



Grieving Process and Grief Coping Strategies of Selected Bereaved Students in a State College in Manila

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ABSTRACT

This study looked into the grieving process and grief coping strategies of bereaved college students in a state college in Manila. Grief and bereavement affect students holistically, impacting their emotional, cognitive, physical, social, and spiritual/religious state because of these impacts, it is extremely important for faculty and administration of the institute to recognize the frequency of grief on campus. It is also crucial for the institution to understand how students respond to their grieving and to identify who are grieving, to ensure that the institution retains students. To determine the grieving process and grief coping strategies of students in a state college in Manila, a researcher-made survey was validated and reliability tested. The respondents of this study are composed of 61 bereaved students from College of Arts and Sciences. Based on the results gathered, the respondents often experience the feeling of grief upon learning that they have lost a loved one during the difficult time of pandemic. Although, acceptance was very highly expressed, they likewise suffer highly from denial; bargaining; anger and depression. They deal with their grief using the two orientations – loss and restoration—equally. Both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented obtained a mean of 2.75 with an interpretation of “often” indicating that the bereaved student moderately employs the grief coping strategy of both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented. And, there is no significant and positive relationship between the grieving process the respondents experienced and their grief coping strategies.

RESUMO

Este estudo analisou o processo de luto e as estratégias de enfrentamento do luto de estudantes universitários enlutados em uma faculdade estadual em Manila. O luto e o luto afetam os alunos de forma holística, impactando seu estado emocional, cognitivo, físico, social e espiritual/religioso. Por causa desses impactos, é extremamente importante que o corpo docente e a administração do instituto reconheçam a frequência do luto no campus. É também crucial que a instituição compreenda como os estudantes respondem ao seu luto e identifique quem está em luto, para garantir que a instituição retém os estudantes. Para determinar o processo de luto e as estratégias de enfrentamento do luto dos estudantes de uma faculdade estadual em Manila, uma pesquisa feita por pesquisadores foi validada e a confiabilidade testada. Os entrevistados deste estudo são compostos por 61 estudantes enlutados da Faculdade de Artes e Ciências. Com base nos resultados levantados, os entrevistados muitas vezes vivenciam o sentimento de luto ao saberem que perderam um ente querido durante o difícil momento da pandemia. Embora a aceitação tenha sido expressa de forma muito intensa, eles também sofrem muito com a negação; de barganha; raiva e depressão. Eles lidam com o luto usando as duas orientações – perda e restauração – igualmente. Tanto o aluno orientado para a perda quanto o orientado para a restauração obtiveram média de 2,75 com uma interpretação de “frequentemente” indicando que o aluno enlutado emprega moderadamente a estratégia de enfrentamento do luto tanto do aluno orientado para a perda quanto do orientado para a restauração. E não há relação significativa e positiva entre o processo de luto vivenciado pelos entrevistados e suas estratégias de enfrentamento do luto.

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Introduction

One of the most traumatic experiences in a person's life is the death of a close relative or friend. It can be extremely distressing to lose a close friend, lover, or family member. It is common for people to have an array of physical and emotional emotions as they come to terms with the loss. Grieving a loved one's passing is difficult at any point in time, but it will be especially difficult if they passed away during the corona virus pandemic, whether from COVID-19 or another cause. Arora & Bhatia (2023) describe the fatalities that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic as "bad deaths," which are characterized by physical discomfort, difficulty breathing, social isolation, psychological anguish, and poor treatment. Grief reactions are the emotional responses to loss that vary considerably from person to person and throughout time.

Bereavement, as stated by Shear (2012), is a major stressor that causes unpleasant and incapacitating acute mourning symptoms, which normally lead to the restoration of a satisfying, albeit altered, existence. Most of the time, grief doesn't need medical attention. On the other hand, complicated grief, a chronic, incapacitating condition, can occasionally develop from acute grief if it is allowed to fester.

While grief is most connected with loss following the death of a loved one, it can also be associated with other types of loss that causes the bereavement too difficult to endure. Grief is a long process that incorporates many different feelings and behaviors, and external actions of mourning are the behavioral elements displayed by the grieving person, which may be evident into day to day lived experiences. Grieving might be more difficult, because people won't be able to see their grandparents whenever they want, whether at home or in the hospital. In emergency rooms, family members who lost loved ones alone were left to see their agonizing deaths (Arnaldo, 2021).

