parents with children with special needs. The findings of this review are expected to enrich the literature on resilience in this population and serve as a reference for future research to understand their conditions more comprehensively.

## **METHOD**

This article presents the results of a literature review on the dynamics of resilience formation in single parents with children with special needs. The literature review involved national and international journal articles published over the last seven years (2017–2023). A systematic search was conducted by identifying relevant themes through online platforms, namely Google Scholar and Garuda, using the keywords “Single Parent Resilience” and “Single Parent with Special Needs Children.” Journal articles were screened by reviewing their titles, abstracts, methods, and participant samples to ensure alignment with the predefined inclusion criteria. The search, conducted from March 14, 2024, to March 18, 2024, resulted in the selection of ten journal articles, with the distribution as follows: two articles from 2017, two from 2019, one from 2020, four from 2021, and one from 2023. The inclusion criteria applied in this literature review were: (1) articles presenting the dynamics of resilience formation in single parents with children with special needs, (2) research subjects being single mothers or fathers with children with special needs, (3) research conducted between 2017 and 2023, and (4) studies examining variables correlated with single parent resilience.

Exclusion criteria included studies with variables not related to the resilience of single parents with children with special needs, articles that were not available in full text, theses, and articles in languages other than English or Indonesian. For the review process, the researcher utilized a literature matrix extraction table to systematically organize the key elements of each study, including author, year, country, objectives, methods, participants, and key findings. The data analysis method employed was thematic analysis, which facilitated the identification of patterns and themes across the studies. Furthermore, the studies were systematically categorized into resilience phases (succumbing, survival, recovery, and thriving) based on the descriptions of resilience dynamics provided in each article. This categorization process allowed for a comprehensive synthesis of the findings to illustrate how resilience develops in single parents with children with special needs across various contexts, aligning with the research objectives of this review.

## RESULT

Based on the final results of the 10 journal articles that have been found, the literature extraction process is carried out in the form of retrieving important information, the results of which are presented in table 1 below:

**Table 1**

*Literature Review Results*

Researcher's name and year of publication	Research objectives	Research subject	Research results
(Nugroho, Andrianie, & Yuniati, 2017)	The purpose of this study was to understand the resilience of single parent mothers who have children with autism spectrum disorder.	The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach involving two research subjects, namely single parent mothers who have autistic children and already have resilience.	The study found that both subjects experienced similar resilience processes despite their different initial circumstances. Initially, they went through an avoidance phase, then both accepted their situation as single parents and believed in their ability to raise their children well. This resilience was supported by internal and external protective factors.
(Swagery & Husna, 2017)	The purpose of this study was to determine the description of hardiness in single parent career women who have children with special needs (ABK) with deaf conditions and the factors that influence it.	The research method used was a qualitative study involving a 53-year-old single parent career woman with a deaf child.	Based on the results of the study, it was found that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The subject did not experience difficulties and was sincere in living his life.</li> <li>2. The subject was able to control his behavior and emotions.</li> <li>3. The subject had self-confidence and resilience in facing sad situations.</li> <li>4. The subject accepts and understood his condition as a single parent.</li> </ol>
(Ramadhani & Rahmandani, 2019)	The purpose of this study was to understand the parenting experiences of single mothers who have children with intellectual disabilities.	The research method used is a qualitative study involving divorced single mothers who have biological children with intellectual disabilities.	Based on the research results, the subjects initially experienced shock upon learning their child was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. Over time, the subjects began to accept their child's condition. They were also able to manage their emotions and address the root of the problem directly through emotion-focused and problem-focused coping approaches.
(Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019)	The purpose of this study is to examine the process of resilience dynamics of single parent	The research method used is a qualitative study. This study involved research subjects, namely three single parent	Based on the research results, the resilience dynamics of the three subjects began with awareness of their child's developmental disorder and efforts to confirm the diagnosis. Afterward, they entered a phase of stress due to the divorce that left

