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Sevilen Birinin Ölümünün Yetişkinlerin Bilişsel Becerileri ve Mutluluk Algısı Üzerindeki Görüşleri

The Effect of a Loved One's Death on Adults' Cognitive Skills and Views on the Perception of Happiness

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Öz: Bu çalışma, bilişsel yeniden yapılandırma süreçlerinin, sevilen birinin kaybından sonra yetişkinlerin mutluluk algılarını nasıl etkilediğini incelemektedir. Fenomenolojik bir tasarım benimsenerek, yasla ilgili psikolojik dönüşüm yaşayan 15 yetişkinle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Veriler, Braun ve Clarke'ın altı aşamalı tematik analizi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular, katılımcıların mutluluk algılarının, yakın ilişkilerin değerinin artması, zaman farkındalığının yükselmesi ve anlam merkezli yaşam perspektiflerine doğru bir kayma yoluyla yeniden şekillendiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu uyarlanabilir değişikliklerin yanı sıra, katılımcılar, rahatsız edici düşünceler, suçluluk, duygusal istikrarsızlık ve günlük işlevlerdeki bozulmalar da dahil olmak üzere bilişsel ve duygusal zorluklar bildirmişlerdir. Bulgular, travma sonrası büyüme ve anlam oluşturma çerçeveleriyle uyumlu olup, yasın hem kırılganlık hem de psikolojik yeniden yapılanma ile karakterize edilen dinamik bir süreç olduğunu göstermektedir. Dahası, kültürel yas ritüelleri ve sosyal destek sistemleri, kayıptan sonra duygusal düzenleme ve iyiliğin yeniden yapılandırılmasında önemli kolaylaştırıcılar olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu sonuçlar, yasla ilgili bilişsel dönüşümleri ve mutluluk algılarını anlamada kültürel açıdan duyarlı yaklaşımların önemini vurgulamaktadır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Yas, bilişsel yeniden yapılanma, mutluluk algısı, travma sonrası büyüme, kültürel yas ritüelleri, psikoloji, psikolojik danışmanlık.
Abstract: This study examines how cognitive restructuring processes influence adults' perceptions of happiness following the loss of a loved one. Adopting a phenomenological design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 adults who experienced bereavement-related psychological transformation. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis. Findings revealed that participants' perceptions of happiness were reshaped through increased valuing of close relationships, heightened awareness of time, and a shift toward meaning-centered life perspectives. Alongside these adaptive changes, participants reported cognitive and emotional challenges, including intrusive thoughts, guilt, emotional instability, and disruptions in daily functioning. The findings align with post-traumatic growth and meaning-making frameworks, demonstrating that bereavement involves a dynamic process characterized by both vulnerability and psychological reorganization. Furthermore, cultural mourning rituals and social support systems emerged as significant facilitators in emotional regulation and the reconstruction of well-being following loss. These results highlight the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in

understanding grief-related cognitive transformations and happiness perceptions.
Keywords: Mourning, cognitive restructuring, perception of happiness, posttraumatic growth, cultural mourning rituals, psychology, psychological counseling.

Introduction

Death and mourning, as an inevitable part of existence, occupy a central place in human life. This universal and historical experience has maintained its significance throughout human history and has the power to leave deep and lasting marks. In societies like Turkey, where the tradition of condolence is strong, grief is deeply experienced, and collectively experiencing these processes is the norm, death and mourning are not perceived solely as individual losses (Sezen & Güngörer). Each moment of these processes becomes a social phenomenon, where collective memory is reconstructed and social identity and solidarity are made visible through social, cultural, and religious rituals (Erbuğ, 2021). Therefore, the search for meaning and the grieving process after a loss are shaped not only by individual psychological defense mechanisms but also by the confluence of cultural and social contexts (Rosenblatt, 2008). The loss of a loved one is a traumatic experience that shakes the fundamental belief systems and cognitive schemas that an individual has constructed over a long period of time (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Such devastating losses trigger an individual's search for meaning in their existence, making cognitive restructuring processes inevitable (Neimeyer 2009). Cognitive restructuring is the process by which an individual reinterprets a traumatic experience, restructures and reimagines their personal and cultural foundations to cope with it, which indicates post-traumatic growth (Neimeyer, 2001).

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) has the potential to radically alter how individuals perceive themselves, their experiences, and their social relationships, and how they make sense of their lives (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). However, this process does not solely depend on an individual's internal resources; external factors such as social support systems and cultural rituals also play a significant role in its development (Calhoun et al., 2005).

