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Bereavement, Level Stress and Coping Mechanism among Teacher Education Students of Samar State University: College Bereavement Study

Perlito S. Domingo^{1*}

College of Education, Samar State University (SSU)

Archie G. Labine^{2**}

College of Education, Samar State University (SSU)

Trixie Joyce V. Capoquin^{3***}

College of Education, Samar State University (SSU)

Mae V. Cañal, RGC^{4****}

College of Arts and Sciences, Samar State University (SSU)

Abstract

Bereavement is a severe stressor that should be addressed properly. The study of Teacher education is very tight as it prepares soon to be educators that will light the future of other young children. This study sought to determine the level of stress and coping mechanism on bereavement among teacher education students of Samar State University. It tested some assumption using the descriptive survey method on 76 identified students who experienced bereavement. It shows that respondent manifested highly emotional and physical stress rather than behavioral stress. It shows that social support is coping mechanism. The said study being the first bereavement research in the city could provide baseline information in the field of bereavement.

Keywords: *bereavement, stress, coping mechanism*

*Perlito S. Domingo, College of Education, Samar State University, Catbalogan City, Philippines 6700
E-mail: perlitosabulaandomingo@yahoo.com

** Archie G. Labine, College of Education, Samar State University, Catbalogan City, Philippines 6700

***Trixie Joyce V. Capoquin, College of Education, Samar State University, Catbalogan City, Philippines 6700

****Mae V. Cañal, Registered Guidance Counsellor, College of Arts and Sciences, Samar State University, Philippines 6700

Introduction

Death is one of the most stressful life events that can happen to everyone, it is significant and universal family experience that affects the total personality of a human being like emotional, social, psychical and psychological which in return could also affects human interaction to the community where he or she belongs.

Meanwhile, Fajgenbaum (2007) noted that vast majority of scholarly literature about death, both qualitative and quantitative, addresses the plight of children, middle-aged adults and the elderly, not college aged men and women. Which was also connotatively seconded by Stapley et al (2015) and argued that college student bereavement is a topic that has received relatively little attention in the literature, but college students commonly have to learn how to emotionally regulate while coping with the death of someone close to them?

According to Mazo (2012), stress affects people from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, civil status, political affiliation, religious belief, economic status and profession. It affects decision-makers such as the politician, the manager, the priest or pastor, the employee, the housewife, the student, the out-of-school-youths, the driver, and even the jobless.

Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset the balance of a person, thus affecting the physical and psychological well-being of the person and thus would require appropriate action if one is to restore that balance. At one point stress was considered to be a transactional phenomenon dependent on the meaning of the stimulus to the perceiver. Thus, stress is not an ordinary thing that may be set aside and ignored. Giving utmost attention to it from the very start of the symptoms is necessary and taking proper action is a must to avoid its worst effects (Mazo 2015).

Shear (2011), claimed that bereavement is a severe stressor that typically incites painful and debilitating symptoms of acute grief that commonly progresses to restoration of a satisfactory, if changed, life. Normally, grief does not need clinical intervention. However, sometimes acute grief can gain a foothold and become a chronic debilitating condition called complicated grief. Moreover, the stress caused by bereavement, like other stressors, can increase the likelihood of onset or worsening of other physical or mental disorders.

Psychologists Lazarus and Folkman (1984) scientifically defined coping as the sum of cognitive and behavioural efforts, which are constantly changing, that aim to handle particular demands, whether internal or external, that are viewed as taxing or demanding. Simply put, coping is an activity we do to seek and apply solutions to stressful situations or problems that emerge because of our stressors. Actually, the term coping is more associated with reactive coping, because in general, we see coping as a response to a stressor. On the other hand, there is also what we call proactive coping, wherein the coping response is aimed at preventing a possible encounter with a future stressor. While coping mechanisms are brought about by a person's conscious minds, it does not mean that all of them bring about positive coping; there are some types of coping mechanisms which are maladaptive. Other psychologists say that maladaptive coping is also synonymous to non-coping, since a person who responds to a stressor using a coping mechanism but is not able to positively ward off the stressor or solve the stressful situation has not coped with the stress at all.

The Samar State University (SSU) is a state university in the Philippines and one of the leading universities in the Samar region. To achieve and maintain its status, the university should address the needs of all the means and its machinery including the students. However, bereavement can affect the development of the students both personal and professional.

