

When widows speak through self disclosure and social support in #SaveJanda community

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ABSTRACT

Background: Interpersonal communication is central to how individuals navigate major life transitions. For widows in patriarchal societies, communication serves as a crucial means for managing grief, navigating shifts in identity, and pursuing emotional connection. In widow-support communities, processes such as trust-building, relational closeness, and self-disclosure shape how members share experiences and obtain social support. However, little is known about how self-disclosure unfolds among widows in peer-based community settings in Indonesia. **Purpose:** This study investigates the self-disclosure practices of widows within the #SaveJanda community as an interpersonal communication strategy for obtaining social support. **Methods:** Using a qualitative interpretive paradigm, this study adopted Robert E. Stake's case study approach. The participants were five widows who were actively involved in the community and were selected through purposive sampling. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and were analyzed thematically. **Results:** The findings reveal that widows progress through stages of interpersonal communication consistent with Social Penetration Theory (SPT). Feelings of safety, mutual empathy, and shared life experiences facilitate deeper self-disclosure, enabling participants to develop closeness and trust. These communicative processes facilitate the acquisition of emotional, informational, and practical support. **Conclusion:** Self-disclosure is a key interpersonal strategy for widows to obtain emotional and social support and to establish meaningful connections within the community. **Implications:** Theoretically, this research strengthens the application of SPT. Practically, it highlights the importance of creating emotionally safe environments that encourage sharing and support among widows.

Keywords: #SaveJanda community; interpersonal communication; self-disclosure; social support; widows

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a crucial element of marital life, contributing to intimacy, trust, and relational harmony between partners. In marriage, partners depend on communication to negotiate roles, manage conflicts, express emotions, and foster mutual understanding (Sitanggang, 2023). Self-disclosure is an essential component of the communicative process, which facilitates the sharing of personal feelings, experiences, and expectations between partners. According to Khairifa (2019), self-disclosure among couples fosters emotional support and enhances trust, both of which are vital for maintaining long-term relationship satisfaction. Despite the essential role of communication in maintaining marital stability, marriage is not free from dissolution. Marriages can end with divorce or death, the latter presenting distinct implications. In Indonesian legal terminology, the dissolution of marriage resulting from the death of one spouse is termed *cerai mati* (Pratiwi, 2024).

Divorce entails the dissolution of a marriage and may require renegotiating family roles. On the other hand, “*cerai mati*” means that one spouse has died, leaving the other spouse a widow or widower. This social identity means not only grief but also dealing with a lot of social shame and financial weakness. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2022), widowhood is a significant demographic phenomenon in Indonesia. The number of widows due to spousal death far

exceeds that of widowers, with 10.3 million women compared to 2.9 million men. This disparity shows gendered life expectancy, variations in marriage age, and cultural norms that facilitate men’s remarriage more easily than women’s. This also suggests that widowhood is not a marginal condition but a structural social reality that unjustly affects women. Women who lose their spouses face many challenges, beginning with considerable emotional distress that hinders daily functioning, and extending to increased caregiving responsibilities and financial burdens, especially in situations where women’s economic opportunities are limited (Anjarwati et al., 2022). Psychological strains may escalate to severe depression or, in extreme cases, result in suicidal ideation (Nadhiroh, 2023; Fauzie, 2022). Assistance from adult offspring can ease some of the challenges, but even in old age, widowhood continues to have a lasting impact on quality of life (Zhu et al., 2024). Global evidence indicates that widowed individuals show high rates of common mental disorders and experience prolonged loneliness and social isolation, which requires continuous psychosocial support (Kristiansen et al., 2019; (Freak-Poli et al., 2025); Niino et al., 2025).

Widowhood has significant social issues in addition to these psychological effects, particularly in patriarchal settings where gender norms influence women’s status and identity. Society frequently stigmatizes widows with damaging stereotypes and treats them harshly. However, unmarried women,

sometimes known as “spinster”, also bear social labels, illustrating how cultural labeling restricts women’s psychological health and autonomy (CNN, 2023; Salsabila & Budhi, 2024). Maylon & Primadini (2025) argue that unmarried women are portrayed through patriarchal discourse as failing to meet socially prescribed gender roles. This emphasizes the stigmatization processes that affect different categories of womanhood. Stereotypes appear in both subtle and overt expressions of social exclusion. Widows often face exclusion from community events, unsolicited sympathy, and societal pressure to remarry promptly to restore social acceptability. Individuals choosing to remarry may face criticism or be perceived as a potential threat to existing marriages (Kamunyu & Makena, 2020). The stigma of widowhood is reinforced by institutional structures, such as workplace discrimination, wage gaps, and biased media portrayals, which often highlight widows’ vulnerability instead of their resilience and agency (GoodStats, 2024; Beribe, 2023). In Indonesia, where patriarchal values run deep, widows often bear a heavier psychosocial and economic burden than widowers. Empirical research indicates that widows are more prone than widowers to face financial instability, workplace discrimination, and restricted access to secure employment. This phenomenon shows the impact of patriarchal constructs and standards of femininity on women’s lives, thereby continuing gender inequality (Rahmatilah et al., 2024; Pasinringi, 2022).

