

**PASTORAL CARE AND SOCIAL SUPPORT OF CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION TEACHERS FOR FATHERLESS STUDENTS AT SMA
SWASTA RK DELI MURNI DISKI**

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ABSTRAK

Kondisi fatherless pada masa remaja dapat memengaruhi keamanan emosional, penyesuaian sosial, motivasi belajar, dan pembentukan konsep diri sehingga sekolah memerlukan figur pendamping yang mampu memberikan dukungan secara konsisten. Dalam konteks sekolah Katolik, guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik memiliki posisi strategis karena perannya memadukan fungsi pedagogis, moral, spiritual, dan pastoral. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dukungan sosial guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik dalam menangani siswa yang mengalami fatherless di SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Subjek penelitian berjumlah 10 orang, terdiri atas satu guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik, satu kepala sekolah, dan delapan siswa yang mengalami fatherless. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dukungan sosial guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik diberikan dalam empat bentuk utama, yaitu dukungan emosional, dukungan instrumental, dukungan informasional, dan dukungan penghargaan. Dukungan emosional tampak melalui sikap terbuka, empati, kesediaan mendengarkan, menjaga kerahasiaan, dan tidak menghakimi siswa. Dukungan instrumental diwujudkan melalui bimbingan belajar, bantuan dalam menyelesaikan tugas, penyediaan sumber belajar, dan pemantauan perkembangan siswa. Dukungan informasional diberikan melalui nasihat, arahan dalam pengambilan keputusan, serta refleksi berdasarkan nilai-nilai Kristiani. Sementara itu, dukungan penghargaan diberikan melalui pujian, motivasi, dan apresiasi terhadap usaha siswa. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa siswa yang mengalami fatherless menghadapi tantangan berupa gangguan emosional, kesulitan penyesuaian sosial, penurunan motivasi belajar, dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri. Dengan demikian, guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik berperan sebagai pendidik, pendamping pastoral, dan sumber dukungan sosial yang membantu siswa merasa diterima, dihargai, serta lebih mampu mengembangkan ketahanan diri, motivasi belajar, dan konsep diri yang positif.

Kata Kunci: dukungan sosial, fatherless, guru Pendidikan Agama Katolik, pendampingan pastoral, siswa

ABSTRACT

Fatherlessness during adolescence may affect emotional security, social adjustment, learning motivation, and self-concept, creating a need for consistent support from significant adults at school. In Catholic schools, Catholic Religious Education teachers occupy a strategic position because their role integrates pedagogical, moral, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. This study aims to analyze the social support provided by Catholic Religious Education teachers in handling students experiencing fatherlessness at SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The research subjects consisted of 10 participants,

including one Catholic Religious Education teacher, one school principal, and eight students experiencing fatherlessness. Data were collected through interviews, observation, and documentation, and were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the social support provided by the Catholic Religious Education teacher appeared in four main forms: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Emotional support was reflected in openness, empathy, willingness to listen, confidentiality, and a non-judgmental attitude toward students. Instrumental support was provided through academic guidance, assistance in completing assignments, learning resources, and continuous monitoring of student progress. Informational support was expressed through advice, decision-making guidance, and reflection based on Christian values. Appraisal support was shown through praise, encouragement, and appreciation for students efforts. The study also found that students experiencing fatherlessness faced emotional difficulties, social adjustment problems, decreased learning motivation, and low self-confidence. Thus, Catholic Religious Education teachers function as educators, pastoral companions, and sources of social support that help students feel accepted and valued while strengthening resilience, learning motivation, and a positive self-concept.

Keywords: Catholic Religious Education teacher, fatherlessness, pastoral accompaniment, social support, students

INTRODUCTION

Education is not merely an institutional process of transmitting knowledge, but also a formative space in which students develop moral awareness, emotional maturity, social responsibility, and spiritual identity (Adon, 2021; Bawa Toron, 2025). In Indonesian educational contexts, schools are also expected to cultivate character and learning motivation alongside academic competence (Augustine & Permana, 2024). Within this framework, Catholic Religious Education and Character Education hold a strategic position because they address faith understanding together with moral formation, spirituality, and the practice of Christian values in students everyday lives (Bawa Toron, 2025; Simbolon & Bangun, 2024).