Contrary to these facts, loss can also lead to negative psychological consequences such as cognitive distortions, sleep disturbances, the emergence of repetitive thoughts, and social isolation (Yehuda, 2002; Mysliwiec et al., 2013; Stroebe et al., 2007). The role and impact of cognitive and emotional factors in reframing individuals' perceptions of happiness is discussed in the literature (Danhauer et al., 2013; Beloe & Derakshan, 2019). In light of all this, it is clear that the grieving process extends beyond the individual loss and involves the creation of collective meaning based on cultural norms. In cultures

where communal living is prominent, such as Turkey, death and the subsequent mourning rituals are considered a multilayered social structure in which the loss becomes part of the collective memory (Yelboğa, 2024).

Examining the literature reveals that the number of studies examining the effects of individual, cultural, and social networks on an individual's cognitive structure and happiness after loss is extremely limited. Intercultural studies are insufficient for understanding the mourning experience in Turkey. Original studies in this field are important to gain new perspectives, provide meaning, and obtain data. Additionally, considering the cultural context as an important variable in studies will allow for a more holistic view of the mourning experience.

Research Aim

This study aims to investigate how cognitive restructuring processes that emerge in adults following the loss of a loved one impact their perception of happiness. Additionally, the study seeks to shed light on mourning culture and meaning-making processes within the cultural context of Turkey. To this end, the study integrates concepts from individual and cultural psychology, posttraumatic growth, and cognitive restructuring to propose a culturally sensitive model and address the existing gap in the literature. The data obtained through interviews and research are expected to reflect the experiences of the Turkish sample and contribute to the international literature on mourning processes in societies with similar cultural structures and communal lifestyles. Additionally, the interview findings are expected to support the development of culturally sensitive grief therapies and psychosocial intervention programs.

Accordingly, this study examines how cognitive processes change and affect adults' perceptions of happiness after experiencing the loss of a loved one. It also explores how external factors, such as social support and cultural mourning rituals, as well as internal factors, such as posttraumatic growth, influence this effect. Thus, when he/she thinks about the experience of loss that affected him/her the most and caused a change in his/her life, it is desired to determine;

How the person perceives and makes sense of happiness after the loss?

What factors he/she thinks prevented his/her happiness?

What cognitive structures and related changes have occurred?

Method

Research Design

This qualitative research project aimed to understand how individuals' perceptions of happiness and cognitive structures change following the loss of a loved one. A

phenomenological approach was adopted to reveal the hidden dimensions of the participants' worlds of meaning, which are constructed through their personal life experiences.

To this end, we asked the participants the following questions:

1. When you think about your loss experience, which affected you the most and caused a change in your life, how do you perceive/make sense of happiness after your loss?

2. When you think about your loss experience, which affected you the most and caused a change in your life, what factors do you now think hinder your happiness?

Group 3:

3.1. After the loss of a loved one, are there times when you have difficulty controlling your thoughts?

3.2. Do you feel that your thoughts after the loss negatively impact your daily activities? (Do you experience sleep disturbances?)

3.3. Did you experience a change in your decision-making process after the loss? Can you give an example? (Is there a change in your problem-solving skills?)

3.4. Have there been changes in your views about the future after the loss? (Have your close relationships with those around you increased or decreased?)

3.5. Has there been a change in your positive or negative perspective on events after the loss? (Are post-traumatic growth functions observed? Do you feel feelings such as anxiety, stress, guilt, etc. after trauma?)

Participants

The study sample consisted of fifteen adult individuals who had lost a loved one and were actively mourning. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. Thirteen of the participants were female and two were male. Their ages ranged from 23 to 43.

Most participants had undergraduate or graduate-level education in psychology or psychological counseling. This enabled them to interpret the grieving process from personal and professional standpoints.

This reflective process involved applying professional knowledge and awareness gained through training to interpret their grieving experiences, recognize the emotional impact they endured, and identify their coping strategies. Therefore, the data collected in this study primarily reflect the perspectives of a specific professional group, limiting the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Therefore, future research

including participants from more diverse educational and sociocultural backgrounds is recommended.

Data Collection Process

The data collection process aimed to reach holistic information about individuals' cognitive and happiness perceptions, and therefore, a semi-structured interview method was used. The interview form included open-ended questions. First, it is desired to determine how the person perceives and makes sense of happiness after the loss, when he/she thinks about the experience of loss that affected him/her the most and caused a change in his/her life.

In line with the participants' preferences, interviews were conducted online and face-to-face. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted in accordance with the informed consent form, and audio recordings were made with participants' approval. These audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, without any words being skipped.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis method (See Table 1). First, the transcripts were read and coded. Then, the codes were grouped into categories based on similarities. These categories were transformed into themes that represent a higher meaning. To develop these themes and categories, data from the interviews, as well as the posttraumatic growth model, cognitive restructuring theory, and cultural models of grief, were considered. This analysis framework is both data-driven and theory-based. To enhance reliability, coding stability was examined using the Miles and Huberman (1994) formula, yielding an agreement coefficient of 0.86. Identified inconsistencies were reviewed and resolved to ensure analytical consistency.