Symptoms of grief can significantly impact a person's ability to function and may also impact his/her safety. During the coronavirus pandemic, loneliness among students was prevalent, according to Labrague et al. (2021). As protective factors against loneliness, resilience, coping mechanisms, and social support were noted. It takes time to adjust to the absence of physical touch with other family members, friends, and colleagues. Given that, managing the risk of having the virus and worrying about people dear who are more vulnerable, as well as adapting to lifestyle adjustments is difficult for many and does affect mental health especially when people are grieving.

According to Romm (2014), grief is associated with an increase in physical pain, blood pressure, and blood clots as well as an increase in appetite loss, which is probably caused by people experiencing less pleasure from eating.

Furthermore, because coping with a big loss takes precedence, grief can have a detrimental influence on concentration, by extension, and academic performance. Alternatively, a mourning person may try to avoid coping with sadness by focusing excessively on schoolwork. However, to reach a resolution, the sentiments must be explored. Hence, this study was intended to better understand the grieving process and coping strategies of selected bereaved students in a state college in Manila during COVID-19 pandemic. To help address the main concerns of this study, the researchers answered the following questions: 1. What is the assessment of the selected bereaved students of a state college in Manila in terms of their grieving process?; 2. How do the selected bereaved students assess their grief coping strategies?; and 3. Is there any significant relationship between grieving process and grief coping strategies of the selected bereaved students?

Literature Review

The pandemic, in the view of Aquino & Balinbin (2020), has made Filipinos' suffering and grief worse, as well as their incapacity to grieve healthily and the helplessness that their family and friends feel for not being able to physically comfort them. So the comfort that is required won't be apparent like it was before.

Domingo, Caal, Capoquin, and Labine (2016), in their study showed the majority of pupils who have experienced a sudden loss may go through one of the most difficult and traumatic experiences a teenager can encounter. This serves as an example of how grief affects productivity, emotional reactions, psychosomatic reactions, and the ongoing thoughts of the deceased in addition to self-image, maturity, and social relationships. The study's findings show that after experiencing a loss, students turn to their friends' and families' emotional support as a coping mechanism.

Parental loss and its implications on bereaved students are crucial (Dizon, 2019), as they can aid in grieving counseling, knowing the actual effects on their psychological well-being and academic success, as well as comprehending the perceived effect of their parents' death on themselves. It may have an impact on the creation of strategies and/or programs to support grieving students in both the psychological (particularly autonomy, which received the lowest average mean result from the respondents) and academic facets of their lives (particularly adaptive and help-seeking, where the respondents received a low mean average) according to the findings of the study.

College students report mild levels of weariness during the required lockdown period, according to the cross-sectional study by Labraque & Ballad (2021). Lower levels of lockdown fatigue were linked to greater coping capacity and personal resilience. Implementing treatments to improve college students' coping mechanisms and personal resilience can help address practice implications like as lockdown fatigue.

The unforeseen, hasty deaths of COVID-19 patients have become the new norm, with people dying in a matter of days or even hours. The sick are kept away from friends and family members, such as lovers, parents, and children, and the dead are quickly cremated after passing away, depriving their loved ones of the typical rites and rituals (Lapena, 2021).

Skritskaya (2012) argues that one of life's most difficult events is bereavement. Acute grief is the result, and it is defined by strong and all-consuming desire and longing for the deceased, frequent thoughts and memories of the deceased, and very minimal interest in things unrelated to the deceased loved one.

COVID-19 has been found to have a variety of effects while people are in grieving, including a potential impact on the general public's mental health (not just the bereaved) (Stroebe, Schutt, and Stroebe, 2020). Anger, guilt, worry, melancholy, and loneliness are only a few examples of strong or differentially focused emotional responses (to authorities, healthcare providers, etc.).

Grieving is a very personal process and there is no right or wrong way to do it. How someone grieves depends on a variety of factors, including their personality and coping mechanisms, life experience, religious beliefs, and the gravity of the loss (Smith, Robinson, & Segal, 2023).

In addition to the mental and physical health conditions that are typical of adults with grief disorder, such as anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, Glickman (2021) made a study on the effects of grief on college students and discovered that lack of concentration and focus, lack of motivation, sleep issues, isolation from family and friends, suicidal ideation, subpar grades, and potential dropout or dismissal were also effects of grief.