The role of Catholic Religious Education teachers is therefore broader than the conventional role of subject teachers (Bukit & Sembiring, 2024; Sihotang et al., 2024). They are expected to function as educators, moral companions, spiritual guides, and witnesses of Christian values in the school community (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). Catholic schools are conceived as educating communities in which teachers contribute to the integral development of students through dialogue, care, and relational presence (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). In this sense, Catholic Religious Education teachers are not only responsible for delivering religious knowledge, but also for accompanying students as they face personal, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual challenges.

One important form of this accompaniment is social support. Social support includes emotional care, practical help, informational guidance, and positive appraisal that individuals can draw upon when facing stressful situations (House, 1981). In school settings, perceived teacher support is positively associated with students' school engagement, with emotional support among the domains showing a particularly strong association (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). Supportive relationships with teachers are also associated with study engagement and learning outcomes (Rautanen et al., 2021; Thijssen et al., 2022). For Catholic Religious Education teachers, such support is consistent with an educational mission grounded in care, dialogue, accompaniment, and respect for the dignity of each student (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022).

The importance of teacher social support can be understood from psychological, pedagogical, and pastoral perspectives. Psychologically, social support and self-efficacy are important protective and promotive resources for adolescent mental health and well-being (Cherewick et al., 2024). In secondary schools, caring and higher-quality teacher student relationships are generally associated with lower anxiety, although the predominantly observational evidence does not by itself establish causality (Salter et al., 2025). Pedagogically, teacher support is positively associated with behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of school engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). Pastorally, supportive teacher student relationships reflect the Catholic educational commitment to integral formation, dialogue, and accompaniment, especially for students who are vulnerable or require additional care (Adon, 2021; Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022).

This issue becomes increasingly relevant when schools encounter students who experience fatherlessness. Fatherlessness may involve the physical, emotional, or functional absence of a father figure, including a perceived lack of paternal love and involvement (Xiang & Zhou, 2023). Such absence can arise from diverse family circumstances, including death, divorce, separation, migration, abandonment, or limited paternal involvement (Erwinda et al., 2025). Longitudinal evidence indicates that father absence can be associated with less favorable mental-health trajectories across adolescence and young adulthood, with effects varying according to timing and individual circumstances (Culpin et al., 2022). Qualitative evidence from fatherless adolescents in Indonesia also shows that self-acceptance is dynamic and can be strengthened by coping resources and social support (Desinta et al., 2025).

Previous studies further suggest that fatherlessness may be accompanied by difficulties in emotional regulation, social adjustment, trust, and self-acceptance, although these experiences are not uniform across adolescents (Culpin et al., 2022; Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Desinta et al., 2025). Some students may become quieter or more withdrawn, whereas others may express distress through resistant or attention-seeking behavior; such expressions should therefore be interpreted carefully rather than treated automatically as disciplinary problems. Research on adolescent social behavior also indicates an association between father absence and social behavioral difficulties (Alfifah et al., 2025). A supportive and non-judgmental school response is consequently important because students may need relational safety before they are able to disclose or process personal difficulties.

Fatherlessness may also intersect with students learning motivation and engagement when emotional burdens, reduced self-confidence, or limited support at home make it harder to concentrate and participate consistently. Perceived support from teachers and peers is positively related to students study engagement (Rautanen et al., 2021). A large meta-analysis likewise found a positive association between teacher support and school engagement across behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). School connectedness is also recognized as a potentially protective resource for adolescent mental health (Raniti et al., 2022). In this context, the school can become an important secondary environment for stability, affirmation, and guidance without positioning the teacher as a substitute for a parent.

Catholic Religious Education teachers have a distinctive potential to support fatherless students because their educational role integrates moral, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). Through empathetic communication, personal attention, reflective dialogue, and faith-based values, teachers can create spaces in which students feel heard and respected. Catholic Religious Education practice in Indonesia also emphasizes teacher roles that extend beyond content delivery toward guidance, motivation, facilitation, and the formation of students' moral lives (Bawa Toron, 2025; Bukit & Sembiring,

2024). Inclusive and differentiated learning practices can further support students with varied needs and learning conditions (Simbolon & Bangun, 2024).

