

Navigating Loss: Exploring The College Students' Experiences of Coping with The Death of a Parent

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Abstract

This study delves into the experiences of grief and coping mechanisms among college students struggling with parental absence. This study utilized a case study design involving ten (10) college students in one of the higher education institutions in Pagadian city. The results highlighted different facets of grief, as articulated by the participants, encompassing sleep disturbances, social disconnection, intense frustration, self-blame and regret, overwhelming grief and sorrow, and trauma. In addition, the results also revealed that the participants experienced challenges, which included emotional distress, increased responsibilities, financial distress, and spiritual and existential struggles. To navigate these challenges, the participants turned to seeking support, and embraced acceptance as coping mechanisms. This study underscores the transformative nature of coping with parental absence and emphasizes the significance of support and resilience for college students' well-being.

Keywords: *grief, parental death, experiences, college students, challenges, coping strategies*

INTRODUCTION

All living beings who come into this world will eventually experience the natural process of death, be it their own, the death of a close friend, or the death of a relative. Accompanying the death experience is grieving, mourning, and coping (Dizon, 2019). Among the myriad of losses one may suffer, the loss of a parent can be the most harrowing experience, leaving a profound impact on people of all ages (Feldbrugge, 2019). Such traumatic events challenge a person's fundamental beliefs and ways of understanding or experiencing the world.

At any age, the loss of a loved one can be traumatic. Adults are better at handling loss than younger people due to their life experiences and higher-order thinking, and children who lose a parent before the age of three go through worse psychological issues. Dependence on the surviving parent or caregiver, a lack of support, and a lack of maturity in cognitive linguistic skills for expressing thoughts or feelings are a few examples (Ferow, 2019).

Parental care plays a pivotal role in child development. This relationship lays the foundation for the child's personality, life decisions, and overall behavior (Parenting, 2018). Li (2021) stresses the significant role of the parents in the first three stages of life, when rapid brain and socio-emotional development occur. Children experiencing parental absences struggle to cope with their emotions, affecting multiple areas of their lives, such as physical, emotional, cognitive, social, financial, and behavioral. Literature indicates that children separated from their parents would exhibit negative emotions, including worry, anger, and dread (Erica, 2019). Children would grow weak in terms of health status because of the lack

of care from parents. Children would also become unattended in behavioral matters because of the parent's absence.

Research consistently shows that children with absent or deceased parents face significant challenges academically and emotionally. Developing notions also demonstrate that children with an absent parent perform poorly academically (Perry, 2021). In Colombia, students who have experienced parental death reported lower academic expectations, with the prolonged absence negatively impacting their academic performance (Wright, 2014). Similarly, in Ghana, over a million orphaned children are vulnerable to a range of issues, including health conditions, abuse, neglect, educational deprivation, and limited access to basic social amenities (Bettman, 2015).

A study in China further illuminated the academic struggles of students left behind or experiencing parental absence. These students performed poorly in class, with an even more significant decline in performance observed when the mother was absent compared to both parents being gone (Fu, 2017). Additionally, research by Lundberg (2017) indicates that boys are more prone to academic problems, such as suspensions, when a parent is absent, while girls are relatively more likely to experience depression in such situations. Berg (2014) also underscores the long-term impact of parental death during childhood, linking it to lower grades and school failure.

Despite the challenges posed by parental absence, children demonstrate resilience and adaptability in coping with these circumstances (Ajiboye, 2019). While some may feel lonely, others seek support from another place, such as participating in sports or becoming overly preoccupied with studying (Bashir et al., 2021). Furthermore, research indicates that people's conceptions of death impact how they respond to death, with spirituality developing as a coping strategy to assist people in dealing with feelings of grief and despair, especially after losing a parent (Ajokpaniovo, 2019).

Studies involving parental death are scarce both internationally and locally. This scarcity highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the experiences of individuals who have lost their parents, which is crucial for societal progress (Vergara, 2018). In the Philippines, the death of a parent significantly affects a child's psychological well-being and academic resilience (Dizon, 2019). According to the 2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS5), nearly one-third of young Filipinos have experienced the absence of at least one parent, with 17% of cases involving the death of a parent. This absence is linked to adverse outcomes such as early school dropout, teenage pregnancy, and reduced levels of pleasure, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. These findings highlight the broader social impact of parental absence in the Philippines, emphasizing the importance of supporting young people who have lost a parent.