Research in communication reveals that women in male-dominated settings must consistently navigate gendered expectations that position them as “out of place,” thus reinforcing structural inequalities (Bima & Primadini, 2023).

Cultural norms and individual psychological characteristics influence self-disclosure, according to cross-cultural studies in interpersonal communication. In individualistic societies such as the United States and Western Europe, people are more likely to share their feelings openly and directly because independence and emotional expression are important cultural values (Vignoles et al., 2016). In contrast, collectivist cultures, including most Asian societies, prioritize relational harmony, group norms, and face-saving, which makes individuals more cautious in revealing personal vulnerabilities (Merkin, 2017). In patriarchal collectivist societies, widows may experience an even stronger pressure to hinder disclosure due to gendered expectations and stigma surrounding womanhood and family roles (Klaus, 2021). The cross-cultural variations highlight the importance of understanding how widows in Indonesia, as members of a collectivist and patriarchal society, engage in the process of self-disclosure within supportive communities.

Grief theories offer a psychological framework for comprehending what it’s like to lose a partner. The five stages of mourning include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, according to the Kübler-Ross

model, one of the most well-known frameworks (Qin et al., 2019). However, these phases do not develop linearly and may overlap or recur. In patriarchal societies, widows experience grief as an emotional process that is further complicated by cultural expectations to rapidly “move on,” despite facing limited opportunities for life reconstruction. Bereavement encompasses not only psychological suffering but also the need for identity reconstruction. Widows frequently indicate that their designation as “widows” predominates their self-definition, eclipsing personal accomplishments and individual identities (Longoria, 2022). The interplay of grief, stigma, and identity reconstruction causes a distinct psychosocial burden. This shows the necessity for supportive environments that enable widows to heal, share, and regain dignity free from judgment.

Digital platforms and online communities have recently become significant avenues for widows to pursue solidarity and empowerment. Feminist scholars highlight that digital media offer marginalized groups, such as widows and single mothers, new ways to challenge cultural stereotypes, communicate narratives, and reclaim agency (Flores et al., 2020; Willem & Tortajada, 2021). In Indonesia, organizations like Single Moms Indonesia and #SaveJanda serve as essential grassroots support systems. Single Moms Indonesia, founded in 2014, has grown to more than 33.000 members across 22 chapters worldwide. The organization provides peer support, advocacy, and online webinars

designed to empower single mothers and widows (Single Moms Indonesia, 2024).

Additionally, #SaveJanda, established in 2016, has created a model grounded in three key components: addressing stigma, delivering psychological support, and facilitating entrepreneurship training (Jaksana, 2023). These combined with digital feminism in Indonesia, which shows the transformative impact of online solidarity. Global studies similarly show that online bereavement interventions can reduce grief intensity, stress, and depressive symptoms (Finucane et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2024). They also demonstrate that social media communication mediates the association between widowhood and depressive symptoms. Moreover, Silva et al. (2023) indicate that internet use can provide opportunities for support and connection, thereby reducing some of the damaging consequences of widowhood for older individuals' quality of life.

In both online and offline communities, self-disclosure is an essential means of communication. Widows share their personal stories, challenges, and aspirations to seek empathy, validation, and effective strategies for coping with loss (Richardson, 2016; Yani et al., 2021). Self-disclosure has been linked to improved self-acceptance, enhanced coping capacity, and strengthened social bonds (Bendor et al., 2024; Moran et al., 2020). Quantitative evidence indicates that social support mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and psychological outcomes, partially explaining

how disclosure reduces demoralization among vulnerable groups (Liu et al., 2024). For widows, self-disclosure functions as an avenue to externalize grief, reduce feelings of isolation, and create connections with peers who understand their experiences. Nevertheless, self-disclosure is not without risks: in unsympathetic environments, disclosure may invite negative feedback, gossip, or judgment, thereby worsening stigma rather than easing it (Surkan et al., 2015). Understanding how widows navigate these dilemmas within support communities is critical for designing spaces that are both safe and empowering.

The Social Penetration Theory (SPT), formulated by Altman and Taylor, offers a significant framework for examining self-disclosure dynamics in interpersonal relationships. Self-disclosure is described as a gradual, layered process that progresses from superficial information to more profound, more intimate revelations (West & Turner, 2018). This progression enhances intimacy, trust, and interpersonal connections. The theory consists of four stages of disclosure: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. Each stage entails increasingly complex forms of communication, with trust as a need for progression. The rate and extent of disclosure are shaped by various factors, including cultural norms, gender expectations, audience trustworthiness, topic sensitivity, and the communication medium (DeVito, 2022). Personality traits and self-esteem, along with

other individual differences, significantly affect an individual's tendency to disclose personal experiences, especially in mediated communication (Adnan & Hidayati, 2018). For widows in marginalized social positions, building trust within support communities is a crucial need for increased disclosure and, consequently, for receiving meaningful social support.