Table 1.

Thematic Analysis Process (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Step	Description
1. Familiarizing with the Data	Transcribing the interviews and reading the data in detail
2. Generating Initial Codes	Coding each piece of data and identifying meaningful codes
3. Constructing Themes	Grouping similar codes and forming initial themes
4. Reviewing Themes	Checking the coherence of themes with the dataset
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Refining the content of each theme and naming

	them
6. Writing the Report	Reporting themes holistically and supporting them with direct quotations

The data analysis process in this study followed the six-phase thematic analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), as summarized in Table 1.

The Role of the Researcher and Reflexivity

The researcher's background in psychological counseling and trauma studies has contributed to a deeper engagement with the data, but it also introduces the potential risk of bias. For this reason, the researcher adopted a holistic approach to the study and made a continuous effort to critically reflect on their own perspectives and assumptions.

Results

This section provides an in-depth discussion of adult individuals' perceptions of happiness and changes in their cognitive processes after the loss of a loved one, through the narratives of the participants. Within this framework, the first research question of the study was posed:

1) When you think about the most significant loss in your life, how do you perceive or give meaning to happiness after the loss?

Table 2.

Thematic Analysis of the Perception and Meaning-Making Process of Happiness After Loss

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Attachment and Time	Changing perception of time and relationships	I will never separate from my loved ones.	1
		Spending quality time with loved ones.	4
		Living in the present moment.	5
		Having a sense of purpose in life.	4
		Making an effort to feel happy.	5
Impermanence of Life	Emotional and philosophical awareness	Everything in this life is temporary.	4
		Life has lost its meaning	4
		Anything can happen to me.	2

Note. Themes reflect participants' perspectives on how they understood and redefined happiness after loss. Frequencies show how many participants mentioned each code.

Participants focused on two main themes when making sense of their perceptions of happiness after experiencing loss: attachment and the transience of life about time. Participants reported a deeper appreciation of the value of spending time with loved ones. This directly aligns with the relational growth component of the Posttraumatic Growth Model (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2009). One participant articulated this transformation as follows: *"I shifted my sense of happiness from individuality toward sociability (1, M, 24)."* Another described it as: "*I realized that happiness lies in moments. It's not about days or months, but in the small pieces of life we need to hold on to (15, F, 43*)." A third participant noted: *"After the loss, I started appreciating the people and things that made me happy, and I learned to dedicate more time to them. (12, F, 27)."* Similarly, participants were found to develop a deeper awareness of the transience of life after loss. This is consistent with Janoff-Bulman's (1992) Shattered Assumptions Theory and the existential questions that emerge after loss.

This section, following the first question, explores the internal and external factors that hinder participants' happiness after a loss. Specifically, the lasting effects of themes such as emotional burden, cognitive distortions, regret, and guilt on an individual's perception of happiness were examined.

2) When you think about the loss that impacted you the most and caused a change in your life, what factors do you think are preventing you from being happy right now?

Table 3.

Barriers to Perceived Happiness Following Loss

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Grief and Emotional Load	Longing and Emotional Bonds	Thoughts of never seeing them again, feeling lonely on special days, longing for memories	5
	Triggering the Nature of Memories	Photographs, objects, or places evoke memories of the loss	3
Relational and Social Aspects	Focus on Close Relationships	Trying not to conflict with others, maintaining constant communication	4
	Need for Social Support	Desire for emotional support, feeling the void of the deceased	3
Cognitive and Emotional Regulation	Regret and Guilt	Worry about not treating the deceased well, regret for not doing more in time	3
	Feeling Out of Control	Awareness of inability to	2

		change the past, a sense of helplessness	
	Gradual Adaptation Over Time	Initial intense emotional reactions followed by a gradual decrease	2
Daily Life Stressors	Everyday Challenges	Stress from work, school, and social life overshadowing the perception of happiness	2

Note. This table summarizes individual, relational, and cognitive barriers that participants identified as preventing the perception of happiness after loss.

Despite the professional awareness of the participants, the factors that prevent the perception of happiness after loss were quite diverse among the participants, and these factors were intertwined with individual, social, and cognitive dimensions. A significant portion of the participants (33%) stated that longing for the lost person and the idea of not seeing them again overshadowed their happiness even in the long term. This finding is consistent with the model of Worden (2009), which describes the long-term effects of the emotional disconnection caused by grief. One participant expressed this emotional reality as follows: *"The thought that I will never see them again truly upsets me. Knowing they won't be there when I return to certain places is hard to bear* (3, F, 24)."