Additionally, Filipino children, due to their strong family ties, face profound emotional and developmental challenges after losing a parent. Their personal growth and academic resilience are impacted; hence, support and interventions from significant adults are essential (Dizon, 2019).

In the area where the study was conducted, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that many students who have experienced parental absence struggle with emotional

challenges. Moreover, they also face other difficulties, such as financial constraints and bereavement, which in turn adversely affect their learning (Sarcol, 2022). Navigating grief while balancing academic and social demands is a tough challenge. Unfortunately, college environments often lack the proper support for students dealing with bereavement (O'Neill, 2013).

College students grappling with losing a parent may find forming identities difficult, especially if they genuinely doubt their abilities and worth (Bistrecean et al., 2021). They may have a great deal of difficulty getting over the losses, which impair the chances of maturing and leading lives rich in closeness, autonomy, and direction. College students represent the future generation of professionals, leaders, and members of society. They must be offered adequate assistance throughout their grieving period to prevent further negative consequences like poorer academic performance and increased dropout rates.

To date, there is a lack of research specifically focused on college students' grief and the long-term impact of interventions on their grief and bereavement. More research is needed in this area to understand better and support college students who have experienced the death of a parent (Tang, 2019).

The main goal of this study is to investigate how college students cope with the death of a parent. By gaining an understanding of how parental death affects students' grief and how they handle it, valuable insights can be provided to others who have experienced similar losses and help them build resilience and find healing.

Framing this study is the Kübler-Ross model, also known as the Stages of Grief. The theory offers a structured framework for understanding the emotional journey of college students who have experienced parental death. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the theory in 1969, which delineates five distinct phases of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance. These phases are often considered reactions to death that can occur at any time. The stages of grief seek to process changes and help adapt to a new reality. Although there are parts that are constant across each stage, everyone's grief experience is unique (Stanaway, 2020).

The Kubler-Ross model helps understand the stages and process of grief and guides the exploration of the consequences of losing a loved one; the challenges college students face in processing grief, and coping strategies among college students. It provides a structure to study the complete emotional experiences and can inform interventions for grieving college students.

Statement of The Problem

This research aims to explore the experiences of college students coping with grief and loss following the death of a parent. The central question guiding this study is: How do college students describe their experiences of grief resulting from parental death?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the consequences experienced by college students following the loss of a parent?

2. What challenges do college students face in processing grief and coping with the death of a parent?
3. How do college students employ coping strategies to navigate their grief and cope with the loss of a parent?

METHODS

Research Design

This Research employed a qualitative methodology, specifically the Merriam (2009) case study model. Using this method, one can thoroughly understand the subject and draw insightful conclusions by immersing oneself in real-life situations. The study's case is college students who have experienced parental death. The design assisted in recording participants' life stories, obtaining personal recollections of their challenges, and helping them deal with the loss of their parents.

Research Environment

This study was conducted in one of Zamboanga del Sur's colleges. This institution has good characteristics, especially in upholding its vision, mission, and goals. In line with this, the researchers find this institution suitable for the study since it has a higher proportion of college students who have stories of grief and coping with parental death.

Research Participants

The qualified participants in this study were from diverse programs with stories of grief and coping with parental death, either having a deceased mother or a father, with approximately 10 participants. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Each participant gave full consent and participation to cooperate in this study.

Research Instrument

The main instruments in this study are the researchers themselves, aided by an interview guide. The interview's objective is to provide an opportunity for the respondents to tell stories of grief and coping with parental death so that those stories can be studied. The guide questions were designed using open-ended questions. The interview guide typically includes engaging, exploratory, descriptive, and probing questions, ensuring that the researchers get all the relevant information from the interviewee. Also, it concludes with an exit question to address any final concerns.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers selected a specific school in the province of Zamboanga del Sur for their study. After obtaining permission from the president's office to conduct the study, the researchers identified students who had experienced parental death to participate in the study. Before the interviews, the researchers presented a letter of consent to request permission and participation from the selected students. Data collection began as soon as the participants consented. The researchers gathered data by asking the interview guide questions. After answering, participants were offered a follow-up interview for clarification purposes. The interviews were conducted in private to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities.