This study sought to determine the level of stress, the coping mechanism of the students in the Samar State University, Catbalogan City, particularly those who are enrolled at Bachelor of Secondary and Elementary Education. Research sought to answer the profile of the students-respondents in terms of sex, age, circumstances of death and the relationship to the deceased.

Data gathered from this study will become baseline information on bereavement and will become part of the data of the university. This will help teachers, guidance counselors, advisers to understand partly the academic standing of the students and will help them to respond with this kind of problem the circumstances confront them.

This study is anchored with the two theories and one model of bereavement. First is the theory of Bowlby (1969 & 1973) a psychoanalyst and the father of attachment theory, empirically studied how the intensity of the grief could be influenced by the type of attachment that one had to the deceased. Bowlby (1969 & 1973) identified how the circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one affected the characteristics, intensity, and duration of the bereavement process.

His grief theory described a series of phases through which bereaved persons experience grief reactions and, in time, reach recovery. During the first phase, bereaved persons experience a period of numbness and shock, exhibit outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger, and are likely unable

to comprehend the full impact of the death. This is seen as a protective defense mechanism to blunt the emotions of the bereft. The bereaved persons then enter the second phase, composed of searching and yearning (pining) for the deceased to return. This stage includes crying, anxiety, anger, self-reproach, confusion, and loss of security. The grief reactions in Stage 3 are characterized by despair and disorganization as they must learn to bear life without the loved one. Bereaved individuals who successfully complete these phases enter Phase 4, where they begin, to a lesser or greater degree, the process of reorganization and recovery.

Further, is the theory of Worden (2002) which stated that extended bereavement theory emphasizing the role that counsellors and therapists play in offering care and comfort to grieving clients. Based on research with children and adults, Worden (2002) presented a unique conceptualization of “the mourning process” and outlined four distinct tasks of mourning. Worden explained that the word task was chosen as it seemed to better represent the work that the mourner must do to move through the grief process. The first task that the mourner must undertake is to accept the reality of the loss. Worden made a distinction between intellectual acceptance, that knows that the loss occurred, and emotional acceptance, which is a much more difficult and sometimes insurmountable task. The second task, working through the pain of grief, includes not only the pain of grief but also anxiety, anger, guilt, and other feelings associated with the loss. The third task, adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing, involves three types of adjustments to the loss. External adjustments involve realizing the roles that the deceased played in one’s life and developing strategies to fill those roles in his/her absence. Internal adjustments refer to the ways in which the bereft need to redefine their own selves after the loss. Spiritual adjustments are also necessary after loss, indicating that loss challenges one’s spiritual beliefs, causing one to explore existential issues more deeply. The fourth and last task of mourning, to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life, was based on the notion that survivors maintain continuing bonds with the deceased. This means that the bereft find ways to move on with life while continuing to maintain an emotional bond with the deceased.

The Dual Process Model depicted grief as an oscillatory process in which a bereaved individual alternately experiences and avoids suffering during the same period of time rather than in a linear fashion with one stage ending and another beginning. Psychologists Stroebe and Schut (1999) introduced the “Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement” to address the limitations of earlier models that presented grief as a series of stages, phases, or tasks.

To establish focus of the study, it was delimited to level of stress, the coping mechanism experience by the student-respondents of Samar State University. The student-respondents were limited to the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) enrolled during the 2nd semester of the school year 2015-2016 (Figure 1).

Conceptual Framework of the Study

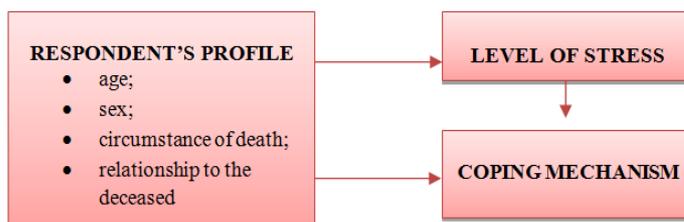


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Bereavement can impact “social relationships, productivity, emotional responses, psychosomatic responses, persistent thoughts of the deceased, effects on self-image, confidence, and maturity” (Balk, 1990, p. 116) in adolescents. According to Hogan and DeSantis as cited by Goldblatt (2011) who have studied this population in large community-based samples, this population may be at risk for medical, psychiatric, social, and behavioral dysfunction.

Elegbeleye & Oyedeji (2003) on Bereavement Truma and the Coping Ability of Widow/Ers: The Nigerian Experience the investigated the perception of death by the bereaved, the process of mourning and grief, the psychological and social malfunctioning which arise as a result of bereavement and the process of ‘grief work’ and the coping ability displayed by various victims of bereavement,

particularly widow/ers. The study employed the instrumentation of quantitative and qualitative research strategy to gather relevant data from the study.

