

Mental Health in Relation to Parental Absence:  
A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

**Support** - Non.

**Review Stage at time of this submission** - Completed but not published.

**Conflicts of interest** - None declared.

**INPLASY registration number:** INPLASY202560022

**Amendments** - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 5 June 2025 and was last updated on 5 June 2025.

INTRODUCTION

**Review question / Objective** How does parental absence affect the mental health and well-being of children?

**Rationale** Orphaned children are at increased risk of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems due to the loss of parental care and emotional support. While many individual studies have explored these outcomes, findings are inconsistent and vary across settings. This study was conducted to systematically review and analyze existing evidence comparing the mental health of orphaned and non-orphaned children.

**Condition being studied** The condition being studied in this systematic review is the mental health of orphaned children in comparison to non-orphaned children. The study focuses on a broad spectrum of psychological outcomes to evaluate the impact of parental absence on children's emotional and behavioral well-being.

METHODS

**Search strategy** The systematic review was conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guideline.

**Participant or population** Children up to 18 years.

**Intervention** Orphan children.

**Comparator** Children living with their parents.

**Study designs to be included** Case-Control.

**Eligibility criteria** The inclusion criteria were as follows, case-control study or cross-sectional study with a comparison group, Healthy children, all languages, presenting a comparison group, Lost one or both parents, up to 18 years old. The exclusion criteria were as follows: orphaned by AIDS and not measuring mental health with a specific tool.

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**Information sources** Electronic databases.

**Main outcome(s)** The main outcome of the study is to determine whether orphaned children experience significantly different mental health outcomes compared to non-orphaned children.

**Data management** In this systematic review and meta-analysis, records and data were managed through a structured and transparent process in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines.

**Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis** The Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) was used to assess the methodological quality of included studies.

**Strategy of data synthesis** A comprehensive search strategy was implemented using databases such as PubMed, MEDLINE, and ScienceDirect to identify relevant studies without time or language restrictions. After removing duplicates, two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts for eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Full-text articles were then assessed in detail, and relevant data—such as study design, sample size, country, age range, and mental health outcomes—were extracted using a standardized data extraction form.

**Subgroup analysis** Formal subgroup analysis was not extensively conducted due to the limited number of eligible studies.

**Sensitivity analysis** A formal sensitivity analysis was not fully conducted in this systematic review and meta-analysis due to the limited number of studies included and the variability in measurement tools and outcomes.

**Language restriction** Non.

**Country(ies) involved** Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords** Mental health; parents; orphans; orphanage; anxiety; depression; psychology.

**Dissemination plans** The findings of this systematic review and meta-analysis will be disseminated through multiple academic and professional channels to maximize impact and reach. The primary dissemination plan includes submitting the study for publication in a peer-reviewed international journal specializing in pediatric health, mental health, or public health.

## Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Mohammed Barry - Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, investigation, resources, visualization, writing-original draft preparation, writing-review and editing.

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