Data Analysis

The method used to analyze the interview transcripts is Merriam's (1998) data analysis method, which involves condensing, reducing, and analyzing the transcript to make meaning of the data. The researchers classified the data into categories based on the study topics and then searched for trends and linkages. By familiarizing themselves with the data, they found patterns. The researchers started categorizing the data based on the patterns.

Ethical Considerations in Research

Ethical considerations were considered to protect the participants by applying appropriate ethical principles. Due to the in-depth nature of this qualitative study method, ethical considerations were essential in a qualitative investigation and had a particular resonance. The concern over ethical issues becomes more salient when conducting face-to-face interviews with vulnerable participants. Below are the important ethical issues considered in this study.

Confidentiality. The participants' confidentiality was preserved by not revealing the identities during data collection. Furthermore, the environment's privacy is protected by remaining anonymous in stating the data analysis and its findings.

Data analysis and dissemination of the findings. The participants' names and other identifying information were deleted during the data transcription. The participants were identified by pseudonyms in the verbatim quotes while presenting the study's findings. The written consent and other records, including the participants' private information, were kept in a locked cabinet, with only the researchers accessing it.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Consequences experienced by college students following the loss of a parent

Based on the results, the participants highlighted six (6) categories of the consequences of losing a loved one: sleep disturbances, social disconnection, intense frustration, self-blame and regret, overwhelming grief and sorrow, and trauma.

Sleep Disturbances. Upon analyzing the data, one predominant category that emerged as a consequence of losing a loved one was sleep disturbances.

"... naay mga gabie nga mag lisod ko og tulog kay mangita gyud ko sa iyang presensya." [There are nights when I struggle to sleep because I long for his presence.] P4

"... mao to mag lisod kog tulog." [I find it difficult to sleep.]

It is common for people who have recently experienced a loss to experience sleep disturbances, which is also a symptom of depression (Fisher, 2023). It can have a detrimental effect on one's emotional and physical well-being. In addition, sleep disruptions exacerbate emotional and stress-related conditions (Lancel, 2020)

Social Disconnection. Grief can cause isolation because people may struggle to find others who understand the situation. The following statements make this abundantly evident:

"wala koy kastoryahan kay di ko ganahan maka purvesyo sa uban." [I do not want to talk to anyone because I do not want to bother anyone.] P4

"Feeling nako wala nakoy maduolan." [I feel like I have no one to lean on.] P5

"Wala koy ka share-ran every time mag mental breakdown ko, wala koy ka bonding"

[I have no one to share with whenever I have a mental breakdown, no one to bond with.] P6

Grief can cause strain in interactions with others and relationships. Grieving people may feel alone or misunderstood, and friends and relatives may struggle to empathize with or support them. Furthermore, because societal norms and expectations around loss could differ, managing grief in a social setting can be challenging. The role of social support is critical during catastrophic grief. Nevertheless, little is known about the helpful acts, and it is unknown how bereaved individuals perceive and define social support (PLOS One, 2021).

Intense Frustration. It is expected to feel frustrated after a loved one passes away. People get upset because they cannot help but ask why everything had to happen.

"Mura kog nagdala og kalagot sakong papa dayun wala dayun nako sya nabuhian kay wala pagyud nako sya napasaylo." [I feel a deep sense of anger towards my father, and yet I still hold that anger for a long period of time because I was not able to forgive him.] P2

"Sa kinaunhan, galagot ko sa panghitabo kay feeling nako dili nako kaya og wala akong papa." [At first, I was angry because I thought I couldn't go on without my father.] P4

Self-blame and regret. Self-blame and regret were common among grieving participants. These emotions have the potential to become overwhelming and can set off a vicious cycle of guilt and negative self-talk, which makes grief even more challenging to handle.