Research is beginning to highlight the connection between self-disclosure, social support, and the psychological adaptation of widows. Richardson (2016) discovered that self-disclosure among peers caused post-traumatic growth in widows. Mayer et al. (2022) stated that disclosure after suicide loss can have both helpful and harmful effects, depending on how they receive other responses. Disclosure within empathetic networks promoted recovery, whereas in unsympathetic networks, it increased trauma. Huisman & Lemke (2022) highlighted that empathetic interpersonal communication, rooted in disclosure, facilitated widows in obtaining both practical and emotional support. Studies across diverse fields reinforce this pattern. For instance, Wilson-Menzfeld et al. (2024), about "Military Widows' Experiences of Social Isolation, Loneliness and Unmet Social Needs," also show that widows seek support through social interaction with fellow widows. Like these studies, Hilliker (2016) also found that grief support groups created safe spaces for widows to disclose their experiences, reconstruct their identities, and cope with

their loss. Yonanda et al. (2022) reported that sharing grief with family, friends, and God promoted post-traumatic growth. Added by Bartone et al. (2019), online spaces enhanced this phenomenon: sharing experiences in virtual grief communities promoted resilience, facilitated meaning-making, and instilled hope. Wilder (2016) also observed that interpersonal sharing among widows played a crucial role in their adaptation and recovery.

Furthermore, several studies highlight the complex role of disclosure at the intersection of spirituality and social support. Arfika & Aprilia (2024) demonstrated that social support, when coupled with shared spiritual practices like prayer and community worship, significantly improved the happiness and resilience of elderly widows. Anjani (2019) stated that widows who expressed their grief through prayer, viewed as self-disclosure to God, achieved inner peace and enhanced coping strength. Surkan et al. (2015) noted that disclosure may lead to harassment and social ostracization for women, which shows its dual risks. These studies indicate that disclosure is crucial in the adjustment of widows, with its outcomes dependent on the surrounding social and cultural environment.

Despite this body of research, significant gaps remain. Existing studies primarily describe self-disclosure through psychological frameworks. They also encompass therapeutic and intrapersonal roles, including emotional regulation, resilience, and coping mechanisms. Although beneficial, these approaches neglect

the communicative aspects of disclosure as a relational and social phenomenon. Communication studies consider disclosure important to the development of interpersonal closeness, mutual trust, and effective relational dynamics (DeVito, 2022). Self-disclosure should be understood as both an intrapersonal coping mechanism and a communicative act influenced by cultural, interpersonal, and community dynamics. In Indonesia, the growth of digital widow support communities such as #SaveJanda highlights a significant gap in communication-focused research.

This study is time-sensitive due to the increasing dependence on digital support communities among widows in collectivist and patriarchal societies, where offline disclosure is socially limited. While many studies worldwide have examined the importance of interpersonal communication in emotional recovery, there remains a lack of understanding about how widows in Indonesia navigate trust, stigma, and relational boundaries during self-disclosure to peers. Therefore, this study aims to examine the stages, dynamics, and determinants of self-disclosure among widows in the #SaveJanda community by applying the SPT. Understanding these processes is crucial for designing culturally sensitive support mechanisms that empower widows and reduce the barriers created by patriarchal norms.

This study addresses a notable gap in literature. Existing research confirms that widows benefit from social support and that

disclosure serves as a pathway to such support. The process of disclosure in community settings remains underexplored. How do widows in #SaveJanda navigate the stages of self-disclosure? What factors affect the willingness to share personal experiences? What is the role of disclosure in fostering trust and resilience within the community? The study addresses these questions, which, it is hoped, contribute to both theoretical and practical domains: it enhances communication scholarship by applying SPT to widowhood. It offers practical guidance for developing support interventions that address the communicative needs of widows.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that individuals construct meanings based on their life experiences, social interactions, and cultural. Meaning is therefore subjective, varied, and shaped by personal interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.46). Within this paradigm, the voices of the widows were prioritized to understand how they make sense of grief, stigma, and self-disclosure within their support community.

A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to explore complex social phenomena and to understand participants' subjective meanings through inductive analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 278). This study adopted an instrumental

case study design, as described by Creswell & Poth (2018, p. 201), where the case is examined to gain broader insight into how interpersonal openness supports emotional healing and social support.

The case in this study is defined as the interpersonal self-disclosure processes occurring among widows within the #SaveJanda community, a digital widow-support environment. Interactions with participants occurred primarily via digital platforms, such as WhatsApp groups and Zoom meetings, and the data collection period was from April to May 2025. This bounded system allows the phenomenon to be examined within its natural communication, where widows regularly share experiences, negotiate trust, and seek peer support.