In addition, 20% stated that triggers such as photographs and places brought back memories from the past, and that they experienced sudden emotional fluctuations. This situation is consistent with the model of coping with loss defined in the Dual Process Model of Stroebe and Schut (1999). One participant shared: *"When I see her photos, I still cry sometimes. It doesn't happen often now, but it still affects me* (5, F, 23)." Another added: *"There's a cat around here that reminds me of my grandmother. Whenever I see it, I feel triggered* (10, F, 24)."

In the relational dimension, the value of the relationships established with the living people increased after the loss, which increased the participants' efforts not to remain angry with anyone and to repair the relationships (27%). This is consistent with the theoretical framework of Neimeyer (2016), who addresses the relational meaning-making processes after losses. However, it has also been observed that this effort overshadows the ability to set boundaries and subjective happiness. One participant stated: *"I always felt like I had to make peace right away, even when I should have protected my boundaries. It made me unhappy, but I couldn't help it* (8, F, 29)."

In cognitive and emotional regulation processes, feelings of regret and guilt (20%), especially thinking that they did not treat the lost person well enough and thinking that they did not do more in time, were prominent. This situation is parallel to the maladaptive thoughts defined in the cognitive dissonance model related to loss by Boelen et al.

(2006). A participant emphasized: *"I feel like I missed the chance to be there. That regret always lingers* (10, F, 24)."

There were also participants who stated that these thoughts and emotional burden eased over time. Finally, 13% of the participants stated that the daily stresses brought about by life after the loss also affected their perception of happiness. This finding is also consistent with the adaptation literature of Bonanno (2009), who suggests that grief should be evaluated not only with the loss but also with the reconstruction process after the loss. One participant explained: *"I've dealt with the grief, but daily stressors, small things in life now affect my happiness more than they used to* (12, F, 27)."

In this section of the study, participants' intellectual, emotional, and behavioral restructuring experiences were examined within the context of the Cognitive-Structural Grief Process, which is discussed in the literature within the context of post-traumatic adaptation and development models. Questions asked in this context specifically focused on topics such as post-traumatic cognitive restructuring, thought control, daily functioning, decision-making processes, and perception of the future.

3.1) Do you have difficulty controlling your thoughts after losing a loved one?

Table 4.

Experiences of Difficulty in Thought Regulation Following Bereavement

3. Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Thought Control and Cognitive Overload	Loss of Mental Control in the Early Period	Persistent thoughts about the deceased	5
		Intrusive traumatic memories	3
		Experiencing uncontrollable mental flow	4
		Intense regrets and "what if" thoughts	3
		Strong guilt and self-blame	2
	Regaining Control Over Time	Decrease in thought intensity and movement toward acceptance	2
		Conscious and intentional recall of memories	4
Anxiety and Catastrophic Thinking	Future-Oriented Worries	Fear of losing other loved ones	3
		The belief that loss can occur at any time	3
		Mental flashbacks triggered by stimuli (smells,	3

		places, faces)	
Strong Cognitive Regulation	High Self-Control and Use of Support	Individuals with strong self-regulation skills	3
		Managing thoughts through open communication and social support	2
		Reframing and reconstructing life's meaning after loss	2

Note. This table presents participants' experiences of difficulty in regulating intrusive thoughts following bereavement and how these challenges evolved over time.

According to the results of the analysis, thought control difficulties are commonly observed in the post-loss period. Especially immediately after the loss, 40% of the participants (n=6) stated that thoughts about the lost person took over their entire mind and that they had difficulty controlling these thoughts. This process, which is triggered by constantly returning to that moment, feelings of regret and guilt, is consistent with Boelen et al. (2006) maladaptive cognitions theory after loss. One participant expressed this situation as follows: *"I couldn't think of anything else. I was constantly thinking about how much they suffered and picturing their final days in the hospital. I couldn't eat or speak. I just kept thinking about them all day long* (5, F, 23)." The fact that this control difficulty decreased over time and 33% of the participants (n=5) stated that they were able to confront these thoughts more consciously and willingly after a while after the loss is consistent with the Dual Process Mourning Model of Stroebe and Schut (1999), which emphasizes the dynamic nature of grief. Another reflected: *"I still remember the sadness, but I've integrated it into my life. It no longer overwhelms me* (7, F, 26)." The statement of one participant: *"It was very intense at first, but now I look at their photos knowingly, it is under my control* (5, F, 23)" illustrates this process. On the other hand, in addition to concerns about the past after the loss, concerns about the future also emerged. 27% of the participants (n=4) stated that they frequently thought about the fear of losing their living relatives and the uncontrollability of life. This situation is also consistent with Malkinson (2007), who defined traumatic thought patterns after the loss. One participant explained: *"After I lost them, I became hyperaware. I kept thinking 'What if I lose someone else?' It even affected my daily life, like how I drove or constantly warning others to be careful* (8, F, 29)."

