

Grief Reactions and Psychological Wellbeing of Parentally Bereaved Students in Public Secondary Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates grief reactions and psychological wellbeing of parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, the study target population was 841 parentally bereaved students in public secondary school students in Kisumu Central Sub County. Stratified random sampling was used to draw a sample size of 271 students. The participants completed an adapted version of the Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) and the Psychological Well-being (SPWB). There was a significant negative relationship between grief reactions and psychological wellbeing. The study recommends that Counselling Associations, in collaboration with school authorities and social workers should develop a grief therapy program that could help to manage various grief reaction symptoms among students to improve their psychological wellbeing. Secondly, guidance and counseling teachers should constantly organize grief counseling for in-school adolescents who have lost their parents. It will help to identify their grief reactions in time and salvage the effects on their school activities

KEYWORDS –Bereavement, Grief Reactions, Loss, Psychological Wellbeing, Students,

I. INTRODUCTION

Loss, grief, and bereavement are part of human experience and are natural, painful, unpredictable events of life. The loss of a parent is a potentially devastating life event that can affect the child's life in many ways, it has been related to adverse health, social, psychological, and educational outcomes throughout life (Berg, Rostila & Hjern, 2016; Hoeg et al., 2018). Mentec and Flahault (2015) referred to the parental loss as a dramatic experience in life for children with long-term effects. The experience of death, especially of a parent, has been identified as the most stressful event in the life of children and adolescents (Hollingshaus & Smith, 2015). According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2017), the global orphan population is estimated at 130 million children. In 2017, approximately 13 million children lost their parents, according to data collected by UNICEF. A study conducted by Koblenz (2015) found that 2.5 million children under the age of 18 were said to have witnessed the death of a parent in the United States. In Sweden, about 4 percent of all children in Sweden witness the death of a parent before their 18 birthday (Berg, Rostila & Hjern 2016).

In Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa are the regions hardest hit by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) pandemic, and it is said to be home to around 6.2% of the world's population but over half (54%) of the total number of people living with HIV in the world (20.6 million people). In 2018, there were 800,000 new HIV infections, just under half of the global total (UNAIDS 2019). These infections lead to significant mortality rates; approximately 800,000 deaths were attributed to AIDS-related causes in 2015 (Fact Sheet 2016). Due to

the extensive prevalence of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, children are at continued risk of losing one or both parents to the virus, thereby contributing to orphanhood. The death of one or both parents can lead to a variety of negative consequences for children. Orphans are at a greater risk for malnutrition, school dropout, poor psychosocial well-being, and earlier sexual debut (WHO 2016). The death cases of people are on the increase in Kenya due to road accidents, fire outbreaks, HIV and AIDS pandemic, and other related illnesses. As of 2018, the prevalence of HIV in Kenya was 4.9 percent, with the prevalence found to vary across different counties (NACC, 2018). According to the 2018 Kenya Population HIV survey, the highest prevalence was 19.6 percent in Homabay County; 17.5 percent in Kisumu County; with 15.3 percent in Siaya County, third (Kajilwa, 2020). A study on 1565 orphaned and separated children in Uasin Gishu County reported post-traumatic symptoms prevalence of 28. % In street children, 15% among households, and 11.1% 34 among children in children's homes (Atwoli et al., 2014). Unfortunately, there is scanty research done in Kenya to assess parental bereavement and the psychological well-being of secondary school students.

It is thus against this background, that the researcher intends to examine the experience of grief reaction and psychological wellbeing among parentally bereaved students in Kisumu Central Sub-County. Given the number of young people who are bereaved each year, there is an interest among researchers and practitioners to understand how young people are affected by bereavement and to identify the best ways to help young people cope with bereavement. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the nature and severity of changes in a student's mental health after bereavement.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was a quantitative research study and it adopted a descriptive survey research design. A research questionnaire was used to gather information from a sample size of 271 parentally bereaved students a sample of the population of the study. The participants completed an adapted version of Depression and Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS-21) and a scale of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB), the questionnaire had three sections; Sections A, B, and, C: the demographic data; grief reactions, and psychological wellbeing. The instrument was patterned in a four-point and seven-point Likert-type rating scale. The two sets of scores were then correlated using Pearson Correlation. The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents while the results were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was to investigate grief reactions and psychological well-being of parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub County.

Research Question 1: What are the grief reactions to parental loss among in-school adolescents? The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Grief Reaction

Grief Reaction Level	Mean	Std deviation
I was aware of the dryness of my mouth	2.3051	.71469
I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	2.2966	.72416
I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g., excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	2.3093	.71584
I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	2.3051	.71469
I experienced trembling (e.g., in the hands)	2.3008	.71946
I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	2.2966	.72416
I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	2.2966	.72416
I felt down-hearted and blue	2.3008	.71946
I felt I was close to panic	2.3051	.71469

I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	2.2924	.72296
I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	2.3008	.71946
I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g., sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	2.2966	.71826
I felt scared without any good reason	2.3051	.71469
I felt that life was meaningless	2.3051	.71469

The most prevalent grief reaction experience by parentally bereaved students was experiencing breathing difficulty (mean= 2.309; standard deviation= 0.715) followed by finding it difficult to work up the initiative to do things (mean= 2.305; standard deviation= 0.714) and feeling one was close to panic (mean=2.305; standard deviation= 0.71469). The least prevalent grief reaction was being unable to become enthusiastic about anything (mean=2.292; standard deviation= 0.72296) followed by not seeming to experience any positive feeling at all (mean= 2.296; standard deviation= 0.72416) and worrying about situations in which one might panic and make a fool of oneself (mean=2.296; standard deviation= 0.72416)

For the majority of the grief reaction symptoms, the mean was determined to be over 2.3 meaning that the majority of the respondents experienced the above reactions either sometimes or often. A maximum standard deviation of 0.72 was determined across all mean scores thus indicating a small variation from the mean score. This means that there was no huge difference between the respondents as they were answering the questions increasing the confidence level of the data. Therefore, it was evident that the majority of the respondents admitted that they sometimes or often experienced grief reactions.

