

Research Paper

Silenced Struggles, Shared Healing: Psychological Insights into Kalaiarasan's Journey in Kana Kaanum Kaalangal

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a time when emotions, thinking, and social life are changing rapidly, and losing caregivers suddenly can shake a young person's sense of stability. In the Tamil web series Kana Kaanum Kaalangal, the character Kalaiarasan experiences this kind of loss when his parents are tragically killed. The series shows his journey through intense trauma, gradual healing, and eventually personal growth. This paper looks at how Kalaiarasan reacts in terms of behavior, emotions, and thoughts, connecting his experiences to psychological ideas such as Kübler-Ross's stages of grief, Bowlby's attachment theory, Stroebe and Schut's dual-process model, Neimeyer's meaning reconstruction, and Tedeschi and Calhoun's posttraumatic growth. At first, he withdraws, stays quiet, and keeps people at a distance. These behaviors help him cope with his pain. Emotionally, he feels sadness, worry, and some anger, though he hides it most of the time. In his thinking, he often reflects on what happened, stays alert to reminders of the trauma, and slowly starts trying to make sense of his loss. Kalaiarasan never seeks revenge; he just wants to live a peaceful life. The story shows how support from friends and teachers, resilience, and finding personal meaning in difficult experiences can help an adolescent recover. Understanding his journey can give researchers and professionals ideas about how to support teens facing serious loss.

Keywords: *Adolescent grief, Trauma recovery, Attachment theory, Social support, Resilience, Posttraumatic growth*

Adolescence is a time of big changes emotionally, mentally, and socially. During this stage, relationships with parents and caregivers play a huge role in shaping how teens understand themselves, manage emotions, and deal with challenges (Steinberg, 2014). Losing these key people suddenly can shake a young person's world, causing deep grief, confusion, and struggles in everyday life. The Tamil web series Kana Kaanum Kaalangal shows this clearly through the story of Kalaiarasan, whose parents are tragically killed. The series follows how he copes with trauma, goes through grief, and slowly learns to adapt, offering a glimpse into the challenges of adolescent recovery.

At first, Kalaiarasan becomes quiet, keeps to himself, and avoids letting anyone get too close. These reactions are protective they help him handle emotions that feel too heavy to face. Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief help explain why he denies and avoids his

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Received: September 22, 2025; Revision Received: October 08, 2025; Accepted: October 11, 2025

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feelings in the beginning; it's his mind's way of shielding him from being overwhelmed. Mentally, he keeps replaying the traumatic event, trying to make sense of what happened while also struggling to focus on school and daily routines. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual-process model shows that he goes back and forth between thinking about his loss and trying to carry on with life, though memories and fear often interrupt him.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1980) also helps explain his reactions. Losing his parents shakes his sense of security and trust. Initially, Kalaiarasan finds it hard to open up to peers and teachers because he fears getting hurt again. Over time, supportive relationships act as "substitute" caregivers, giving him reassurance and helping him feel safe again. Research shows that teens with strong social support recover emotionally and mentally faster after trauma (Frisina & Borod, 2018; Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Culture and gender expectations also affect how he responds. In many Tamil communities, boys are expected to hide emotions and be strong, which makes him bottle up his feelings. This makes his grief feel heavier at first, but the care and guidance from friends and teachers eventually help him cope better. Emotionally, he feels sadness, anxiety, and suppressed anger; behaviorally, he avoids reminders of his past; cognitively, he thinks a lot about what happened and slowly tries to make sense of it. Neimeyer's (2001) meaning reconstruction theory shows that over time, adolescents like Kalaiarasan can reframe painful events into stories that make sense, helping them build resilience.

Through Kalaiarasan's journey, the series shows how teens deal with complicated grief, from keeping feelings inside to replaying events in their minds, and how caring support from others can guide them toward recovery. His trauma does not manifest as a desire for revenge; rather, he seeks peace and stability, highlighting the nuanced relationship between cognitive processing, emotional regulation, and behavioral adaptation. Understanding these processes provides insights into adolescent psychological growth, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive interventions, supportive relationships, and opportunities for constructive cognitive reflection (Asgari & Naghavi, 2022; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Masten, 2014).

ECHOES OF SILENCE: GRIEF IN MOTION

Kalaiarasan's life changes completely when he loses his parents suddenly. This kind of loss is overwhelming for any adolescent because their coping skills and emotional regulation are still developing (Silverman & La Greca, 2002). At first, he reacts by withdrawing from everyone around him. He doesn't talk about his feelings, not because he doesn't care, but because the grief is too heavy to express. According to Kubler-Ross (1969), this is a natural part of grief denial and emotional numbness can protect someone from being overwhelmed immediately.