"Regrets nga katong time nga wala ko nagpakita sa iyaba although mag sige ralog agi-agi sa barangay kung aba sya ga puyo. Pero wa ko kaila niya kay wa ko kita sa iyang nawng sa personal. Mao to gamahay ko kay abi nakog sya ang dapat managyog pasaylo. Pero ako diay ako og akong mga igsoon kay wa gapakabana sa iyaba." [I regret not showing myself to him, even though I frequently pass by the barangay where he lived. But I didn't know him because I never saw his face in person. That's why I feel guilty, thinking I deserved an apology from him, but me and my siblings are the one who owe him an apology.] P1

"Lisud kayo pasayluon ang kaugalingon kay wa nako sya na suportaan bisan sa ginagmayng kaagi. Wala nako napabati sa iyaba nga naa diay syay anak." [It's very difficult to forgive myself because I never supported him even in the slightest way. I never made him feel that he had a child.] P2

"Gamahay ko kay feeling nako kay gakulang sa pag atiman og tarong sa iyaba maong namatay siya." [I regret because I feel like I didn't take good care of him when he was sick, that's why he died."] P4

When dealing with the death of a loved one, especially a parent, regret and self-blame are frequent psychological responses. People may have self-blaming ideas and behaviors,

believing they might have done something that results in death. This self-blame can be especially powerful if there are unresolved problems or challenging dynamics in the parent-child relationship. (Camacho, 2017).

Accepting that there is nothing one can do to improve things or end the suffering could be challenging. In Kubler-ross's stages of grief, bargaining emerges when an individual start to make deals with themselves. The participants' comments, which indicate a wish for forgiveness or reconciliation because they feel guilty and think they should have received an apology from the deceased, point to a sense of bargaining. Remorse is also felt for not offering assistance, admitting the effect of their deeds on the deceased, and wondering if their deeds—or lack thereof—were a factor in how things turned out (Cruse Bereavement Support, n.d.).

Overwhelming Grief and Sorrow. The participants' responses provide moving insights into their intense sorrow. Their words emphasized the deep hole that is left in a person's life and the long-lasting effects of losing a loved one. The participants struggle with the terrible reality of their loved one's absence and express a terrific wish for their presence.

“Makapasubo iyang kamatayon kay namatay sya nga nag inusara. Maka konsensya kay kami naka kaon og tarong og naka bigda og nindot nga kama pero siya wala. Maka pangutana ko unsay gibati niya sa iyang last minute.” [It's very tragic that he passed away alone. It bothers my conscience because we were able to eat well and sleep in a comfortable bed, but he didn't experience that. I wonder what he felt in his last moments.] P1

“Pinaka painful gyud to. Di nako ma-explain ang feeling ba in terms nga nawalaan kog tawo nga close kaayo sakong heart. Feeling nako nga pag naay mama kay colorful kaayo. Pero if walay mama kay feeling nako naglakaw ko sa dalan nga walay suga.” [That's the most painful part. I can't explain the feeling in terms of losing someone who was very close to my heart. I feel like having a mother makes life so colorful. But without a mother, it feels like I'm walking on a dark path without any light.] P5

“...subo kay wala ko didto sa bigayon nga nagkalamatay akong amahan, wala ko didto” [I was really sad because, I was not there during that moment when my father died, I was not there...] P8

“Makasubo kaayo samot na kay dili ko sanay sa mga changes sakong kinabuhì atong nawala si mama.” [It is very heartbreaking, especially because I am not accustomed to the changes in my life since my mom passed away.] P9

“Pinaka painful nga nabitabo sa akong kinabuhì gyud.” [The most painful thing that happened in my life, indeed.] 10

Feelings of sadness are a natural reaction to grief. Like sleep disturbance, it is also a symptom of depression. Depression in Kubler-Ross stages of grief (1969) refers to feelings of sadness and hopelessness. This is often a result of losing a loved one (Fisher, 2023).

Individuals frequently express a deep sense of loss and sadness while discussing the untimely death of a parent (Gobbi, 2021). Words like "devastating," "heartbreaking," or "unbearable" are sometimes used to describe the intense emotional impact of parent's death. It may also highlight the unexpected and sudden character of the loss, emphasizing the shock and incredulity experienced at hearing the news.