Another shared: *"Now, even when I'm enjoying something, I think about how it could end. I worry whether I should even make plans involving people who might not be there tomorrow* (6, F, 24)." These concerns, which occasionally resurface in their minds with triggers (smell, place, faces), create strong mental flashbacks in the participants. Participants who are relatively strong in controlling their thoughts (20%) stated that they created a more balanced and harmonious coping process based on resources such as open communication and social support. This situation is consistent with Neimeyer's (2016) emphasis on the

reconstruction of meaning and the importance of social support in the mourning process. One participant explained: *"I've never had major issues controlling my thoughts. I've always been open about my emotions, and I have supportive relationships with my husband and sister* (13, F, 40)."

The extent to which basic life activities such as sleep, nutrition, and social interaction were affected was assessed thematically.

3.2) Do your thoughts after the loss negatively impact your daily life (e.g., sleep disturbances)?

Table 5.

Perceived Impact of Thoughts on Daily Functioning Following Loss

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Disruption in Daily Life and Functional Impairment	Immediate Aftermath	Sleep disturbances	6
		Loss of appetite and eating difficulties	5
		Tendency toward social withdrawal	4
		Difficulty concentrating	3
		Inability to enjoy daily activities	3
Adaptation and Recovery Over Time	Adjustment Process	Gradual improvement in sleep and eating patterns	4
		Emotional fluctuations triggered by memories	3
		Return to responsibilities with awareness that life continues	2
No Significant Effect	Stable Daily Routine	No notable disruption in daily functioning	2

Note. This table outlines how loss-related thoughts impacted participants' daily functioning, including disruptions in sleep, eating, and emotional regulation.

In the post loss period, a significant portion of the participants (40%) stated that they experienced disruptions in their daily life activities such as sleep disorders, loss of appetite, emotional distance, and distraction. One participant described this situation as *"I couldn't sleep at night, I was constantly thinking about him/her, I didn't even want to eat* (3, F, 24)." Another added: *"I didn't want to leave the house, and I stayed in bed for days. I had no*

appetite, and I avoided people (5, F, 23).” These findings show how the loss-focused processes defined in the Dual Process Mourning Model by Stroebe and Schut (1999) can directly affect an individual’s functionality. Sleep problems are particularly intense immediately after the loss and tend to decrease over time. 27% of the participants stated that they had difficulty falling asleep in the first months after the loss, and experienced problems such as waking up frequently and having nightmares. This situation is also consistent with the definition of prolonged grief disorder by Prigerson et al. (2013). One participant described this process by saying, *“I was sleeping every night, afraid that the phone would ring after I received the news of his/her death on the phone* (1, M, 24).*”* Disruption in eating habits also stood out as a significant finding. 33% of the participants (n=5) stated that they were reluctant to eat after the loss and had serious problems with nutrition for days. This finding shows how the psychological effects seen in the mourning process affect physiological life and how these processes are intertwined (Bonanno, 2009). One participant reflected: *“I normally love eating, but during that time I just couldn’t. I skipped meals for days* (3, F, 24).” However, the study also included participants who regained their daily routines over time and were able to adapt to the grief. 27% of the participants stated that their sleep and eating patterns regained balance as time passed after the loss, and they were able to return to their responsibilities. This adaptation process is consistent with the mourning tasks approach defined by Worden (2009). One participant noted: *“At first, yes, it was difficult. But over time, I managed to get back to my regular routines and feel balanced again* (8, F, 29).” However, it is also seen that this process occurs differently in each individual's life. Two participants stated that they did not experience a significant disruption in their daily life routine after the loss. This situation is thought to be due to direct and/or indirect factors such as individual coping styles, personality traits, and support systems (Neimeyer, 2016).

To understand the changes individuals experience in their decision-making processes and problem-solving skills after a loss, this section examines their attitudes toward the uncertainties encountered in daily life. In this context, the following question was posed:

3.3) Did you experience a change in your decision-making process after the loss? Can you give an example? (Is there a change in your problem-solving skills?)

Table 6.

Perceived Changes in Decision Making After Loss

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Changes in Decision-Making and Problem-Solving	Turning to External Resources	Seeking advice and social support	3
	Relationship-Oriented Decisions	Avoiding conflict, adopting a conciliatory approach	4
	Risk and Meaning Orientation	Awareness of life's uncertainty, urgency in decision-making	3
	Awareness of Personal Priorities	Letting go of trivial concerns, setting personal boundaries	3
	Regaining Confidence Over Time	Considering others' perspectives, multidimensional thinking	2
No Perceived Change	Stable Decision-Making Processes	No significant change in decision-making post loss	2

Note. This table summarizes participants' perceived shifts in decision-making after loss, including increased reliance on others, relational sensitivity, and existential awareness.