The relevance of this issue is evident in the context of SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski. Preliminary findings at the research site indicate that several students in grades XI and XII experience fatherlessness due to different family circumstances. Based on an initial interview with a Catholic Religious Education teacher on December 2, 2025, these students showed diverse emotional and behavioral characteristics. Some students tended to seek attention through certain behaviors, while others became more closed and were willing to share their stories only with people they truly trusted. The teacher also reported that some students experienced difficulties in expressing opinions and emotions in class, showed resistance to instructions, or demonstrated indifferent attitudes toward classroom rules.

These preliminary findings suggest that the experiences of fatherless students are complex and cannot be reduced to academic or disciplinary issues. Their behaviors may reflect deeper emotional struggles related to loss, insecurity, lack of affirmation, or the absence of a significant parental figure. The teacher's response also indicates that accompaniment is often carried out through openness, acceptance, listening, and participation in spiritual or extracurricular activities such as visits to the sick, retreats, recollections, and other school-based programs. This shows that the support provided by Catholic Religious Education teachers is not always formal or programmatic, but may also emerge through daily relational presence and pastoral sensitivity.

The urgency of the present study is therefore not merely that few studies have combined teacher support and fatherlessness. Father absence can represent a sustained developmental vulnerability, whereas school connectedness and supportive teacher relationships are modifiable resources within adolescents everyday environments (Culpin et al., 2022; Raniti et al., 2022; Salter et al., 2025). This makes the school response practically consequential: when family support is reduced or inconsistent, daily interactions with a trusted teacher can provide relational security, guidance, and affirmation without replacing the father's role. The issue is particularly significant in Catholic schools because their educational mission explicitly frames the school as an educating community centered on dialogue, care, and integral human formation (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). Yet research has rarely examined how these protective and pastoral functions are enacted by Catholic Religious Education teachers for fatherless students in Indonesian private Catholic senior high schools. Addressing this gap is important both empirically, to document an underexamined context, and practically, to identify support practices that schools can strengthen before students' emotional, social, or academic difficulties become more entrenched.

Therefore, this study examines the social support provided by Catholic Religious Education teachers in handling students who experience fatherlessness at SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the forms of support provided by the teacher, interpret how fatherless students experience that support, and explain how pastoral-pedagogical accompaniment responds to their emotional, social, academic, and spiritual needs. The study contributes a context-specific account of Catholic Religious Education teachers as school-based support figures and highlights practices that can inform more responsive pastoral care for students with vulnerable family backgrounds.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the social support provided by Catholic Religious Education teachers in handling students experiencing

fatherlessness at SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings within their natural school context (Fadli, 2021). The research participants consisted of 10 individuals: one Catholic Religious Education teacher, one school principal, and eight students identified as experiencing fatherlessness. Participants were selected purposively because they were directly related to the phenomenon being studied. Data were collected through semi structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews explored the forms of social support provided by the teacher, the schools role in supporting students, and students experiences of receiving emotional, social, spiritual, and academic support. Observation examined teacher–student interactions in learning activities and school life, while documentation was used to support data obtained from interviews and observations. The researcher served as the main instrument, supported by interview guidelines, observation notes, and documentation records.

The data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis through the stages of data organization, data reduction, coding, theme identification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. To strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings, source and technique triangulation were conducted by comparing information from the teacher, principal, and students as well as data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation. Ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining permission from the school, explaining the purpose of the study to participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting the confidentiality and dignity of all participants, especially because fatherlessness is a sensitive personal issue.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation at SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski and interprets them in relation to previous research. To protect confidentiality, the eight fatherless students are identified as I1 to I8, the Catholic Religious Education teacher as I9, and the school principal as I10. The analysis is organized into two themes: (1) forms of social support provided by the Catholic Religious Education teacher and (2) conditions experienced by fatherless students in the school context.

1. Social Support Provided by the Catholic Religious Education Teacher

The findings indicate that the Catholic Religious Education teacher provided four interrelated forms of social support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. These forms correspond to the classic social-support framework that distinguishes emotional concern, practical assistance, information or guidance, and positive evaluation (House, 1981). In the present study, however, the four forms did not appear as isolated interventions; they operated as an integrated pattern of everyday accompaniment in which relational trust enabled students to receive academic, moral, and motivational support.