	mothers who have children with special needs with multiple disabilities.	mothers who were caused by divorce, either divorced alive or divorced dead and had children with a diagnosis of multiple disabilities.	them single parents, compounded by other risk factors. Next, in the adaptation phase, the subjects began to cope with stress through positive activities, supported by their protective factors. Finally, all three reached the strengthening phase, demonstrating resilience derived from both internal and external aspects of themselves.
(Savitri & Siswati, 2020)	The purpose of this study was to understand resilience in mothers who have children with autism spectrum disorder and the factors that influence it.	The research method used is a phenomenological qualitative study and involves three research subjects with the characteristics of mothers who have children with autism, one of the three subjects is a single parent mother who has a child with autism.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by subject N include: There is a phase of denial by protesting to God as a form of initial response. 1. A denial phase, where protesting to God is the initial response. 2. An acceptance phase, where the subject accepts her child's condition and draws closer to God. 3. A reach-out phase, where the subject accepts and tries to avoid failure.
(Qintari & Rahmasari, 2021)	The purpose of this study was to identify the process and factors of resilience of single parent mothers who have children with autism spectrum disorder.	The research method used is a qualitative study involving two research subjects, namely single parent mothers with children with autism special needs.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by both subjects included: 1. The denial phase, where the subjects were unable to accept their child's condition. 2. The acceptance phase, where the subjects accepted their condition. 3. The achievement phase, where the subjects were able to view their problems as challenges and find their own solutions.
(Tricia & Handayani, 2021)	The purpose of this study is to describe the resilience process of single fathers who have adolescents with special needs with autism spectrum disorder conditions.	The research method used is a qualitative study involving two research subjects, namely single fathers who have adolescent children with autism disorders.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by the two subjects included: 1. The subjects were concerned about having a second child, fearing that their second child would experience the same developmental disabilities. 2. The subjects experienced difficulties in caring for their children. 3. When his wife died, the subject found it difficult to take care of his child. 4. The subjects began to adapt to and accept their condition as single fathers and fulfill the dual role of parenting their children.

			5. The subjects actively coped and adapted to the stressors.
(Djap et al., 2021)	The purpose of this study is to determine the resilience of single mothers who have children with special needs with autism spectrum disorder and hearing impairment during the Covid-19 pandemic.	The research method used is a phenomenological qualitative study involving four research subjects, namely single mothers who have children with special needs aged 15-22 years.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by the four subjects include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subjects experience difficulties in helping their children's education, especially during the Covid-19 period.</li> <li>2. The subject felt worried about all the difficulties that would be faced when her husband died.</li> <li>3. The subject needs an adaptation process in her psychological adjustment.</li> <li>4. The subject was able to get through the worst conditions in her life and find a way out for the sake of her children. This resilience ability is also strengthened by protective factors based on the internal and external aspects of the subject.</li> </ol>
(Caragata, Watters, & Cumming, 2021)	The purpose of this research is to find out the resilience and changes that occur in the condition of a single mother.	The research method used is a qualitative study involving 20 research subjects, namely single mothers in Canada and one of them has a child with special needs.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by the subject include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subjects show continuous adaptation to survive with their circumstances.</li> <li>2. Subjects experience periods of difficulty, especially isolation in their lives, but still survive to improve the conditions they experience by doing active coping.</li> </ol>
(Husna & Pratiwi, 2023)	The purpose of this study is to describe the process of achieving resilience of single parent women who have children with special needs (ABK) with speech delay conditions.	The research method used is a phenomenological qualitative study involving three research subjects, namely single parent mothers aged 26-55 years who have speech delay children.	Based on the results of this study, the resilience dynamics experienced by the three subjects included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The initial phase experienced by the subjects, including feelings of sadness, worry, confusion, and panic after their husbands left them.</li> <li>2. The phase of accepting their single parent status and their child's development.</li> <li>3. The phase of surviving and recovering from grief. In this phase, the subjects began to be sincere and religious, facing difficult times with positive affirmations.</li> </ol>