A study on the grieving process and coping strategies of bereaved college students in the Philippines, compared their experiences with those of their non-bereaved peers. The findings suggest that bereaved students tend to experience more significant psychological distress and utilize more maladaptive coping strategies (Santos & David, 2016). Manalo & Ramos (2018) explored on the experiences of bereaved college students in the Philippines, focusing on their perceptions of grief and coping strategies. The findings reveal that these students rely heavily on social support from family, friends, and peers to cope with their grief. It also emphasizes the role of mental health professionals in providing appropriate interventions and support for bereaved students. Tiu & David (2019) investigates the relationship between bereavement and academic performance among college students in the Philippines. The findings suggest that bereavement has a negative impact on academic performance, particularly in terms of attendance and course grades. That study highlights the

need for colleges and universities to provide support services for bereaved students to help mitigate the negative effects of grief on their academic performance.

These studies highlight the challenges faced by bereaved students in coping with their grief and the importance of providing appropriate support to help them navigate this difficult process. Institutions, mental health professionals, and society as a whole must recognize the unique needs of bereaved students and work together to ensure they receive the necessary assistance to overcome their grief and continue their academic pursuits (De Guzman, 2020).

The aforementioned conditions provided a general view of the wave of effects due to COVID-19 that are found to be linked to the understanding of bereavement and loss.

Materials and Methods

The researchers used descriptive-correlational method to determine and analyze the participants' grief process and how they cope with loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship of these variables was also determined. The core data was gathered using survey design administered online utilizing Google forms that gathered credible information about the status of an individual who had lost a loved one during the initial hit of the COVID-19 pandemic and is grieving while enhanced-community quarantine was in effect. From a total population of 87, a sample of 61 bereaved college students who are enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences of a state college in Manila for school year 2020-2021 comprise the respondents of the study. The respondents are mostly female, ages 18-23, regular and irregular student status, working and non-working students from five (5) departments in the College of Arts and Sciences particularly enrolled in Bachelor of Science in Mathematics, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Bachelor of Science in Applied Physics, Bachelor of Science in Computer Science and Bachelor of Science in Psychology and from first to fourth year levels. These students dealt with loss and grief during the first year of COVID-19 pandemic for the said school year. The researchers gathered information regarding the students' grief process and coping mechanisms during a pandemic using a structured researcher-made survey questionnaire.

The researchers conducted a pre-survey of 50 bereaved college students from various schools in Manila to assess the survey questionnaire's validity and reliability. To ensure its validity, experts in the field reviewed the questionnaire, and a statistician using the split-half reliability formula and Cronbach Alpha determined the reliability. The researchers also used a validated 69-item survey questionnaire that was divided into two halves using a 4-point Likert-type scale. Dr. Kubler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief, Theory of Grief was used to create the first part, which comprises 49 items. The five phases of sorrow are: a) Denial, b) Anger, c) Bargaining, d) Depression, and e) Acceptance. The second part is a 20-item scale that examines students' grieving skills during a pandemic and is based on Stroebe and Schut's Dual-Process Model: loss-orientation and restoration-orientation.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study are shown in the tables that follow. On the grieving process of selected bereaved students, the student-respondents often experience the feeling of grief upon learning that they have lost a loved one during the difficult time of pandemic. Table 1 shows the summary table on grieving process, acceptance (2.86) was very highly expressed, they likewise suffer highly from denial (2.63); bargaining (2.61); anger (2.60) and depression (2.59), respectively. Since, acceptance scored high on this process this indicates that the bereaved students have experienced grief and had been able to cope with it successfully on several occasions. Though the respondents often find themselves to accept the loss, they still cannot be able to fully embrace change and feel the closure. Stanaway (2020) contends that acceptance does not mean the absence of suffering, feeling, or trauma. It does not imply support for what is taking place. It entails accepting the challenges one faces, reinforcing the motivation to succeed, and realigning oneself with the circumstances at hand. Given the replies' awareness, acceptance might be frequently displayed. Thus, it indicates that the bereaved students have experienced grief and has been able to cope with it successfully on several occasions. People are completing or resolving a problem they are suffering but will never get over what COVID-19 took from them (Dangor, 2020). The respondents show awareness; thus, acceptance may be often shown.