It is thought that the participants' professional identities may affect their problem-solving skills and problem perception processes. However, these professional identities were not always decisive after the loss; many of the participants stated that they experienced significant changes in their decision-making processes after their loss experiences. In particular, the tendency to turn to external sources in decision-making and problem-solving processes stands out strikingly. One participant reflected on this shift: *"I used to solve my problems internally, but after the loss, I started asking people for their opinions—maybe because of the fear that I hadn't lived enough with others before* (1, M, 24)." 20% of the participants stated that they tended to solve their problems, which they had previously solved internally, by consulting and receiving support from others after the loss. This situation is consistent with research showing how the experience of social support after the loss and the need it creates are reflected in decision processes (Neimeyer, 2016). The importance given to relationships became more evident in decision processes. 27% of the participants stated that they avoided upsetting people after the loss and therefore became compromising and tended to make more careful decisions. One participant said: *"I became more careful about hurting others, especially in my family. I try not to act impulsively and think more before I speak* (7, F, 26)." This finding supports studies showing that there is a change in relationship schemas after grief (Malkinson, 2007). In addition, some participants (20%) stated that their awareness of the uncertainty of life after the loss

increased and that this awareness led them to make decisions without delay and to evaluate their lives in a more meaningful way. One participant summarized this situation by saying, "*Death is already on the horizon; I no longer avoid taking risks* (11, M, 23)" This is consistent with research on the search for meaning and existential questioning after loss (Yalom, 1980). On the other hand, 20% of the participants stated that they began to give more importance to their own priorities and desires in the decision-making stages after the loss, stopped questioning things they had previously considered unimportant, and began to define their own boundaries more clearly. This process is consistent with research on self-awareness and self-evaluation after grief (Worden, 2009). However, two participants stated that their loss did not have a significant effect on their decision making processes. One stated: *"No, I didn't feel any major change in my decisions* (15, F, 43)." This situation reflects individual differences in coping styles and the meaning attributed to the loss, and is consistent with research that loss does not work the same way for everyone (Bonanno, 2009).

This section evaluates the transformation in participants' hopes, expectations, and connections with their surroundings to understand the long-term psychosocial effects of the grief process.

3.4) Have your views about the future changed after the loss? (Have your close relationships with your surroundings increased or decreased?)

Table 7.

Changes in Future Outlook Following Bereavement

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Changes in Close Relationships	Strengthened Bonds	Spending more time with family and loved ones	5
	Relational Withdrawal	Social isolation, distancing, or cutting ties with others	3
	Selective Connection	Deepening secure attachments, prioritizing trustworthy relationships	3
Changes in Future Perspective	Living Without Delay	Valuing time, expressing emotions to loved ones	4
	Acceptance of Uncertainty	Awareness of the unpredictability of life, living in the moment	3
	Lifestyle and Career Revisions	Shifting career goals, reevaluating priorities, and lifestyle	2
No Perceived Change	Stable Future Perspective	No influence of loss on long-term plans or relationships	2

Note. This table presents changes in participants' future outlook following loss, including shifts in relational priorities, emotional expression, and life planning.

The data show that the experience of loss significantly affects individuals' perceptions of the future and relationship processes. 33% of the participants (n=5) stated that they started to spend more time with their families and loved ones after the loss, and this is consistent with research showing that loss can strengthen social ties (Neimeyer, 2016). One participant's statement: *"I started to spend more time with my family and friends, I am afraid of losing the* (11, M, 23)." *Similarly, one participant shared: "I tell my loved ones that I love them more now, I learned that I shouldn't wait for tomorrow (3, F, 24)."* summarizes the positive situation in this way. However, some participants showed the opposite reaction and 20% (n=3) stated that they distanced themselves from their social circle and cut off communication for a while. One participant explained: *"I didn't talk to anyone for a week, I didn't leave the house. I wanted to avoid constant questions* (5, F, 23)." This situation shows that each participant's coping strategies are fundamentally different. One participant explained this process with the words, *"I didn't talk to anyone for a week, I didn't leave the house. I wanted to avoid constant questions."* It shows that some participants developed a selective approach in relational processes (20%, n=3), that is, they adopted a deeper and more trust-oriented approach in their relationships. It is an important data set that shows the change in the mourning process in the individual's attachment styles. When the changes experienced in the future perspective were examined, 27% of the participants (n=4) stated that they tended not to procrastinate and to express their feelings to their loved ones more. One participant expressed this awareness with the following words: *"I tell my loved ones that I love them more now, I learned that I shouldn't wait for tomorrow* (3, F, 24)" Another group of participants (20%, n=3) stated that they gained awareness of accepting the uncertainty of life after the loss. This situation is consistent with Yalom's (1980) view of how death awareness can change and transform individuals' worldviews as defined in his theory of existential psychotherapy. It was also observed that some individuals changed their career and life plans after the loss (13%, n=2). One participant shared: *"I made a career change and began working remotely after the loss. Now I live away from crowds, connecting from wherever I choose* (15, F, 43)." However, 13% of the participants (n=2) stated that they did not experience any change and that the loss did not affect their long-term plans.