Emotional support was the form most consistently described by the student informants. I1 stated that the teacher was willing to listen when students wanted to share personal problems and often gave attention after the learning process. I2 and I3 similarly emphasized greetings, equal treatment, and help without discrimination as practices that created a comfortable classroom atmosphere. These accounts show that emotional support was communicated through ordinary relational gestures approaching, listening, greeting, and showing concern rather than only through formal counseling.

Trust was central to this support. I4, I5, and I6 explained that they trusted the teacher because she kept promises, maintained confidentiality, and was present when help was needed. I9 confirmed that she approached students gradually through casual conversation and protected

the confidentiality of their stories. I10 likewise described the teacher as creating a warm, non-rigid atmosphere and accepting students without comparing them with others. Thus, students appeared more willing to disclose difficult experiences after they perceived the teacher as a safe and consistent adult.

This pattern is significant because emotional support establishes relational safety before other forms of assistance can be accepted. A meta-analysis found a positive association between teacher support and school engagement, with emotional support showing a particularly strong relationship with students engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). A systematic review in secondary-school settings similarly found that caring and higher-quality teacher-student relationships were generally associated with lower anxiety, while also cautioning that much of the available evidence is correlational (Salter et al., 2025). These studies help explain why confidentiality, non-judgment, and attentive listening were especially meaningful for the fatherless participants. The present finding does not imply that the teacher replaces an absent father; rather, the teacher provides a stable school-based relationship that can reduce isolation and make subsequent guidance more acceptable. This interpretation is also consistent with research showing that perceived teacher support contributes to students' study engagement (Rautanen et al., 2021).

The second form was instrumental support, expressed primarily through concrete academic assistance. I2 explained that when students did not understand the material, the teacher repeated explanations in simpler language and provided additional time after class. I5 stated that the teacher guided students step by step without directly giving answers, while I7 reported receiving additional references and enrichment materials. I4 noted that these materials helped students catch up with missed lessons, and I9 confirmed that she monitored assignments and assisted students gradually when they experienced learning difficulties.

These practices indicate that instrumental support was not limited to providing material resources. It also involved scaffolding, additional time, monitoring, and structured help that enabled students to continue working rather than disengage from academic tasks. The teacher's decision to guide students without immediately supplying answers was particularly relevant because it combined support with opportunities for independent effort.

The instrumental findings are consistent with evidence that supportive teacher relationships are associated with student learning and engagement (Rautanen et al., 2021; Thijssen et al., 2022). Meta-analytic evidence further shows that teacher support is positively related to behavioral, emotional, and cognitive school engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). In the present study, instrumental support appears to function as a practical bridge between emotional difficulty and continued participation in learning: once students felt that the teacher would assist rather than judge them, they were more willing to ask for clarification, complete assignments, and try again. This interpretation is important because the qualitative data do not establish that teacher support directly causes higher achievement; they show how concrete assistance was experienced by participants as a resource for sustaining effort and academic confidence.

The third form was informational support. I1 explained that the teacher related advice to everyday experiences and encouraged students to face problems calmly, avoid impulsive reactions, pray, and think before making decisions. I3 stated that the teacher repeatedly emphasized honesty, patience, and respect, while I2 recalled being encouraged to consider the consequences of actions and avoid decisions that could harm others. In this sense, information was not simply the transmission of facts but guidance for interpreting problems and choosing responses.

Informational support was also closely connected to faith reflection. I5 stated that the teacher helped students reflect on life experiences through Christian values such as patience, forgiveness, and trust in God. I6 similarly described being encouraged to learn from difficult experiences rather than merely endure them. I9 confirmed that decision-making guidance was linked to love, forgiveness, and patience, and I10 noted that reflective discussion was frequently used to help students understand personal problems through Christian values.

These findings distinguish informational support from instrumental assistance: its central function was meaning-making, moral reasoning, and reflective decision-making. Catholic educational guidance emphasizes integral formation and accompaniment in which students are supported in understanding themselves, relating responsibly to others, and making life choices within a culture of dialogue (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). Research on Catholic Religious Education in Indonesia likewise underlines the importance of holistic moral formation rather than cognitive assessment alone (Bawa Toron, 2025). In the present data, Christian reflection provided a language through which students could reinterpret difficult experiences and evaluate possible responses. This form of support should be understood as pastoral-educational guidance, not as a substitute for professional psychological treatment when students require clinical care.