Table 1.

Summary Table on Grieving Process

Variables	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
<i>Denial</i>	2.63	Often
<i>Anger</i>	2.60	Often
<i>Bargaining</i>	2.61	Often
<i>Depression</i>	2.59	Often
<i>Acceptance</i>	2.86	Often

While, grief-coping strategies of selected bereaved students shown in Table 2 that the dual process of grief strategies: loss-oriented and restoration-oriented, the respondents deal with their grieving using the two orientations equally. Both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented resulted in 2.75 mean with an interpretation of "often" or indicates that the bereaved students moderately employ the grief coping strategy of both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented. The Dual Process Model of Grief states that both types, "restoration-oriented"

activities and "loss-oriented" activities, are beneficial. During the grieving process, people frequently switch between them (Thompson, Williams, Masso, Morris, Kobel, Duncan, & Samsa, 2017). When one experiences healthy grief, the individual can remember the significance of loss while experiencing a newfound sense of serenity rather than excruciating suffering.

Table 2.

Summary Table on Grief Coping

Variables	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
<i>Loss-oriented</i>	2.75	Often
<i>Restoration-oriented</i>	2.75	Often

Further on the relationship of grieving process and grief-coping strategies on Table 3, the findings revealed that the research hypotheses raised in this study was tested at 0.05 level of significance that there is no significant relationship between grieving process and grief coping strategies of the selected bereaved students in a state college was rejected since there is significant relationship between grieving process and grief coping strategies of bereaved students. The statistics resulted to computed R-value of 0.639 and p-value of "almost zero" which is lower to the level of significance $\alpha = 0.005$. The decision is to reject the null-hypothesis. Thus, the result was interpreted as "moderate positive relationship". This implies that the grieving process in terms of depression has sufficient evidence to prove that it has significant relationship to grief coping strategies. According to Bruce (2020), the grief process is normal, and most people go through it. But when grief takes over your life that is when you begin to feel hopeless, helpless, and worthless. Other people don't have the coping skills or support they need that hinders the grieving process and by the way people experience depression it was associated on how they react on bereavement. On the Other hand, the research of Dyregrov, Dyregrov, and Kristensen (2016), a number of coping tactics, such as avoidance, protection, diversion, both adaptive and maladaptive rumination, thought control, and confrontation, are used when people encourage adaptability during their grieving process.

Table 3.

Grieving Process and Grief Coping Strategies of Bereaved Students

Variable	Computed r-Value	Degree of Relationship	P -value	Decision	Interpretation
Grieving Process vs Grief Coping Strategies	0.639	Moderate Positive Relationship	Almost zero	Reject HO	Significant

The researchers offered the following recommendations: First, considering the restrictions during the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents who have experienced different forms of grief due to limited physical support needs more variety of support from their living loved ones such as recreational activities, etc. to strengthen well-being and to avoid post-traumatic stress. Next, continuously seek for more effective and efficient intervention services for grieving, acknowledge emotions and ask for visitation. Also give particular attention to them so they will not find difficulty in expressing themselves. Seek for the right coping strategies that best helps their grieving. Further, the school administrators and teachers may consider enhancing their connections with grieving students through programs by means of workshops and seminars on emotional attachment/adjustment and coping strategies especially to other non-psychology major or practitioner who has no or little background in managing emotions, grief, and mental health. It also helps to establish referral mechanisms for students who need additional support and provide teachers with recommendations on how to share information about the death with their students. Finally, pay special attention to students who have just experienced a death or significant life change, have seen a death, or have emotional issues.

Conclusion

With these, the following conclusions were drawn based on the specific findings of the study. First, the bereaved student-respondents often experienced the different stages of grief upon learning that they have lost a loved one during the first year of COVID-19 pandemic. According to the five (5) stages of grief, the results show that the respondents have gone to all phases of grief though not sequentially. Thus, the grieving process of the bereaved students are often experienced on several occasions. Second, the bereaved student-respondents were equally using both loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping strategies. It shows that respondents may find it difficult to fully undergo restoration from grieving because data revealed that grief coping strategies were moderately employed. Lastly, there is significant relationship between grieving process of bereaved students on their grief coping strategies. Thus, the level of responses on grieving process is associated with how students cope on their grieving.

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