Participant 4 added:

"Makapasubo kay murag naay nawala nga part sa akong ma murag ma kumpleto ra if mobalik akong papa. Pero murag impossible na kayo kay di naman gyud." [It is very tragic because it feels like a missing piece of me that would only be complete if my father would return to life. But it seems highly impossible because I know it will never happen.] P4

In addition, individuals could stress the importance of their parents in their lives and the gap that their absence leaves. They may characterize this gap as "irreplaceable" or "a part of me missing" (Hardman, 2019). There may also be expressions of emptiness, loneliness, and a yearning for the parent's love, support, and direction. It is crucial to remember that college students' accounts of a terrible parent passing away can differ based on their coping strategies and the particulars of the death. While some may draw attention to the suffering and sadness, others might emphasize the fortitude and resiliency teenagers have acquired from overcoming such a trying situation.

Trauma. The death of a parent during college years can have profound and long-lasting effects, resulting in significant emotional trauma.

"Maka trauma siya, tungod kay sa pagkamatay sa akong mama, mabadolok nako nga naa pa bitaw lain mawala sakong pamilya" [I am traumatized because of the death of my mother, I'm afraid that there might be another loss in my family.] P7

Individuals at this stage of development may struggle to fully comprehend the finality of death, which can further intensify the emotional distress. They may experience a range of complex feelings, including anger, guilt, and a sense of abandonment, and struggle with the profound void left by the loss of a parent (Averill, 2018). Coping with such traumatic experiences can profoundly impact various aspects of an individual's life, including identity formation, relationships, and overall well-being. The loss of a parent during this critical period of development can disrupt the sense of self and purpose, leading to questions about one's mortality and purpose in life.

Challenges college students face in processing grief and coping with the death of a parent

The result of the study revealed five key categories encompassing the challenges faced by college students experiencing grief. These categories include emotional distress, increased responsibilities, financial distress, and spiritual and existential struggles.

Emotional Distress. One predominant challenge encountered by college students who have experienced parental death is emotional distress. Their loss takes a range of complex

feelings, including melancholy, hopelessness, loneliness, and agony. This emotional turmoil profoundly affects their day-to-day activities and may harm their mental health. In addition, they may also find it more difficult to properly deal with their loss as a result of this emotional upheaval.

"Galisod kog handle sakong kaugalingon." [I struggle to handle myself.] P1

"Na stress ko og na depress ko nga ako ray nakabalo kay di man ko ganahan makig storya." [I feel stressed and depressed, and I do not want to talk to anyone.] P1

"Masuya ko sa uban nga naa pay papa. Dili gyud sya sayon nga challenge kay murag taga adlaw ko nakig lambisog ana bitaw." [I feel envious of others who still have fathers. It's not an easy challenge because it feels like I'm battling every day.] P4

"Lisod mo padayon sa matag adlaw nga wala siya. To be honest, wa pako ka cope up og hangtod run mangita gibapon ko sa presensya sakong mama." [It's challenging to continue each day without her. To be honest, I haven't fully coped up until now, and I still long for the presence of my mother.] P6

"Depression and anxiety. Mura syag naay nawala nga part sa akoo nga di na mabalik. Very difficult to face tungod kay sa mama man gud murag diha nimo makuba ang love and comfort." [Depression and anxiety. It feels like there is a part of me that can never be regained. It's extremely difficult because with my mom, it's like that's where you get love and comfort.] P6

"Kanunay kong naghilak, kay ako ang kamanghuran sa mag-igsuon ug labing close sakong mama." [I always cry, since I am the youngest and we are so close.] P7

The experience of losing a parent or sibling can leave a lasting impact on a child's mental health, rendering them more vulnerable to developing mental health problems in the face of future losses. Research suggests that the impact of a parental death may have an even more significant effect on mental health than the initial loss. (Bodden, 2017) When a child has already experienced the profound grief and emotional distress associated with previous grief, subsequent losses can compound vulnerability, potentially exacerbating symptoms of anxiety, Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health challenges. The cumulative burden of grief and the compounding effects of multiple griefs highlight the importance of providing appropriate support and resources to help children navigate the complex emotions and psychological impact of repeated family losses. (Am J Psychiatry, 2018)

Furthermore, the level of attachment between children and parents, as well as the children's previous experiences in the parent-child relationship, significantly influence the ability to effectively navigate challenging situations. The initial attachment formed in the early stages of life greatly shapes the children future social and emotional outcomes. (Cullen K, 2018).

Increased Responsibilities. It is revealed in this study that college students who are grieving over the death of a parent commonly face the challenge of taking on more roles. The participants found themselves bearing increased responsibilities at a young age.