In the study of Mazo (2015) on Causes, Effects of Stress, and the Stress Coping Mechanism of the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology Students in A Philippine University he used the descriptive survey method aimed at coming-up with the base line data on the causes of stress among students taking Information Technology, the effects of stress on them, and the coping mechanism that they employed to overcome their stress.

The researchers used the descriptive research design in gathering the student-respondents level of stress and coping mechanism. The study also aimed to describe the profile of the student's respondents in terms of their age, sex, the circumstances of the death of their love ones and their relationship to the deceased.

This study was conducted in the College of Education, Samar State University, Catbalogan City. A total of five hundred forty (540) students taking BSED and BEED were enrolled during the semester. The researcher conducted a pre-survey; seventy six (76) from all year level were identified who experienced bereavement.

This study used the following survey questionnaires: Part I solicited the personal information of the respondents such as gender, age, the circumstances of the death of their love ones and their relationship to the deceased. Part II was a 63 items checklist of the pre-identified question for level of stress commonly encountered by person who is suffering from the bereavement, which each items had five (5) options which of which are the following: Never (1), Almost never (2), Some of the time (3), Most of the time (4) and Almost Always (5), which we had adopted from the Counseling Team International. Part III is for Coping Mechanism, an adapted survey instrument from User Manual for the Coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) of David L. Tobin. The format of the CSI is adopted from Lazarus "Ways of Coping" questionnaires (Folkman & Lazarus, 1981), which assess coping strategies. Users have the option of requesting this stressor in an open-ended manner, or of requesting a particular type of stressor (e.g., one that precipitates headaches or one that was ineffectively coped with. The norm reported in this manual was developed with an open-ended format. Respondents took the CSI are asking to respond to 72 questions in a 5-item Likert format. Respondents indicated for each item the extent to which they performed the particular coping response in dealing with the previously describe situation. Each item has five (5) options which of which are the following: None (1), A little (2), Some (3), Much (4), Very much (5).

To test significance, the researchers used 0.05 level of significance two tailed test. The researchers also used several statistical software in the computation like SPSS version 16.0 and Microsoft Excel.

Results and Discussion

In Table 1 out of the seventy six (76) student-respondents there are 62 or 81.58% female while 14 or 18.42% were male. The average mean of the student-respondents age of female were 18.43 while the male is 18.73. The data implied that majority of the student-respondents who experience bereavement is female. The data also implied that student-respondents are within the age bracket of 18 and presume to be adolescent. The data also adhere to Muller (2015) where she cited Vries suggesting that younger adults are more distress than older adults.

There are 45 or 59.21% student respond sudden as circumstances of the death, meanwhile, 3 or 3.95% answered homicide as the circumstances of the death of their love one. It can be deduced that that unexpected death, violent, and deaths as a result of human agency were more associated with psychological distress than other type of circumstances, especially than those which occurred in natural circumstances (Benneth and Soulsby 2012). Moreover, Gummow (2013) said that the difficulty with sudden death is that it is unforeseeable and often involves horrific and violent incidents such as a road accident, suicide or heart attack, which can hinder the ability to cope. The ramifications for those who lose a loved one to sudden death are disastrous and often tear families apart because there is no time to prepare or say goodbye. Life is changed forever.

There are 49 student-respondents or 64.47% who experienced deaths of their parents while the other twenty seven (27) or 35.53% experienced loss of their siblings. It can be presumed that most number of the respondents suffered from parental bereavement and can be deduced that parentally bereaved teenagers often experience negative events following parental death that reduce self-esteem, such as a loss of positive interactions with significant others and/or increases in harsh parenting from a depressed surviving parent (Haine, 2003, Wolchick, 2006).

Table 1. Profile of the Student-Respondents

Variables		Mean	SD	F	Percentage
Age	Female	18.43	1.28	62	81.58
	Male	18.73	2.65	14	18.42
Circumstances of the Death	Sudden	-	-	45	59.21
	Anticipated	-	-	16	21.05
	Accident	-	-	9	11.84
	Suicide	-	-	3	3.95
	Homicide	-	-	3	3.95
Relationship to the deceased	My Parent(s)	-	-	49	64.47
	My Sibling(s)	-	-	27	35.53

As reflected in the Table 2 out of seventy six (76) student-respondents there are twenty seven (27) or 35.53% students-respondents manifested highly physical stress with an interpretation of “high level” in physical indicator symptoms along stress following the bereavement while the least four (4) or 5.26% experienced physical stress with an interpretation of “very low”. The result attest to Bennett and Soulsby (2012) that younger widowed people, bereavement are a non-normative event and therefore, its effects are less familiar. At younger age widowhood or bereavement experience is associated with the greater decline in physical and psychological health. Moreover, it was connotatively denoted by Shapiro et. al (1998) that stress had been shown to have deleterious effects on one’s physical and mental well-being.