Research Question 2: What is the psychological wellbeing of parentally bereaved students in public secondary school? The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Psychological wellbeing

	Mean	Std deviation
I like most parts of my personality	4.3051	2.06081
When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far	4.2119	4.60407
Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them	4.2415	2.08463
The demands of everyday life often get me down	3.8936	1.52800
In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life	3.8559	1.80437
Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me	3.0424	1.90584
I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future	3.1398	2.02788
In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live	3.8390	2.17714
I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life	4.2500	1.46774
I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life	3.9025	1.95998
For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth	3.9831	2.21785
I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I	3.8630	2.19832

think about myself and the world

People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others	4.0551	2.22585
I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago	3.8686	1.94491
I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions	3.2754	2.09060
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others	3.7966	1.55774
I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think	4.3559	1.44708
I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important	4.3856	2.22166

The results revealed in Table 2 show that most parentally bereaved students had experienced the indicators of psychological well-being as many agreed that they experienced the psychological wellbeing elements to either a moderate degree, a great degree, or a very great degree. This is supported by the mean where the least mean obtained in the table above was 2.8559, thus, revealing a great extent of psychological well-being from the respondents who are the parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub County. A maximum standard deviation of 1.05 was determined across all the mean scores indicating small variation from the mean score thus a high confidence level.

The answer to Research Question 1, which aimed to determine the grief reactions of parentally bereaved students, can be found in Table 2. Since the majority of the instrument's questions were mentioned by the respondents, it can be inferred that parentally bereaved students have significant symptoms of grieving reactions. To determine whether there is a relationship in the descriptive results between grief reactions and psychological wellbeing of parentally bereaved students, a Pearson's correlation was used.

Table 3: correlation between Grief Reactions and Psychological Wellbeing

		Grief Reactions	Psychological Wellbeing
Grief reactions	Pearson Correlation	1	-.228**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	236	236
psychological wellbeing	Pearson Correlation	-.228**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	236	236

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the correlation table, the results showed that there is a negative correlation between grief reactions and three of the psychological well-being of parentally bereaved students. The findings indicated that

the higher the grief reaction in the parentally bereaved students, the lower their psychological well-being. This means that there is an inverse relationship between grief reactions and psychological wellbeing.

The results revealed that grief reactions impact the psychological well-being of parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub County. Attachment theory relates well to this study since the relationship between a child and the primary caregiver or the parent greatly affects how children understand and respond to loss, how they focus, how they are aware of their emotions, how they manage their feelings, how they face the trials and tribulations and how they form their future relationships (Bretherton & Mulholland, 1999). Also, attachment patterns can predict the bereavement process and how a child will adapt to the experience of bereavement, insecurely attached children have difficulty in dealing with negative emotions and are often unable to get support in the grieving process (Bowlby 1960).

The findings of this study are in line with Jan-Louise and Godfrey (2017), study on the individual experiences of adolescent sibling bereavement and its impact on adolescent development and psychological wellbeing, the study concluded that adolescent sibling bereavement is often a traumatic experience that may be compounded by other contextual factors and may lead to the complication of the grief process. The findings are also in line with Ntuli, Mokgatle, and Madiba's (2020) study on how experiencing maternal death affects the psychosocial wellbeing of orphaned youth who left school before completing high school. The Ntuli et al. (2020) study revealed that the death of their mothers has made a negative psychological impact on their psychosocial wellbeing, resulting in the development of internalizing depressive symptoms. Rimiru and Mokuu (2020), study the extent to which denial affects the psychological well-being of bereaved students in day public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Murang'a County, Kenya, and Hailegiorgis et al. (2018) who explored the psychological well-being of in-school orphaned and non-orphaned children in Ethiopia also complement the findings of this study. The findings of this study are in line with Abdel, et al. (2017) study on the prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety and its relationship to other sociodemographic variables of orphaned children in the Gaza Strip.

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to explore how parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub County experience grief reactions and how it impacts their psychological wellbeing, and the findings emphasize the impact that grief reactions can have on their life. The study found that there is a statistically significant negative relationship between grief reactions and the psychological wellbeing of parentally bereaved students in public secondary schools in Kisumu Central Sub County.

The study thus recommends that the government through the Ministry of Education come up with short programs or coursework on grief counseling for students to be taught in secondary schools. This may help equip the learners with important grief knowledge and can see them adopt very good coping styles that are favorable to students' psychological wellbeing. Such education, tailored to the students' ages and knowledge of death, maybe a powerful tool with which to provide students with emotional and coping resources.

The school administrators to periodically organize short seminars for guidance and counseling to help sharpen their skills and also them how to be good parents. Schools should improve peer counseling among their student bodies. The school administrators to also put-up plans to sensitize the teachers, students, and parents on the need for inclusion of learners with grief experiences in counseling programs so as increase their psychological wellbeing. Guidance and counseling teachers should constantly organize grief counseling for in-school adolescents who have lost their parents. This will help the bereaved students in identifying their grief reactions in time and salvage the effects on their school activities. Secondly, guidance and Counselling teachers should coordinate different response strategies, such as Bereavement Support Group (BSG), that could instantly give attention to grief reactions among students with the loss of a parent.

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