The investigation was conducted within the #SaveJanda community, a nationwide support network for widows based in Indonesia. The community operates mainly through digital platforms, making the research setting inherently online. Participants were in different geographical regions, with some residing in the Greater Jakarta Area (Jabodetabek) and others distributed throughout Indonesia. All interviews were conducted via Zoom, reflecting the community's authentic communication environment and enabling equitable participation regardless of geographical location. This online environment is essential to the case, as it provides a platform for individuals to build relationships, establish trust, and engage in self-

disclosure.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, enabling the researchers to intentionally identify widows who met specific criteria (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The inclusion criteria were widowhood, active membership in the #SaveJanda community, and experience with interpersonal self-disclosure with other members. The sample comprised widows who voluntarily consented to participate and signed informed consent forms before the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data was collected through two primary methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018), with interviews as the principal data source through which participants freely articulated their experiences. The questions were designed to be open-ended and adaptable to examine trust-building, stages of disclosure, communication patterns, and perceived social support. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted individually via Zoom. Secondary data were obtained from journal articles, books, reports, and publicly available information on the #SaveJanda community. For triangulation, documentation verified participants' narratives and situated the community's communication. Collecting data from multiple sources enhances the case study's credibility and aligns with Stake's recommendation to reflect the complexity of the bounded system.

Data analysis followed the three phases of case study analysis adapted from Stake

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interview transcripts were broken down into meaningful units and assigned initial codes. The codes indicated patterns of concepts, including trust-building, disclosure boundaries, emotional support, and communication dynamics. Participants' codes were systematically compared to detect both similarities and differences. Interviews were combined with documentation sources to develop a clear understanding of how widows approach self-disclosure within the community. The results were systematically categorized into key themes that illustrated the stages of disclosure, the factors affecting openness, the emotional consequences, and the online community's contribution to supporting widows. The interpretation draws on theoretical frameworks, participant perspectives, and sociocultural factors.

This methodological approach gave a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the self-disclosure experiences of widows within the #SaveJanda community. The case study approach enabled the researchers to examine the communicative dynamics of a specific support environment. It revealed how disclosure fosters trust, emotional recovery, and social connection among members.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initial Stage of Joining the Community: Before presenting the research data, it is essential to describe the characteristics of the study participants. All five participants were

Table 1 Research Subjects

No	Pseudonym	Age	Status
1	S	58	Widow in #SaveJanda
2	M	35	Widow in #SaveJanda
3	F.W.	33	Widow in #SaveJanda
4	J	69	Widow in #SaveJanda
5	Suka	57	Widow in #SaveJanda

Source: Research Results, 2025

widows and active members of the #SaveJanda community, which comprises individuals of diverse ages, backgrounds, and experiences. Their ages ranged from early to late adulthood (33-69 years). Despite sharing the same status as widows, each participant brought distinct emotional histories, levels of resilience, and personal motivations for joining the community. These individual differences contributed to variations in how they navigated interpersonal communication and adapted to the social environment of #SaveJanda.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the research participants. At the initial stage of joining the #SaveJanda community, participants exhibited varied emotional responses, reflecting their backgrounds and readiness to engage with a new environment. S and J both felt awkward and chose to observe the characteristics of other members before opening up. S explained, "At first, I just observed, you know... So, I took a while." J also shared, "Yeah, it's normal, right? When you join any community, you feel awkward at first."

In contrast, M expressed feeling happy and

comfortable due to the positive atmosphere: "It feels great to find a community that's on the same wavelength and very positive." F.W. initially felt afraid because of the difference in speaking style between herself, as someone from a rural area, and the other members, who were mainly from Jakarta. Meanwhile, Suka was surprised by the variety of problems faced by other widows: "Yeah, I was a bit surprised too; there are so many life problems, you know?"

Trust and Limited Openness at the Beginning. Four out of five participants, M, F.W., J, and Suka, stated that they had been open from the start about their widowhood status, though this openness was limited to basic information. M mentioned, "Just the basics. They simply understood that the divorce resulted from domestic violence." F.W. admitted to sharing only her basic identity, such as age, number of children, and the reason for becoming a widow. J and Suka took a similar approach, only sharing surface-level aspects of their experiences.

On the other hand, S was not immediately open because she felt uncomfortable sharing personal information in a public forum and had

not yet built trust with other members: “I don’t trust anyone... If I don’t know them yet... only, then can I feel comfortable.” This highlights the importance of trust in the self-disclosure process within an online community.

Trust emerged as the primary determinant of participants’ initial openness. Although some participants, such as M, F.W., and Suka, were open from the start, their openness remained limited. They admitted to withholding more profound information because they did not know the other members personally. F.W. revealed, “I don’t know who the other members are.”

Similarly, J remained cautious because she was unsure whether other members would accept her openness. Suka also chose to wait until she felt comfortable: “Because I also have to consider the situation, I tend to be more careful.” These findings emphasize that trust and interpersonal closeness are crucial in moving from superficial to deeper levels of disclosure, as aligned in a study on adolescents’ self-disclosure patterns that applied SPT (Sari & Wirman, 2022).