The data in the table also shows 48 or 63.16% student-respondent experience severely emotional stress interpreted “danger” while the least 3 or 3.95% experience “very low” and “medium” following the death of their love ones. The data attest to Benneth and Soulsby (2012) that unexpected death, violent, and deaths as a result of human agency were more associated with psychological distress than other type of circumstances, especially than those which occurred in natural circumstances.

In Parkes’ seminal work he examines some of the determinants of grief, including the circumstances of the death (1996). He found that unexpected deaths, violent deaths, and deaths as a result of human agency (e.g., suicides) were more often associated with psychological distress than other types of circumstances, especially those which occurred in natural circumstances. Lopata cited by Benneth and Soulsby (2012) also discussed the effects of sudden or violent deaths on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved. She too found that these circumstances had a greater impact than those where the death was anticipated.

Table 2. Stress Indicators

Variates		F	Percentage
Physical	Very Low	4	5.26
	Medium	11	14.47
	High	27	35.53
	Very High	13	17.11
	Danger	21	27.63
Total		76	100
Emotional	Very Low	3	3.95
	Medium	3	3.95
	High	9	11.84
	Very High	13	17.11
	Danger	48	63.16
Total		76	100
Behavioral	Very Low	49	64.47
	Medium	17	22.37
	High	7	9.21
	Very High	2	2.63
	Danger	1	1.32
Total		76	100

Table 3 discloses that the student-respondent coping mechanism following the bereavement is the ‘Social Support’ with the grand mean of 3.33 interpreted as “Somewhat”, while the least used coping mechanism ‘Social Withdrawal’ with the grand mean of 2.46 interpreted as “A little”. This implies that the coping mechanism of the student-respondents following the bereavement is ‘Social Support’ which means that the student-respondents is seeking emotional supports from people, one’s family and one’s friends and student-respondents avoid from withdrawing relationship from friends and family.

Results adhere to Moran (2011) that one of the most common treatment options for bereavement is the use of support groups. Typically, support groups are found to be useful for those individual who are going through “uncomplicated” grieving process, or those who possess the resources necessary to naturally precede grieving process.

Results also adhere to Emr (2012) that social support, when available, satisfactory, and sufficient, can act as buffer, or safeguard the individual from the negative impact of stressors. Social supports help the individual adjust to loss, and reduce the like hood of maladaptive coping methods and depression. This support throughout the bereavement process facilitates not only better adjustment, but better physical health, less anxiety and depression and lower the used of psychometric medication.

Table 3. Coping Mechanism

Coping Mechanism	Grand Mean	Interpretation
Problem Solving	3.08	Somewhat
Cognitive Restructuring	2.9	Somewhat
Express Emotion	3.04	Somewhat
Social Support	3.33	Somewhat
Problem Avoidance	2.86	Somewhat
Wishful Thinking	3.23	Somewhat
Self-Criticism	2.82	Somewhat
Social Withdrawal	2.46	A Little

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn based on the results of this study:

1. Majority of the student-respondent are female, 18 – 19 years old, majority of the respondents experience sudden parental death. This attests that most of the student-respondents are teenagers and considered young adults. The result further attest that most of the student-respondent had experience one of the most painful, if not traumatic experiences for teenagers.

2. Majority of the student-respondent were affected and suffered from bereavement “severely” from emotional stress, “highly” affected from physical stress and affected “very low” in the behavior. This attest that bereavement can impact social relationships, productivity, emotional responses, psychosomatic responses, persistent thoughts of the deceased, effects on self-image, confidence, and maturity.

3. The results also implies that the coping mechanism of the student-respondents following the bereavement is ‘Social Support’ which means that the student-respondents is seeking emotional supports from people, one’s family and one’s friends.

Universities and communities devoted to scholarly endeavors and should explicitly incorporate the dimension on compassion and caring and provide personal health and stress management program and tips for student who had experienced bereavement.

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