“Pressured sad ko sakong family samot na kay ako maoy eldest gyud kay pagka wala sakong mama ang responsibilidad niya kay napasa sa akoo.” [I feel pressured by my family, especially since I am the eldest, and after my mother passed away, her responsibilities were passed on to me.] P2

“Ako nalang gi huna-huna nga kayahon nako as long as I live.” [I just think that I should endure so long as I live.] P3

“Gabunahunaan sab nako ang akong mga igsoon, kinsa man ang motabang kanila? Kinsa man ang maghatag sa ilang mga kinabanglanon?” [I am also thinking of my siblings, who will also support them? Who will provide their needs?] P8

These extra duties can put immense pressure on college student's time management, emotional well-being, and capacity to focus on goals in education because the increased stress of caring for others and taking care of household chores may leave college students with less time and energy for self-care, socializing, and academic pursuits, which could influence the general well-being and academic performance.

The burden of increased responsibilities among college students dealing with grief and parental death can significantly impact the adolescent's well-being and academic journey. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, academic institutions can provide the necessary support systems to help these students navigate their responsibilities while maintaining a healthy mind and academic success (Johnson, 2020).

Financial distress. Financial distress has an extreme effect on individuals and families alike. The grief of losing loved ones is already unbearable, and when coupled with the fear of financial instability and the uncertainty of ever fully recovering, the effects become direr. These uncontrollable circumstances can have a drastic ripple effect on the affected families. Financial constraints exacerbate existing tensions and strain relationships, which make bereaved families' struggle much more difficult.

“Lisod kaayo kay wa nako kabibaw kinsay mo-suporta nako sa akong pag skwela karon.” [I felt very difficult is to accept, because I was thinking also of who will be the one to support me in studying right now.] P8

“Ang kakulangan sa pinansyal nga suporta. Walay bisan kinsa nga motabang kanako sa pagskwela.” [the lack of financial support. No one will be going to support me in studying.] P10

When a parent dies, the children may feel empty and start to notice their prejudices when they see others who have happy, fulfilled families. Children are, therefore, compelled to stand as early as possible due to the absence of assistance that younger siblings require. Because of their unfulfilled needs, children who experience destructive emotions cannot be

held accountable. Children who exhibit depressive, nervous, angry, or sad feelings when their parents are away are said to have emotional repercussions (Erica et al., 2019).

Spiritual and Existential Struggles. Grieving can raise significant concerns about life. Spiritual and existential challenges commonly accompany it as people struggle with profound issues about life, death, and the meaning of existence. These challenges may lead people to question their faith and doubt God. The following statement makes this abundantly evident:

“Nawad-an kog paglaum ug pagsalig sa Ginoo og lisud gyud sya e handle, pero gapadayon ra gihapon.” [I lost hope and trust in God, and it's difficult to handle, but I continue to persevere.] P1

“Maka wala syag pagsalig sa Ginoo.” [I lost my trust to God.] P3

According to Kubler-Ross's Stages of Grief, anger is commonly experienced by patients as they concede reality. The feelings may be directed to others such as family members, spiritual providers, or higher providers (Tyrrell, 2023)

Parents play a crucial role in guiding the children towards genuine freedom, which involves selflessness, respect for others, justice, open dialogue, generous service, and solidarity. Christian parents, in particular, are responsible for nurturing their children's faith and helping fulfill God-given vocation.

As educators, parents should teach children the true meaning of suffering and death by being attentive to various forms of suffering and fostering attitudes of closeness, assistance, and sharing, particularly towards family members who are sick or elderly. After losing a parent, circumstances characterized by suffering, isolation, financial struggles, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about the future can lead people to make choices that devalue life. However, it is crucial to recognize that despite life's hardships and mysteries, it is a remarkable and precious gift that should be celebrated with joy and respect. In the face of adversity, acts of charity can provide hope and practical opportunities for individuals to embrace life (Pope Paul II, 1995).

College students' coping strategies in navigating their grief

The researchers identified two categories related to the college students' coping strategies in dealing with the challenges of grief: Seeking support, and embracing acceptance.