Factors Facilitating Early Openness: Unlike the other participants, M reported experiencing no barriers to openness because she immediately perceived the #SaveJanda community as a safe and supportive environment. She shared, “Because in our community, everyone respects each other... so it’s admirable.” Her healing from past trauma and her desire to grow as a mother further motivated her to disclose her experiences: “I would rather not stay buried

in sadness for too long... because I’m also a mother.” This illustrates how emotional safety, empathy, and shared identity can accelerate movement from the orientation stage to the exploration affective exchange stage of self-disclosure (West & Turner, 2018). Consistent with prior studies, supportive peer environments can reduce perceived interpersonal risk and encourage more rapid openness among widows (Richardson, 2016; Huisman & Lemke, 2022).

Gradual Development of Openness: For most participants, openness developed gradually, forming a clear pattern across the interviews. S and J described needing several encounters to observe others, evaluate trustworthiness, and gain confidence before sharing more profound experiences. As S explained, “Four, five meetings... After getting to know some of the members...,” while J expressed similar hesitation. Their cautious approach reflects the orientation stage of SPT, where individuals communicate carefully and avoid deep disclosure until relational safety is established (West & Turner, 2018).

F.W. reported that she required two to three months to reach a level of comfort in which individuals begin to share personal thoughts and feelings selectively. This suggests a gradual progression from the orientation phase to the exploratory affective exchange stage. M exhibited a distinct approach: her open personality facilitated a more rapid progression, whereas Suka selectively revealed information, depending on the personal relevance of the topics

discussed. The observed variations indicate that interpersonal disclosure is influenced by internal factors, including confidence, emotional intelligence, and personality traits (Darmawan et al., 2019), as well as external factors such as perceived empathy and shared experiences within digital communities (Finucane et al., 2025). The findings reveal a systematic progression that involves self-disclosure, careful observation, selective sharing, trust development, and more profound emotional disclosure. This pattern corresponds with the theoretical stages outlined in SPT and empirical research on disclosure within online support groups.

From Group Chats to Emotional Closeness: Openness also increased as interactions shifted from group chats to dyadic exchanges and offline meetings. Participants identified the transition to private messages as the point when “emotional closeness began to form.” M and F.W. reported that group chats led to intense private conversations in which bonds developed. S reported feeling close to one member after they met during community activities. J felt chemistry after discovering similarities in age and life experiences. Suka felt comfortable with one member because they had known each other beforehand in a kite-flying group. These examples indicate that openness was fostered through shared experiences and consistent communication.

Expansion of Topics and Communication Intensity: The increase in the number of trusted

members indicated greater openness. S, M, and F.W. each identified three trusted members, J identified two, and Suka identified one. The discussions encompassed a range of subjects, including widowhood, employment, family dynamics, daily routines, and societal concerns. M presented humorous content and addressed women’s issues, whereas J frequently discussed family and financial challenges. The intensity of communication varied; it occurred daily for F.W. and weekly for J. The pattern indicates that self-disclosure advanced in conjunction with relational intimacy.

Boundaries and Conditions for Deeper Openness: Even with greater transparency, participants-maintained limits regarding deeply personal issues. S, J, and F.W. acknowledged that they would provide additional details only upon direct questioning. S stated, “I tend to be reserved unless prompted.” The presence of security and the absence of judgment were influential factors in fostering openness. M reported feeling safe in environments free of judgment. In contrast, F.W. reported feeling secure in the company of peers of similar age and background. The community developed a framework for mutual understanding to address infrequent conflicts, particularly those between F.W. and Suka.

Changing Levels of Closeness: Over time, all participants reported changes in their closeness with other members. S felt closest to Tiara and Zoe, though her relationship with Tiara was deeper: “With Tiara, yes. But with Zoe, I’m

closer, but not as close as Tiara...” M emphasized consistent communication and support as key to closeness: “Because we support each other, we’re on the same page, and we always give positive responses...” F.W. described the group as a “new family,” while J still set boundaries: “I’m someone who always sets limits... I can’t fully trust someone 100%...”. Similarly, Suka stated that she maintains positive relationships without intending to get too close: “I never want to get too close either. But, you know, it’s just normal...”

Deepening Openness for Some Participants: Closeness also influenced self-disclosure. S, J, and Suka acknowledged that although their openness increased, they continued to set boundaries. S explained, “Halfway, not too deep... more than a little...” S clarifies, “It’s not superficial”. J limited her openness to emotions such as loneliness. Suka only shared general experiences: “I tend not to want to be too open... just that. Difficulties... the environment like that...” Their statements suggest a rise in trust, even though they remained cautious.

In contrast, M and F.W. achieved much deeper openness. M compared widowhood to death and divorce: “It feels completely different... My husband left a good impression... It feels different when I move on from my previous partner.” F.W. even revealed that she has become very open to the point where her community friends know the most private aspects of her life: “I’m completely transparent, even about the deepest things... they know my most

secret matters.” This evidence demonstrates that the #SaveJanda community provides a safe and supportive space for its members to build closeness and emotional openness gradually.