The fourth form was appraisal support, expressed through praise, encouragement, appreciation, and recognition of effort. I1 stated that encouraging words made students feel noticed and more confident. I2 described receiving applause and verbal encouragement when students attempted to answer questions or present in class. I5 considered such appreciation emotionally meaningful when attention at home felt limited, while I6 stated that encouragement made it easier to try new activities and participate despite initial fear.

I9 explained that she deliberately praised even small efforts, such as the courage to answer a question, and I10 confirmed that this recognition could be especially meaningful for students who lacked affirmation at home. Analytically, appraisal support complements emotional support because acceptance alone does not necessarily strengthen students' sense of competence; students also need feedback that recognizes effort and progress. Social support and self-efficacy are closely linked to adolescent mental health and well-being (Cherewick et al., 2024), while teacher support is positively associated with school engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). In this study, praise was generally attached to effort, participation, and willingness to try rather than to comparison with peers. That pattern may help explain why appraisal was experienced as affirmation of personal worth and as encouragement to participate more actively.

2. Conditions Experienced by Fatherless Students

The findings also reveal four interrelated challenges experienced by the fatherless participants: emotional and psychological difficulty, problems in social adjustment, fluctuating academic motivation, and low self-confidence. These experiences are broadly consistent with research linking father absence to mental-health vulnerability, social adjustment difficulties, and challenges in self-acceptance (Culpin et al., 2022; Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021; Desinta et al., 2025). At the same time, the data varied across participants, indicating that fatherlessness should not be treated as producing a single or uniform outcome.

The first challenge concerned emotional and psychological difficulty. I5 described feeling less secure and becoming afraid to try new things because of worry about making mistakes or being perceived as incapable. I1 reported episodes of sadness or anger that were sometimes difficult to understand, and I6 similarly described moments when sadness or anger

emerged without an obvious immediate cause, leading to silence and the tendency to keep feelings private.

I9 observed comparable patterns at school: students experiencing problems sometimes became quieter than usual, more sensitive, and more withdrawn from peers. These accounts resonate with longitudinal evidence showing that father absence can be associated with less favorable trajectories of depressive symptoms, although the strength and timing of associations vary and cannot be generalized to every child (Culpin et al., 2022). Research on perceived father-love absence also emphasizes the psychological significance of paternal affection and involvement during adolescence (Xiang & Zhou, 2023). The present data therefore support a cautious interpretation: emotional vulnerability was visible among participants, but it should not be assumed to be an inevitable consequence of fatherlessness. The teacher's sensitivity mattered because distress was often communicated indirectly through silence, withdrawal, or reduced participation. This is consistent with evidence that caring teacher–student relationships can serve as a supportive school resource for adolescents experiencing anxiety or emotional strain (Salter et al., 2025).

The second challenge was difficulty in social adjustment and relationship formation. I1 described awkwardness when initiating conversations with peers. I5 explained that trusting others was difficult because of fear that personal stories would not be understood or might be misinterpreted. I8 reported that some students were mostly silent during learning activities and tended to be alone during breaks, while I6 noted that group work required more time before trust and comfort developed.

These findings suggest that social withdrawal among the participants was connected less to a lack of desire for relationships than to uncertainty, mistrust, and the need for relational safety. Previous Indonesian research has linked fatherlessness with social adjustment difficulties among adolescents (Dasalinda & Karneli, 2021), and another study reported an association between father absence and adolescent social behavior (Alfifah et al., 2025). Importantly, I9 observed that interaction gradually improved when students became accustomed to a supportive environment. This does not establish that withdrawal will always diminish, but it suggests that its expression may be responsive to context. That interpretation is consistent with evidence that school connectedness can act as a protective resource for adolescent mental health and social functioning (Raniti et al., 2022).

The third challenge was fluctuating academic motivation and learning engagement. I1 stated that motivation changed depending on personal conditions such as emotional burden or fatigue. I4 reported continuing to study but sometimes losing focus because of personal and peer influences. I5 linked low motivation with doubts about personal ability, while I6 described daydreaming, difficulty following explanations, and postponing assignments because it was difficult to know where to begin.