## DISCUSSION

Children with special needs (ABK) face various health issues and limitations, requiring greater effort in daily activities and potentially leaving them behind compared to other children (Edyta & Damayanti, 2016). In Indonesia, the number of children with special needs continues to increase, with the United Nations estimating that around 10% of school-age children have special needs. Recent data indicates that approximately 1.5 million children fall into this category, primarily between the ages of 5 and 18 (Nurrohmah, 2021). The role of a single parent for children with special needs makes resilience crucial for navigating the challenges of parenting and the pressures of daily life. Resilience is not just an individual attribute, but rather the ability to adapt positively to stress (Dewi & Wideasavitri, 2019). According to Grotberg (1995), resilience is influenced by age, developmental stage, experience with stress, and the support received. Based on the results of a literature review of 10 research journal articles listed in table 1, the results of the dynamics of resilience formation in single parents who have children with special needs are obtained. These results are categorized into two themes, including:

### A. Dynamics of Resilience Formation

According to O'Leary and Ickovics in (Coulson, 2006), there are four stages experienced by a person when facing significant adversity to achieve resilience, these stages include: the succumbing phase, the survival phase, the recovery phase, and the thriving phase. This statement is in line with the findings of the 10 research articles used in this literature review. These phases include:

#### a. The succumbing phase

The succumbing phase marks the initial period when single parents of children with special needs undergo emotional shock and feelings of powerlessness upon receiving their child's diagnosis and dealing with marital separation. During this phase, parents often experience anxiety, sadness, confusion, denial, and sometimes anger directed at God, illustrating significant emotional distress (Djap et al., 2021; Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019; Husna & Pratiwi, 2023; Nugroho et al., 2017; Quintari & Rahmasari, 2021; Savitri & Siswati, 2020; Tricia & Handayani, 2021). In Indonesia, this stage is commonly exacerbated by societal stigma, financial burdens, and beliefs in supernatural causes, which heighten the stress felt by parents.

#### b. Survival phase

The survival phase is marked by parents feeling emotionally unstable and unable to function optimally, often experiencing isolation and prolonged distress (Caragata et al., 2021; Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019). Single parents of children with special needs may feel overwhelmed while trying to meet daily demands and adjust to their caregiving role, especially when lacking social or family support. In

Indonesia, this phase is critical as cultural expectations and limited access to mental health services may hinder parents from seeking timely help, underlining the need for accessible community-based support systems.

c. Recovery phase

This phase is where individuals can recover psychologically and emotionally, adapt to stress, and overcome the impact of negative feelings (Coulson, 2006). They can return to their daily activities and show resilience. This statement is in line with the findings in ten research, based on the results of these research findings, a single parent who has a child with special needs is ultimately able to recover psychologically and emotionally by accepting the situation that he is a single parent who has a child with special needs, is able to adapt and rise from stressful conditions, begins to be sincere and face his condition with religiosity, and is open to the conditions he is experiencing. In this phase, single parents also develop active coping as a strategy in overcoming their negative feelings and changing stressful situations that become sources of stress by using emotion focused coping and problem focused coping approaches. Religious and spiritual beliefs often support acceptance and resilience in this phase among Indonesian parents.

d. Thriving phase

The thriving phase signifies a stage where parents can transform previous adversities into motivation for personal growth, learning from experiences to prevent setbacks and actively seeking a meaningful life (Coulson, 2006; Djap et al., 2021; Qintari & Rahmasari, 2021; Savitri & Siswati, 2020; Swagery & Husna, 2017). In the thriving phase, after going through stressful conditions, a single parent will try to avoid failure, be able to view the problem as a challenge and find a good solution, keep trying to survive. Based on the findings of research (Tricia & Handayani, 2021), it is stated that anticipation of grief is necessary in accelerating the resilience process.

Based on an analysis of ten studies, it can be concluded that the process of building resilience in single parents with children with disabilities can also be understood through seven aspects of the resilience theory proposed by Reivich and Shatte (2003). These aspects include:

a. Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation is the ability to stay calm and focused under stress (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). Research shows that single parents of children with disabilities use active and emotion-focused coping to manage stress effectively (Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019; Swagery & Husna, 2017). Good emotion regulation helps individuals remain calm during pressure, supporting resilience (Maharani & Panjaitan, 2019).



b. Impulse control

Impulse control is the ability to manage internal urges and pressures (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). Research shows that single parents of children with disabilities can control stress by accepting their situation, allowing them to manage behavior and negative emotions to prevent harm to themselves and others (Savitri & Siswati, 2020; Dewi & Wideasavitri, 2019)

c. Optimism.