Positive Impacts of Openness: The participants demonstrated that openness yielded both emotional and practical benefits. One major impact was moral support. S stated, “Yes, we encourage each other, too. We give support, you know. No one judges or brings others down; the friends in the community are supportive.” F.W. expressed a similar sentiment, mentioning a sense of emotional solidarity: “Yes, they support each other, strengthen one another, absolutely.” Undoubtedly, they pray for one another, indicating a shared sentiment. One factor that strengthens empathy in this community is a sense of shared destiny, which fosters openness and understanding.

In addition to moral support, most participants receive concrete benefits, such as information and material assistance. For example, S received job information and business connections, as well as material aid in the form of treats from community friends. M was also supported to participate in a book anthology project and a podcast as a form of self-actualization. She stated, “Having the opportunity to participate in the creation of a book anthology serves as an example of self-healing.” F.W. also felt similar benefits: “If it’s paid, they’re willing to cover the costs... they often provide information... for the personal development of a widow.” J and Suka received

only moral support and information because they did not share their personal difficulties in depth; as Suka explained, “I never talk about my difficulties, no matter how difficult they are.”

Opening up also had psychological effects, including reflection and increased self-awareness. M realized many life lessons from the loss process, including the importance of being prepared to face life’s uncertainties. “The process of maturing was truly forged in the separation from my partner... realizing that we shouldn’t be too attached to anything”. F.W. discovered unexpected potential within herself: “It turns out I can write; it turns out I can start a business”. All participants reported feeling more relieved after sharing, although some, such as S and J, occasionally experienced regret when their openness was perceived as excessive. Everyone expressed positive hopes that their stories could provide strength, understanding, and lessons for other members. As S stated, “Yes, I hope that what I share can give strength to other widows.”

The Process of Change in Self-Disclosure Among Members of the #SaveJanda Community: The SPT comprises four stages through which individuals deepen interpersonal interactions. The four stages are orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. But not every relationship goes through all four stages. During these phases, relationships grow closer, and people share more about themselves (West

& Turner, 2018).

During the orientation stage, four participants reported that they had disclosed the cause of their widowhood, but only superficially. S was the only one who hadn’t said anything because she couldn’t talk about it in the community’s WhatsApp group. They didn’t want to share personal stories because they did not yet know the other group members well enough, which also limited what they disclosed. S, F.W., J, and Suka all went through this. This technique aligns with Altman and Taylor’s account of the orientation stage, in which people are careful in how they talk to one another, leading to shallow self-disclosure. This is because the communicators don’t trust each other (West & Turner, 2018). Riyadi et al. (2025) also found that this strategy was effective for examining how college students formed friendships with their roommates. People frequently discuss broad stuff, such as introductions, during the orientation stage. This phase is crucial for creating a favorable first impression, gaining people’s trust, and making them feel comfortable before continuing.

On the other hand, M, who is naturally more open, felt comfortable disclosing herself due to her healed trauma, a desire for growth, and her responsibilities as a mother. M also mentioned that the #SaveJanda community was created as a support system comprising people with similar frequencies or experiences, which made her feel safe to open up. This aligns with the research by Alexandrina et al. (2021), which

stated that communities serve as communication platforms and sources of support, reducing members' hesitation to share their difficulties.

After spending time in the community, all participants reported increased self-disclosure during the exploratory affective interaction stage. Everyone in the group got to know some members of the community very well. S and J said that it took them a few meetings to get to know each other and feel comfortable sharing. F.W. also needed time to decide whether it was safe to share her personal stories with people around her. They remained careful about what they shared, but they began to discuss their thoughts and problems as widows more openly. They also stated that their initial conversations focused on general or societal issues related to widowhood. This aligns with Altman and Taylor's idea that people begin to open up more at this stage, but not entirely. There are still limits on communication, but conversations become more open and trusting, which leads people to share more about themselves (West & Turner, 2018).

Participants also explained that their comfort with self-disclosure was influenced by the characteristics of other members. S and F.W. trusted their friends not to gossip. S noted that her friend exhibited friendliness and a willingness to assist, whereas F.W. experienced a sense of understanding from their everyday experiences. Over time, M experienced a sense of security as her friend reacted positively to her stories; J grew trust and rapport following

multiple encounters, and Suka found comfort in their enduring familiarity and reciprocal transparency. This observation corresponds with DeVito (2022) self-disclosure concept, indicating that individuals reveal personal information based on the anticipated support, including assistance, affirmative feedback, and mutual sharing.

This stage is also consistent with Riyadi et al. (2025), who found that self-disclosure deepens and becomes more personal at this stage, driven by comfort developed through consistent interaction, positive responses, and shared experiences, as all participants experienced.