He also isolates himself from peers and teachers, keeping to himself in class and avoiding social activities. Even though he appears calm, there are subtle signs of tension, like irritability or being easily startled. These behaviors are not aggression toward others but are signs of internal stress caused by trauma (Pynoos, Steinberg, & Wraith, 2009). Teachers and peers notice his quietness and, over time, their consistent care and support help him slowly feel safe enough to interact again. (Cohen and Wills, 1985) explain that emotional support can reduce the negative effects of stress, and Kalaiarasan's experience clearly shows this.

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On the thinking side, he struggles with intrusive memories of his parents' death. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual-process model explains that he alternates between focusing on his loss and trying to manage daily life. Sometimes he can concentrate on schoolwork, but memories or reminders of his parents make him anxious or sad. He never seeks revenge; instead, he wants peace and stability in his life. Emotionally, he feels sadness, fear, and some suppressed anger, which affects his focus and decision-making. Over time, as peers and teachers show understanding and encouragement, he learns to cope with his feelings and regain control of his life.

Cultural expectations also play a role. In his community, boys are often expected to hide their feelings, which makes him keep his grief inside. But gradually, the support from teachers and classmates allows him to open up safely. Through this support, Kalaiarasan slowly balances his emotions, thoughts, and actions, showing that even after severe trauma, adolescents can heal with the right guidance and understanding (Asgari & Naghavi, 2022; Masten, 2014).

SHADOWS OF VIOLENCE: TRAUMA AND ITS RIPPLE EFFECTS

After the initial shock of losing his parents, Kalaiarasan struggles to adjust to a world that feels unsafe and unpredictable. Trauma can make adolescents overly cautious, anxious, and sometimes withdrawn, even when there is no immediate threat (Layne, Saltzman, & Pynoos, 2006). In Kalaiarasan's case, seeing people or situations that remind him of his past triggers moments of fear and tension. He doesn't act aggressively toward anyone; instead, he internalizes his distress, which is a common response for adolescents facing severe trauma. This internalization affects both his emotions and his thinking. He finds it hard to concentrate on schoolwork, make decisions quickly, or trust others easily, showing how trauma can interfere with cognitive processes (Thompson, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2011).

Teachers and peers play a critical role during this phase. They notice that he avoids social interactions and struggles with routine tasks, and they provide gentle guidance and encouragement. This support allows him to gradually test his sense of safety and slowly engage with daily activities again. Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1980) explains why consistent support is essential: when adolescents lose primary caregivers, substitute supportive figures help rebuild trust and emotional security. Kalaiarasan's experiences show how positive relationships can act as a protective buffer against the ongoing impact of trauma (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Culturally, there is an expectation for boys to control their emotions, which makes Kalaiarasan keep much of his pain hidden. This suppression can increase stress, but the understanding and patience of peers and teachers help him feel accepted despite his quietness. Gradually, he begins to process his emotions and reflect on his experiences without being overwhelmed. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual-process model helps explain this shift: he alternates between focusing on memories of loss and engaging in everyday tasks, slowly regaining balance.

Even while he is still affected by trauma, Kalaiarasan shows the beginnings of coping and resilience. Emotional support, reassurance, and the creation of safe spaces at school help him regulate his feelings and regain cognitive clarity. Over time, these consistent experiences of care allow him to respond to challenges more adaptively, showing that trauma recovery is

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possible when adolescents are surrounded by empathy, patience, and understanding (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2013).

BRIDGES TO HEALING: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

Kalaiarasan's slow recovery highlights how important consistent social support is for adolescents coping with sudden parental loss. Support can be emotional, instrumental, or appraisal-based, and each type helps in unique ways (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Emotional support, for instance, allows him to share his fears, sadness, and confusion safely. While he remains quiet and withdrawn at first, peers and teachers provide patience and understanding, giving him small opportunities to open up. Over time, these moments help him feel less isolated and more accepted, reinforcing that he is not alone in his struggles.

Instrumental support is equally crucial. Teachers and peers help him manage school responsibilities and daily tasks, which gradually restores his sense of competence and control. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual-process model explains that adolescents like Kalaiarasan benefit from alternating between loss-focused reflection and restoration-focused tasks. By engaging in schoolwork, group activities, or small problem-solving tasks, he begins to regain cognitive clarity and a sense of efficacy. These accomplishments, though modest, create stepping stones for greater independence and emotional regulation.

Recognition and encouragement from others also play a big role in helping Kalaiarasan recover. When his classmates notice the small things he does or when teachers acknowledge his efforts, it boosts his confidence. These moments help him move away from feeling helpless and start thinking more positively about how to handle challenges (Masten, 2014). Bit by bit, these experiences rebuild his inner strength and remind him that he is capable of facing difficulties, even after such a huge loss.

Cultural and developmental expectations add another layer to his experience. In his community, boys are often expected to hide their emotions and "stay strong," which makes expressing feelings difficult. But the support he receives gives him safe opportunities to show vulnerability without judgment, helping him balance cultural norms with his own emotional needs. Social support provides safe spaces where Kalaiarasan can express vulnerability without judgment, teaching him that seeking help is not a weakness. Over time, these consistent positive interactions create what psychologists describe as relational scaffolding, which helps adolescents like him rebuild trust and develop coping strategies for both social and emotional challenges (Bowlby, 1969, 1980; Hobfoll, 2001).