Optimism is the belief that individuals can overcome problems and have a bright future (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). This statement is in line with the findings of research (Qintari & Rahmasari, 2021). Based on these findings, it was found that although single parents raise children with disabilities alone, they still have confidence and an optimistic attitude in dealing with their problems.

d. Empathy

Empathy is the ability of individuals to understand the emotional and psychological conditions of others (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). This statement is in line with the findings of research (Qintari & Rahmasari, 2021; Tricia & Handayani, 2021). Based on these findings, it is found that single parents have empathy by showing openness, compassion and concern for their children.

e. Causal analysis (problem analysis ability)

Causal analysis is the ability to accurately identify the causes of problems (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). Research shows that single parents of children with disabilities often develop this skill, helping them understand the reasons behind their child's developmental challenges (Husna & Pratiwi, 2023; Savitri & Siswati, 2020). This ability allows them to anticipate and minimize potential negative impacts in the future (Saputri & Valentina, 2018).

f. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to handle problems and achieve success (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). Research shows that self-efficacy supports resilience in single parents of children with disabilities, as they believe in their ability to raise their children well (Nugroho et al., 2017). Those with high resilience actively seek challenges to connect with their environment, while those with low resilience tend to avoid challenges and doubt their ability to handle stress (Maharani & Panjaitan, 2019).

g. Reaching out (increasing positive aspects)

Reaching out is an individual's ability to see problems as a source of strength for the future (Reivich & Shatte, 2003). This statement is in line with the findings of research (Hasanah & Retnowati, 2019; Qintari &

Rahmasari, 2021; Savitri & Siswati, 2020). Based on these findings, it is found that some single parents have the ability to accept their problems and continue to try to be better by learning through previous mistakes. In this situation, a single parent makes the child the only motivation and source of enthusiasm in living a more positive and meaningful life.

#### B. Sources of Protective Factors for Resilience Formation

In addition to the seven resilience abilities outlined by Reivich and Shatte (2003), single parents raising children with special needs benefit from a variety of internal and external factors that contribute to their resilience. According to Grotberg (1995), resilience is shaped by 'I Have' (external support), 'I Am' (personal strengths), and 'I Can' (self-confidence in overcoming challenges). To effectively cope and adapt, single parents of children with disabilities must leverage both internal and external resources. This assertion is corroborated by several studies, including those by Djab et al. (2021), Hasanah and Retnowati (2019), Nugroho et al. (2017), Qintari and Rahmasari (2021), Ramadhani and Rahmandani (2019), Savitri and Siswati (2020), and Swagery and Husna (2017), which highlight that external support from family, friends, communities, and spiritual beliefs facilitates resilience among single parents facing the unique challenges of raising children with special needs. Internally, characteristics such as equanimity, perseverance, self-acceptance, and spiritual grounding further strengthen their resilience (Husna & Pratiwi, 2023; Nugroho et al., 2017; Savitri & Siswati, 2020; Swagery & Husna, 2017; Tricia & Handayani, 2021). Moreover, studies by Caragata et al. (2021), Nugroho et al. (2017), and Tricia & Handayani (2021) emphasize that self-reliance and the confidence to make decisions independently contribute significantly to their ability to navigate and thrive in challenging circumstances.

### CONCLUSION

The findings in this literature can serve as a reference for understanding the dynamics of resilience development in single parents with children with special needs. These insights are expected to encourage single parents to be more aware of the importance of building resilience in facing life's challenges. Practically, it is recommended that community health centers, social workers, and support groups provide psychoeducation and resilience training for single parents to strengthen their coping strategies in caregiving situations. This literature review was limited by the number of accessible and relevant articles, given the limited number of studies specifically addressing the dynamics of resilience development in single parents with children with special needs. This limits the diversity of perspectives in the analysis and the generalizability of the results. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to explore resilience dynamics in more specific contexts, such as by gender or specific types of developmental disorders, and to expand the source

search to further develop research on this topic. Furthermore, these findings can serve as a foundation for further research on promotive interventions to enhance resilience in single parents caring for children with special needs.

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