In the affective exchange stage, the frequency of communication between participants and certain members increased considerably. The range of topics also broadened beyond widowhood. Regarding widowhood topics, all participants shared more deeply. Participants M and F.W. had disclosed everything they had experienced. This aligns with the affective exchange stage in SPT, in which personal matters are disclosed more intensely (West & Turner, 2018). Participants S, J, and Suka had not fully opened up and primarily discussed their feelings of loneliness.

Riyadi et al. (2025) stated that in this stage, participants talk about sensitive life issues only after feeling safe and trusted. This trust and safety are fostered by frequent communication. It was also noted that self-disclosure in Indonesia's collectivist culture occurs gradually

and is based on complete trust, just like S, J, and Suka, who needed to build trust before opening up.

According to all participants, their self-disclosure was prompted by other members' disclosures and questions. Usually, other members needed to disclose themselves first before participants felt comfortable doing the same. Participants S and J admitted they wouldn't talk about personal matters unless prompted. This reflects the concept of self-disclosure, which must be reciprocal according to DeVito (2022). Richardson (2016) also emphasized that empathy and non-judgment are crucial for building relationships that foster openness. Participants S, J, and Suka, who are not naturally open about personal issues, still had personal boundaries. Riyadi et al. (2025) also noted that experiences and empathetic interactions were associated with self-disclosure.

At this stage, conflict arose only between F.W. and another member. F.W. reported frequent conflicts due to receiving inappropriate responses when she was in a bad mood. After the emotional storm passed, they reconciled. This also aligns with the affective exchange stage in SPT, which posits that conflict may arise from deep disclosures and closeness, thereby allowing more candid criticism (West & Turner, 2018).

Participants F.W. and M. proceeded to the stable exchange stage after fully disclosing personal information, including private details.

F.W. stated that her community friends now resemble family. Their profound understanding of her has led to fewer conflicts, as they are attuned to her emotional state. M also conveyed all her feelings and experiences. She had not experienced conflicts with her friend, as they managed narratives with maturity and respect, even when advice was disregarded. This scenario corresponds to Altman and Taylor's characterization of the stable exchange stage, characterized by complete disclosure and minimal conflict arising from mutual understanding (West & Turner, 2018).

These findings are consistent with those of Riyadi et al. (2025), who reported that interpersonal relationships at this stage are characterized by complete self-disclosure, a sense of safety, and accurate communication without fear of rejection. For example, in the case of F.W. and M, they shared fully and felt safe from judgment or negative responses. At this point, trust in their friends was so high that they believed their friends would always be there to listen.

On the other hand, participants S, J, and Suka felt closer to other members but still had not shared deeply about their struggles as widows. S and Suka even admitted they rarely communicate with the community now. S was busy with work, while Suka simply did not want to get too close. This also supports Altman and Taylor's theory that not all relationships reach the stable exchange stage (West & Turner, 2018). The SPT is closely related to the concept

of self-disclosure, such that certain factors can either hinder or promote it, thereby affecting relationship depth. In this case, the personalities of participants S, J, and Suka tended to restrict disclosure of sensitive topics, thus preventing deeper intimacy. Therefore, participants in middle to late adulthood tend to be more reserved about personal matters, preventing their self-disclosure from reaching the stable exchange stage.

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that changes in self-disclosure among widows in the #SaveJanda community follow a pattern consistent with SPT. The relational dynamics fostered through gradual interaction, mutual trust, and emotionally safe environments encourage participants to disclose themselves healthily and adaptively. This process demonstrates that supportive social communities are crucial in facilitating emotional recovery and building meaningful interpersonal relationships. At a broader relational level, these findings echo Klaus (2021) observation that widowhood reshapes social networks in complex ways, with some individuals experiencing a decline of supportive ties and others successfully creating new networks of friends and family. In this case, the #SaveJanda community functions as an alternative support network that widows can actively build around themselves.

The Outcome of Self-Disclosure Among Members of the #SaveJanda Community

Self-disclosure among widows in the

#SaveJanda community elicited multiple forms of social support, both emotional and practical. Participants consistently described the community as a communicative space characterized by empathy, mutual understanding, and nonjudgmental conditions that interpersonal communication scholars identify as essential for supportive interactions (DeVito, 2022). Through disclosure, widows gained access to moral support, informational resources, and even material assistance, demonstrating that openness fostered mutual support exchanges rather than one-directional help. This observation aligns with theories of relational communication, suggesting that shared experiences and vulnerability strengthen relational solidarity and trust (West & Turner, 2018).

Psychosocial benefits also emerged as a significant outcome of self-disclosure. Participants reported sensations of emotional relief, increased self-assurance, and the capacity to recontextualize traumatic events, including the passing of a spouse. One participant, F.W., identified new personal strengths (e.g., writing, entrepreneurship, and the courage to articulate private matters), demonstrating how disclosure can facilitate identity reconstruction. These findings strengthen previous studies show that social support within widow communities contributes to post-traumatic growth, helping widows regain agency and emotional resilience after loss (Richardson, 2016; Wilson-Menzfeld et al., 2024). The results also align with DeVito

(2022) argument that disclosure enhances self-knowledge and reduces psychological pressure by expressing internal burdens.