I9 confirmed that some students submitted assignments late, started work only after reminders, and rarely participated in class discussions, although engagement improved when guidance and attention were provided consistently. These patterns indicate that the academic difficulty reported in this study was intertwined with emotional condition and self-confidence rather than being purely cognitive. Perceived teacher support is positively associated with study engagement (Rautanen et al., 2021), and teacher relationship skills have been linked with student learning (Thijssen et al., 2022). Meta-analytic evidence also supports a positive association between teacher support and multiple dimensions of school engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). Accordingly, the present findings are best read as showing how

participants experienced consistent guidance as a resource for re-engagement, not as proof that teacher support alone determines academic outcomes.

The fourth challenge was low self-confidence and a disturbed self-concept. I1 explained that self-doubt emerged when students perceived their abilities as lower than those of peers, which reduced their courage to participate. I5 stated that students sometimes felt incapable before trying and compared themselves with more active classmates. I6 reported reluctance to express opinions because of a belief that their ideas were unimportant and described a tendency to wait for instructions in group work rather than taking initiative. Social withdrawal was also related to this low self-confidence. I8 preferred to spend more time alone, I2 described needing personal space during breaks to feel calmer, and I10 confirmed that some students withdrew from the social environment. Research with fatherless adolescents in Indonesia shows that self-acceptance can fluctuate and can be strengthened through coping strategies and relational support (Desinta et al., 2025). Broader adolescent research also identifies social support and self-efficacy as linked resources for mental health and well-being (Cherewick et al., 2024). These studies help interpret why emotional and appraisal support were complementary in the present findings: acceptance created safety, while specific recognition of effort gave students evidence that they were capable of contributing.

Taken together, the pattern emerging from the data suggests a reciprocal sequence among the four support forms rather than four separate services. Emotional support established trust; instrumental and informational support became more usable once students felt safe enough to ask for help; and appraisal support reinforced students' willingness to participate and try again. This pattern extends the categorical social-support framework (House, 1981) by showing how the categories can operate relationally in a school context. It is also compatible with contemporary evidence that teacher support is associated with students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Vargas-Madriz et al., 2024). The contribution of the present qualitative study lies in showing the mechanisms as experienced by fatherless students: listening and confidentiality were not merely pleasant interpersonal behaviors, but conditions that enabled academic help, moral guidance, and affirmation to be received.

Overall, the Catholic Religious Education teacher functioned not only as a subject teacher but also as a pastoral companion and school-based source of social support. This interpretation is consistent with the Catholic understanding of the school as an educating community in which dialogue, accompaniment, and integral human formation are shared responsibilities (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2022). The findings nevertheless indicate boundaries to this role. A teacher can listen, guide, affirm, and recognize signs of vulnerability, but should not be positioned as a replacement for an absent parent or as a substitute for professional counseling. Practically, pastoral support is likely to be strongest when the Catholic Religious Education teacher collaborates with the principal, homeroom teachers, counselors, families, and other school support systems while maintaining confidentiality and appropriate referral pathways.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Catholic Religious Education teacher support for fatherless students at SMA Swasta RK Deli Murni Diski is expressed through four integrated forms: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal support. Emotional support especially listening, empathy, confidentiality, and non-judgment formed the relational foundation that allowed students to accept other forms of assistance. Instrumental support addressed concrete learning difficulties, informational support helped students interpret problems and make

decisions through Christian values, and appraisal support affirmed effort and strengthened confidence. The fatherless participants also described emotional insecurity, social withdrawal, fluctuating learning motivation, and low self-confidence. Taken together, these findings position the Catholic Religious Education teacher as both an educator and a pastoral companion whose consistent presence can support students sense of acceptance, agency, and engagement; however, the qualitative design supports contextual interpretation rather than causal claims.

This study is limited by its single school setting, small purposively selected sample consisting of one Catholic Religious Education teacher, one principal, and eight fatherless students, and reliance on qualitative accounts, observation, and documentation; therefore, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. Future research should involve multiple Catholic and non-Catholic schools, more diverse participants, and additional perspectives from parents, homeroom teachers, counselors, and peers. Mixed-method or longitudinal designs could further examine how different forms of teacher support relate to students motional well-being, social adjustment, and learning engagement over time. For practice, schools are encouraged to strengthen teacher capacity in relational and pastoral accompaniment, confidentiality, early identification of student vulnerability, referral procedures, and collaboration with counseling and family support systems.

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