Finally, this section evaluates individuals' perspectives and the cognitive-emotional transformations they experience after loss. In particular, it analyzes whether emotions such as guilt, anxiety, and stress coexist with signs of post-traumatic growth.

3.5) Has your perspective on events changed since the loss? (Are post-traumatic growth functions observed? Do you experience feelings such as anxiety, stress, guilt, etc., after trauma?)

Table 8.

Changes in Emotional and Cognitive Outlook Following Loss

Theme	Category	Code	Frequency
Posttraumatic Cognitive and Emotional Shifts	Negative Cognitive Changes	Persistent fear of loss and anxiety about the Future	5
		Self-blame and feelings of guilt	4
		Emotional suppression an-davoidance of feeling	3
	Positive Cognitive Changes	Appreciating life more, not stressing over trivial matters	3
		Spending more time with loved ones	5
		Awareness of posttraumat-icgrowt	3
Emotional Ambivalence	Internal Conflicts	Simultaneous experience of growth, guilt, and anxiety	3
	Emotion Regulation	Gradual decrease in intense emotions, movement toward acceptance	2
No Perceived Change	Stable Outlook	No significant impact on an overall perspective	2

Note. This table highlights emotional and cognitive shifts following loss, including anxiety, regret, and increased appreciation of life.

Participants stated that they experienced noticeable changes in their perspectives and emotional reactions to events after the loss. 33% (n=5) of the participants emphasized that they experienced a constant fear of loss, anxiety about losing their loved ones, and intense uncertainty about the future after the loss. Another said: *"I constantly worry something will happen to my loved ones while I'm away. It affects my quality of life* (14, F, 24)." At the same time, 27% (n=4) of the participants stated that they experienced feelings of self-blame and intense regret after the loss. Positive results show that a group of 33% (n=5) stated that they understood the value of their lives better after the loss and did not get hung up on small things as much as before. This finding is considered an indicator of the perception of posttraumatic growth. Another shared: *"I no longer stress about little things. Life's too short, and I've learned to focus on what really matters* (11, M, 23)." One participant expressed this situation as "Every moment I spend with my loved ones is very precious now, and I feel it much more." However, 20% (n=3) expressed that they

experienced both posttraumatic growth and negative feelings such as guilt and anxiety together. Finally, 13% (n=2) of the participants stated that the loss did not change their perspectives and moods permanently. One said: *"I didn't experience trauma-related anxiety or transformation. I went through a mourning period, but I don't think it changed how I see things* (15, F, 43)."

Figure 1.

Conceptual model illustrating the post-loss cognitive and emotional processes shaping individuals' perceptions of happiness.

Post-Loss Process and Happiness Perception Model for Participant Statements

Loss Experience

↓

Cognitive Restructuring - Emotional Regulation - Search for Social Support

↓

Reorganization of Life and Search for Meaning

↓

Individual Perception of Happiness

In this model, participants state that they are restructured both cognitively and emotionally in the post-loss process, and that social support systems and support from the immediate environment play an important role in this process. In the process of reorganizing life, themes such as making sense of the loss and rebuilding hopes for the future came to the fore. At the end of these processes, individual happiness perception is reshaped depending on the meaning of the loss experienced and the functionality of social support mechanisms.

Discussion

In this study, themes such as "appreciating time," "efforts to repair relationships," and "conscious awareness of emotional regulation" suggest that individuals go through not only a grieving process but also a psychological restructuring process when coping with loss. This supports the "relational deepening" theme in Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2004) post-traumatic growth model. For example, individuals' statements such as "I don't want to be angry at anyone anymore" or "I've learned not to make a big deal out of small things" demonstrate the level of relational awareness that develops after the loss. These findings are also consistent with Neimeyer's (2001, 2016) meaning-making approach, revealing an individual's effort to reinterpret the world after the loss. The findings also support Stroebe and Schut's (1999) Dual Process Grief Model, suggesting that individuals develop both loss-focused and reconstruction-focused coping strategies.