Through emotional reassurance, practical guidance, and recognition of his efforts, Kalaiarasan slowly begins to re-engage with the world. His peers and teachers act as bridges, connecting him back to everyday life and helping him reconstruct a sense of safety, competence, and hope. These supportive relationships lay the foundation for the posttraumatic growth he eventually achieves, demonstrating how social networks are essential in fostering resilience after profound adolescent loss (Field, 2010; Asgari & Naghavi, 2022).

EMERGENCE INTO GROWTH: POSTTRAUMATIC TRANSFORMATION

As Kalaiarasan continues to receive steady support from peers and teachers, his journey gradually moves toward posttraumatic growth (PTG), a process where adolescents develop positively after facing extreme challenges (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). PTG is not about

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forgetting the trauma or returning to the way life was before; it is about learning, adapting, and discovering new strengths. For Kalaiarasan, this growth is subtle and realistic, intertwined with the ongoing presence of grief. He does not rush to “move on,” but slowly integrates his loss into a meaningful understanding of his life.

Emotionally, he begins to manage his reactions more effectively. Instead of remaining entirely withdrawn or tense when confronted with reminders of his past, he learns to pause, reflect, and respond thoughtfully. Neimeyer (2001) emphasizes that reconstructing the story of one's loss is central to recovery. Kalaiarasan achieves this by gradually acknowledging the trauma, understanding his feelings, and creating a narrative that allows him to recognize both the pain and his personal resilience. This cognitive processing shifts him from rumination toward constructive thinking, helping him regain control over his thoughts and actions.

Socially, Kalaiarasan becomes more comfortable reconnecting with peers and participating in school activities. Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1980) explains that stable, supportive relationships provide corrective experiences, restoring trust and emotional safety. The guidance and companionship of peers and teachers allow him to rebuild confidence in his social abilities, reinforcing that he can navigate relationships successfully despite past losses. These interactions help him feel a sense of belonging, validation, and mutual support, which strengthens his emotional resilience.

He also develops new coping strategies to manage ongoing challenges. Structured problem-solving, goal-setting, and controlled emotional expression become part of his daily life. Masten (2014) highlights that resilience grows when internal strengths are supported by external resources. By taking responsibility for small tasks, resolving conflicts calmly, and participating in school life, Kalaiarasan demonstrates increasing self-efficacy, a core aspect of resilience.

Finally, PTG is evident in his emerging empathy, deeper social connections, and renewed focus on constructive goals. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) describe PTG as encompassing stronger relationships, greater personal strength, and appreciation for life, all of which appear in Kalaiarasan's story. The series shows that recovery is not the absence of grief but the transformation of trauma's impact into meaningful personal growth, hope, and the ability to face the future with strength and clarity.

CONCLUSION

Kalaiarasan's journey in Kana Kaanum Kaalangal reveals the delicate interplay of trauma, grief, cognitive processing, and resilience in adolescence. His story demonstrates that initial withdrawal, silence, and mistrust are protective responses rather than weaknesses. Cognitively, he ruminates on the loss of his parents, becomes hypervigilant around reminders of his past, and gradually develops strategies to interpret his trauma in a way that supports adaptive functioning. Emotionally, he experiences sadness, suppressed anger, and anxiety, while behaviorally, he avoids situations that may trigger distress. Over time, peer and teacher support allows him to re-engage with his social environment, feel validated, and begin reconstructing a sense of safety and trust. Importantly, he does not seek revenge; his trauma surfaces in specific contexts, but his ultimate aim is to achieve peace and stability. The narrative underscores that culturally sensitive, consistent social support and developmental scaffolding can foster resilience and posttraumatic growth. As Tedeschi and

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Calhoun (2004) suggest, growth after trauma involves enhanced relationships, personal strength, and a renewed appreciation of life all of which are reflected in Kalaiarasan's gradual evolution. "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars." by Khalil Gibran

Future research should examine how peer and mentor networks influence adolescent coping after sudden parental loss across diverse cultural settings. Cross-cultural comparisons may reveal differences in how grief is cognitively processed, emotionally expressed, or transformed into resilience (Ungar, 2013). Longitudinal studies could also investigate whether media-based portrayals, like Kalaiarasan's, help adolescents recognize adaptive coping strategies and foster constructive cognitive processing. Additionally, interventions integrating peer support, mentorship, and culturally appropriate practices could provide effective frameworks for promoting both emotional and cognitive recovery in bereaved adolescents.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Madhu Nisha P. (2025). Silenced Struggles, Shared Healing: Psychological Insights into Kalaiarasan's Journey in Kana Kaanum Kaalangal. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 13(4), 042-048. DIP:18.01.005.20251304, DOI:10.25215/1304.005