Seeking Support. In times of death, seeking support is an integral and innate aspect of being human. Whether faced with the loss of a loved one or contemplating one's mortality, seeking solace, understanding, and guidance can bring immense comfort during these difficult moments. By reaching out for support, individuals can effectively navigate the complex emotions that accompany death, gain valuable perspective, and discover solace in the empathetic presence of others.

“Akong mama ragyud akong mastoryahan sa tanan.” [I do not have anyone else to talk to except my mother.] P1

“Nagpa ka busy nalang ko pirmi sa church para di nako ma huna-hunaan.” [I keep myself busy all the time to avoid thinking too much. Engaging in church activities has helped me.] P1

"Church activities og mga tawo sa simbahan, akong mga nanay. Kay ma-motivate ko sa ilang mga istorya." [I engage in church activities and interact with people in the church, especially with the elderly people in the church.] P2

"Ako nalang gi hunahuna nga kayabon nako as long as I live. Tungod pud sa mga encouragement sa mga friends nako." [I just think that I should strive to improve as long as I live. It is also because of the encouragement from my friends.] P3

"E divert nako akong emotion, like mo join sa activities sa Church." [I divert my emotions. I join activities in the Church.] P4

"...dayun mo try og share sakong mga friends, kay nag care gyud diay sila, ako lang ang ga gapalayo." [...and try to share with my friends because my friends actually care, and I was the one keeping my distance.] P4

"Spending a lot of time with my friends. Kay pagka wala sakong mama kay mura nag walay tarong among pamilya. So akong atensyon kay gina baling nako sakong mga friends." [Spending a lot of time with my friends. Because without my mother, our family feels incomplete. So, I divert my attention to my friends.] P6

"Gi encourage ko sa among pari na mag ampo kanunay, especially mo attend ug misa and mag rosaryo." I was encouraged by our priest to pray always. I always attend mass celebrations and pray the rosary, which somehow allows me to move forward.] P9

Showing willingness to be present, providing helpful advice, and recognizing one's grief process can all create a supportive environment where people feel understood and cared for. Support and understanding validate the emotions and assist adolescents in navigating the healing process and coping with the loss.

The absence of parents improves emotional maturity and leads adolescents toward feelings of loneliness, which is unsurprising in the absence of solid emotional support (Bashir et al., 2021). These children need to make up for it by seeking social support from other places, such as making friends, going out to parties, and building different groups where children might get what they need. This also explains why children who do so have more muscular emotional maturity. The participants emphasized the need to be wanted and supported during that time, especially after losing their parent's unconditional love and support.

Embracing Acceptance. An essential component of coping is accepting and allowing oneself to feel the whole spectrum of emotions accompanying grieving. The subsequent statement demonstrates this beyond any doubt:

"Padayon gihapon sa kinabubi bahalag naay mga experience nga dili maayo para nato. Be strong kay kung magpadala ka sa imong gibati, mawala gyud ka sa passing." [I continue with life, even though there are experiences that are not favorable.

Be strong because if you let your emotions take over, you'll lose your way.]

P2

"Lisud gyud sya e cope up labaw na kay close ko sakong parent pero naay reason ang tanan. Maong padayon. Try to enjoy although nag long ka sa imong parent." [It is not easy to cope, especially since I am close to my parents. But everything has a reason. So, continue to live life. Enjoy yourself even though you long for the presence of your parent] P3

"...Go with the flow nalang ko sakong life karun." [But I have made her my motivation. I will just go with the flow in my life right now.] P5

"Acceptance nalang gyud. Wala nako naka depende sakong mama kay wala naman sya, akong kaugalingon nalang gyud akong gisaligan. Kinahanglan nimong magpadayon, busa kinahanglan ko nga magpaka kusgan." [I just have to accept it. I can no longer rely on my mother, so I have to rely on myself. I need to move forward, so I must stay strong.] P5

"Dawaton nalang gyud. Wala nako naka depende sakong mama, akong kaugalingon nalang gyud akong gisaligan." [I just have to accept it. I can no longer rely on my mother, so I have to rely on myself.] P6

"Never lose hope nalang gyud. Magpaka strong nalang kay dili tungod kay wala nay giniklanan magpa parewara nalang pud. I need to move forward, so I need to be strong." [I will never lose hope. I will be strong because just because I no longer have parents does not mean I should give up. I need to move forward, so I must stay strong.] P7