Some participants reported difficulty coping with strong emotions after the loss and moving on with their lives. This dual process demonstrates that grief progresses not linearly but dynamically and in a fluctuating manner. Statements such as, "I look at your photos more consciously now," reveal that individuals' ways of dealing with traumatic memories change over time. Another prominent theme in cognitive restructuring processes is the "transience of life" and the "awareness of death." These themes evoke the unraveling and reconstruction of core cognitive assumptions emphasized in Janoff-Bulman's (1992) theory of "shattered assumptions." Participants particularly developed an awareness of life's fragility and shaped their perspectives on the future within a more meaningful and memory-focused framework. These findings are consistent with Yalom's (1980) approach to existential psychotherapy; awareness of death leads individuals to reexamine their life values and generate meaning. When examined from a cultural context, social support and mourning rituals play a significant role in the cognitive restructuring process in a collectivist society like Turkey. Participants stated that family and community support, particularly during the bereavement process, facilitated the process of "holding on to life." This finding aligns with Rosenblatt's (2008) cross-cultural grief studies. While the individual search for meaning is prominent in Western literature, the healing effect of social connections was more clearly seen in this study. The findings regarding emotional regulation and thought control support Boelen et al.'s (2006) maladaptive cognitive beliefs model. Participants reported experiencing guilt, regret, and uncontrollable thoughts after the loss, but reported that these feelings diminished over time and they began to regulate their thought processes more consciously. The unique contribution of the study becomes even more evident when changes in individuals' perceptions of happiness are examined. Happiness is not solely a pleasure-focused emotion but is also restructured within the framework of meaning, commitment, and goals. This finding is consistent with the subjective well-being model developed by Diener et al. (1999) and supports the literature suggesting that happiness is defined more collectively and relationship-centeredly in Eastern societies (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). The statement, "Happiness is no longer about achieving things, but about spending quality time with loved ones," typifies this new definition. Furthermore, the shift in participants' perspectives on the future can be interpreted not only as a sense of vulnerability after the loss, but also as a search for a new life and personal growth. Participants demonstrated a tendency to take risks, make decisions promptly, and build a more meaningful life. This supports the literature demonstrating that grief is not merely an end but also the beginning of personal transformation (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Bonanno, 2009). In light of all this, it appears that the experience of loss and grief profoundly disrupts an individual's life, resulting in both cognitive and psychological consequences.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that adults who experience the loss of a loved one reconstruct their perception of happiness primarily through heightened awareness of time and relationships, as well as through a deeper philosophical and emotional recognition of life's transience. Happiness was no longer defined in terms of pleasure or achievement, but rather through meaningful connections, conscious presence, and intentional efforts to value life. This shift suggests that bereavement initiates a cognitive transformation in which happiness is redefined as a meaning-centered and relational experience.

The results further demonstrate that cognitive and emotional responses to loss do not follow a linear trajectory. While participants experienced intrusive thoughts, guilt, anxiety, and disruptions in daily functioning, these reactions often coexisted with adaptive processes such as emotional regulation, increased self-awareness, and intentional meaning-making. This coexistence highlights that vulnerability and psychological reorganization are not opposing outcomes but intertwined dimensions of the grief experience.

Within the cultural context of Turkey, social support systems and mourning rituals emerged as significant factors shaping the post-loss adjustment process. Collective practices, family involvement, and culturally embedded expressions of grief played a crucial role in facilitating emotional regulation and sustaining individuals' connection to life after loss. These findings underscore the importance of understanding grief not solely as an individual psychological experience but as a culturally situated process influenced by shared meanings and communal support.

Overall, the study emphasizes that the experience of loss reshapes cognitive structures, emotional regulation, and perceptions of happiness in complex and dynamic ways. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small and purposively selected sample, which limits the transferability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the majority of participants had higher education backgrounds, particularly in psychology-related fields, which may have influenced the depth of reflection and articulation of cognitive and emotional processes. Third, data were collected through both online and face-to-face interviews, which may have introduced variations in disclosure patterns and interaction dynamics. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for an examination of how cognitive transformations evolve over time following loss.

Future research may address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, diversifying sample characteristics across socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, and incorporating mixed-method approaches to better capture the dynamic nature of grief-

related cognitive restructuring. Comparative cross-cultural studies may also provide deeper insight into how collective norms and relational structures shape mourning experiences and post-loss meaning-making processes.

The findings also highlight the need for clearly defined, culturally responsive psychosocial interventions. At the individual level, structured grief counseling and psychotherapy approaches focusing on meaning reconstruction, cognitive restructuring of guilt-related beliefs, and emotion regulation strategies may be beneficial. At the relational level, family based counseling interventions can support communication, role renegotiation, and shared mourning processes. At the community level, facilitated grief support groups and culturally congruent mourning rituals may strengthen social connectedness and collective coping. Such interventions may be delivered by trained clinical psychologists, psychological counselors, psychiatrists and social workers, ideally within an interdisciplinary framework that integrates mental health services with community based support systems.

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