The advantages of self-disclosure varied significantly. Certain participants, such as S and J, experienced regret or vulnerability when their disclosures lacked empathetic responses or when they were concerned about potential misunderstandings of their narratives. The reactions illustrate the fundamental tenets of Tian (2025) revelation risk model, which shows that bereaved individuals assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of disclosure in relation to perceived relational safety. Supportive disclosure can facilitate healing. It may worsen distress if the response lacks empathy or if boundaries are ambiguous. This supports DeVito's argument that improper or excessive disclosure can lead to psychological distress and interpersonal strain. The findings indicate that widows need to manage disclosure wisely, balancing transparency with personal boundaries, particularly in community contexts where trust levels differ.

The findings also highlight that motivations for disclosure extend beyond the desire for personal relief. Several participants expressed hopes that their stories would strengthen and inspire others, indicating that disclosure also functions symbolically as a form of mutual care, identity affirmation, and collective resilience. This supports Hilliker (2016) observation that widow-support communities serve as spaces in which individuals rebuild identity and negotiate

meaning after loss. In #SaveJanda, sharing became a mechanism through which widows positioned themselves not only as recipients of support but also as contributors to the emotional well-being of others.

The findings demonstrate that self-disclosure within the #SaveJanda community functions as a relational process with multiple outcomes: it enhances intimacy, encourages mutual empowerment, aids in identity reconstruction, and supports psychosocial resilience, all while also necessitating careful management of relational risks. These outcomes indicate that disclosure supports individual psychological processes and functions. It results from interpersonal communication practices shaped by trust, cultural norms, and the community's communicative environment.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to explore the factors driving self-disclosure among widows who experienced spousal death in the #SaveJanda community and to understand how the process of self-disclosure enables them to gain social support. The findings offer a detailed analysis of disclosure dynamics, the significance of trust, and the transformative capacity of both online and offline support networks in mitigating widowhood stigma in Indonesia.

The research indicated that trust was the primary factor influencing self-disclosure. Initially, participants restricted their disclosure to fundamental identity information, including

age, number of children, and the reason for widowhood. This caution reflects a fear of judgment, stigma, and bullying inherent in patriarchal culture, where widows are often stereotyped as weak, immoral, or predatory. The findings indicate that disclosure is not an automatic process; instead, it progresses gradually, shaped by factors such as trust, feelings of security, empathy from others, and shared experiences. The community's supportive environment, characterized by empathetic interactions and a lack of judgment, established a basis for openness. For certain participants, including M, a personal commitment to healing and growth as a single mother enables disclosure. This experience illustrates the necessity of secure communal environments that support trust and empathy in addressing structural stigmas.

The disclosure process unfolded in progressive phases. Initially, participants shared only surface-level stories. Interactions increased through group chats, dyadic exchanges, and offline meetings over time, deepening disclosure and forming relational bonds. Shared interests, everyday life experiences, and consistent communication facilitate closeness. While some participants needed months before feeling safe enough to disclose, others opened up quickly due to extroverted personalities or preexisting friendships.

Disclosure is also selective and contextual. Participants disclosed more when topics were personally relevant or when

members were perceived as empathetic and trustworthy. Although openness varies, from deep transparency (M and F.W.) to guarded boundaries (S, J, and Suka), disclosure is a negotiated act shaped by personality, cultural, and perceived safety. It also brings emotional and practical benefits – from solidarity, encouragement, and prayer support to resources such as job opportunities, financial assistance, and avenues for self-actualization.

This study provides new scientific insights into self-disclosure as a culturally rooted behavior influenced by widowhood stigma and patriarchal gender norms. Unlike in Western countries, where disclosure is frequently presented as an individual act, this study demonstrates that disclosure among Indonesian widows is socially negotiated within safe communities. This discovery contributes to communication and social psychology theories by showing how trust, stigma, and belonging connect in disclosure behavior.

For society, the findings promoted that community-based groups, such as #SaveJanda, could reduce stigma, provide safe spaces, and enable widows to access emotional and material support. Policymakers and NGOs should strengthen such initiatives as complementary social safety nets. At the same time, public education campaigns are necessary to challenge patriarchal stereotypes and to reposition widows as resilient individuals rather than stigmatized figures. Digital platforms should also be optimized to build supportive spaces

where widows can safely share experiences.

Looking ahead, three recommendations emerge. First, researchers should further examine gendered experiences of disclosure among marginalized groups, including comparative and cross-cultural studies. Second, longitudinal approaches are required to explore how disclosure evolves and supports long-term resilience and reintegration. Third, practitioners and community leaders should develop structured empowerment programs within widow support communities, including mentorship pairings, storytelling workshops, and skill-building initiatives that enhance both disclosure and empowerment.

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