"Akoa nalang syang gi take positively. Akoa nalang gibutang sakong buna buna nga tanan mawala ra aning kalibutana." [I take it positively. I put in my mind that everything in this world is temporary.] P8

In Kubler-Ross's stages of grief, acceptance is not the end of grief. In many cases, acceptance came with bitterness. It involves adjusting to the new standard, redefining roles and responsibilities, and figuring out how to deal with daily life's emotional and practical aspects without parents (Guzzo, 2021). It is a stage where one comes to terms with the new reality. This phase is challenging, for there may be good days and bad days and good days again. People in this stage may concentrate more on cherishing their remaining time and reflecting on their experiences (Tyrell, 2023).

It is essential to permit oneself to feel the pain, sadness, frustration, and confusion (Clarke, 2022). Acknowledge these feelings as an inevitable part of grief rather than denying or ignoring these feelings. It starts to process and move through the emotions to heal and find peace by acknowledging and accepting them gradually. Remember that it is acceptable to experience and express emotions because they are essential to healing and personal growth. Children must slowly accept that their parents are not always there during challenging moments.

IMPLICATIONS

In the context of grief and coping with the loss of a parent, college students can gain practical insights. They can develop resilience by learning to confront challenges, seek support, and tap into their inner strength to overcome difficulties. This experience can also cultivate empathy, enabling students to comprehend others' struggles better and offer compassion and help to those facing similar hardships. Additionally, the journey through grief and parental loss can lead to personal growth and transformation, allowing students to discover their inner strengths, adopt new life perspectives, and shape their values. Coping with loss can also instill a deeper appreciation for people and relationships, encouraging students to value their loved ones and prioritize meaningful connections. Furthermore, this experience can inspire college students to find purpose and meaning in their lives by honoring their parents' memory, making a positive impact, or pursuing fulfilling paths. These practical implications can enhance college students' personal development and overall well-being as they navigate life's challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher endorses the following recommendations:

1. The school should establish an Absent Parent Grant Program to financially assist students who have lost a parent, requiring students to contribute service hours in return.
2. The school should establish dedicated grief counseling services within colleges that can provide essential emotional support and coping strategies for bereaved students.
3. The school should promote student utilization of the guidance office for workshops with peer counselors and free therapy sessions, facilitating coping strategy development and providing valuable community support.
4. The school should develop a grief support plan, including training teachers and staff on grief sensitivity, to provide students with necessary support and understanding in the educational environment.
5. The student council should raise awareness to destigmatize grief and promote understanding of challenges faced by students coping with parental death through social media campaigns and school events.
6. Future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of customized interventions, including counseling, support groups, expressive therapies, and mindfulness practices, customized to aid college students coping with parental loss to develop evidence-based approaches and support systems for this vulnerable population.

By implementing these recommendations, it is essential to create a supportive and empathetic environment for college students who have stories of grief and coping with parental death. Through awareness, education, and community support, the students can navigate grief, develop effective coping strategies, and find solace in healing.

CONCLUSION

The stories of grief and how people cope with the death of a parent offer valuable insights into the profound emotional impact of such experiences. Experiencing the death of

a parent can be a profoundly personal and transformative journey. It involves a range of emotions, including sadness, sorrow, anger, confusion, and longing. The loss disrupts the familiar and secure foundation of a person's life, forcing adolescents to navigate an uncertain and changed reality. The deceased parent leaves a void that is challenging to fill, as individuals of all ages yearn for the love, guidance, and support typically provided by a parent.

Each individual finds a unique path to healing and adapting to the new circumstances. Some may find solace in cherished memories, drawing comfort from revisiting positive moments shared with the absent parent. Others may seek support from family, peers, and church communities for guidance and emotional assistance. Despite the pain and challenges of grief and coping with parental absence, individuals often demonstrate strength and determination. May develop inner resilience, independence, and self-reliance upon learning to navigate life without one or both parents. Some may even find motivation in achievements, dedicating themselves to honoring the memory of the absent parent or proving resilience in the face of adversity. Moreover, the stories of grief and coping with parental death demonstrate the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. While the pain of parental death may never entirely disappear, individuals can find ways to honor the past, embrace the present, and build a hopeful future.

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