

Experienced Grief on Parental Death

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine the experience of grief caused by parental loss by death and explored different factors which reflect the adaptive and maladaptive coping of individuals who experience grief. The purpose of the study was to understand the nature of the grief experience, to help promote healthy grieving and to inform counseling and therapy. Sample of the study comprised of five females, who had lost at least one parent by death. Semi structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted as the method of analysis and themes were extracted from transcripts of interviews. IPA provides comprehensive insight into participants' lived experiences. Findings of the study revealed that experience of grief affects every individual and coping with their grief and loss of parents changed them and their lives in myriad ways. Major themes included psychological consequences of grief: medley of feelings, coping strategies: coming to terms, change in self: post loss self, questioning about future: what next? continuing bonds with deceased, familial factors: changing bonds with family, emotional consequences: emotional downfall. It is important to understand the nature of the grief experience, to help promote healthy grieving and to inform counseling and therapy.

Keywords: Grief, Parental Loss, Lived Experience.

Introduction

Death of loved ones and their loss are universal human experiences. Expression of grief changes with the passage of time and with the healing process. Most individuals have adaptive responses toward the loss of loved one by relying on their internal and social support systems. But still there is a significant subset of griever who fight with complicated grief, which manifests as intense longing for the deceased and causes impairment in many domains of their life (Neimeyer & Smigelsky, 2018). Grief is a complex experience. People react differently to the death, as it depends on their relationships, among other things. The feeling of sorrow typically reduces in intensity with the passage of time, but to overcome these feelings, grieving is an important process which takes time. It may take months or years (Mathews, 2017).

Various researches have explored different factors with reference to the experience of grief which take an individual to adaptive as well as maladaptive coping such as substance use, behavioral disengagement, self-blame, and emotional eating specifically among adults (Hoeg et al, 2016). Grief is defined as the psychological, physical, social and behavioral reactions on the emotional experience of losing some one by death (Worden, 2018)

The experience of grief on death of loved one may be universal, but the reactions on losing a loved one could widely vary and these responses may be affected by factors such as age, gender, trauma history, history of depression, type of loss, nature of relationship with deceased and other factors.

Parents play significant role in the life of children and their development. The death of a parent may have a negative impact on a child physically, emotionally, and spiritually and psychologically. Tang and Li (2019) explored bereavement experience in students. The results showed four main themes through content analysis: facing huge life changes, experiencing loss and suffering, challenges and coping strategies for facing parental death, and re-interpreting death.

Sack (2019) explored the link between grief, addiction and mental illness. Results indicated that gender differences also influence impact of parental death as men appear to experience more loss on father's death than daughters while women appear to be more deeply impacted on mother's death than sons. Poxon (2013) examined the experience of grief, its nature and feeling of being stuck in the grieving process. Findings revealed new insights of consequences of living with unresolved problems of grieving such as being stuck in grief, fear and avoidance, feeling a sense of impending doom and loneliness. Many researches explored the rate of psychopathology in first degree relatives of deceased during bereavement process. Findings have shown that female, married and the participants who were rural residents have high psychopathology rate in their bereavement process (Batool & Haider, 2015).

Death is an unavoidable reality and part of life. It is inevitable and unpreventable. Death is universally a sad occasion because it terminates the familial bond. However, though death, grief and mourning are common life events, our response to them are shaped by the respective culture we are a part of. Grief, also known as bereavement is an emotional response on death of someone, including physical, emotional, and psychological distress. When a parent dies, whether a child is young or old, single or married, he/she will be deeply affected as it is the most crucial loss of life: one loses a lifelong friend, an advisor and counsellor. Experienced grief on death of loved one is natural process in which different responses may be influenced by factors such as age, gender, history of trauma, history of depression, type of loss, nature of relationship with deceased and other factors. This study explored different factors which reflect the adaptive and maladaptive coping of individuals who experience grief. It is important to understand the nature of the grief experience, to help promote healthy grieving and to inform counseling and therapy.

Objectives

The study sought to understand the experience of grief in relation to loss of a parent by death, effects of grief on the individuals and the coping patterns in bereavement.

Research Questions

1. What is the experience of grief among individuals who lose a parent by death.
2. How does grief affect the individuals who lose a parent by death?
3. What are the coping patterns in grief and bereavement?

Method

The present research was qualitative in nature and an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis based study.

Participants

Five females were selected who had lost at least one parent by death. Only female participants were selected due to cultural reasons as Pakistani daughters express more intimacy, harmony, connectedness and

mutuality towards Parents (Gillani, 2019). Females tend to be more attached to parents and provide much more emotional support than men. Also, the researcher was female and male interviewees may have felt hesitation in expressing their feelings. Participants who had lost a parent in the duration of two years were selected through purposive convenient sampling. Two females were working women, two females were students and one female was a house wife. All the participants were residing in Lahore city, although they belonged to different cities of Punjab. Participants' ages ranged between 22 to 33 years. Only Unmarried participants were selected who had lost at least one parent in last two years (see Table 1.)

Table No1: *Demographic Table of Participants

Interviewee	Relationship with Participant	Age	Time since death	Profession
Participant 1	Father	22 years	22 months	Student
Participant 2	Mother	23 years	20 months	Student
Participant 3	Father	24 years	24months	Business administrator
Participant 4	Father	21 years	23 months	Student
Participant 5	Mother	26 years	9 months	Autism therapist

Procedure

A qualitative approach was adopted using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Through literature review, a few interview questions were generated, which were translated into Urdu language with assistance of language experts. Through initial piloting, nine questions were selected to use in the study i.e. tell me about your loved one's death? What were your first reactions, tell me about your experience of grief. (Can you tell me more about this? What feelings are part of your grief experience; what thoughts are part of your grief experience), what have been the difficulties you and your family have had to face/deal with after death, how has life been since your loss of parent? Compare your life before and after death, what changed/remained the same for you, what in the way you look at yourself, others and world around you changed as a result of this experience, what are the ways in which your grief has affected you, tell something about how you coped with grief on losing your parent, if there was just one thing you could tell others going through the same experience as you that would help them, what might it be.

Five participants who met the eligibility criteria were invited for interview. Purposive convenience sampling technique was used to select participants. Semi structured interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes in duration were conducted with them. The interviews were scheduled as per their convenience. Verbal permission was taken from the participants before starting the interview to ensure that their participation in research was according to their will. Before starting the formal interview, research ethics were explained to participants i.e. they were apprised of confidentiality and privacy of their information, expected time duration and that taping and transcribing the data will be used only for extracting themes and will not be used for any illegal or unethical purpose. All interviews were recorded and later these recordings were transcribed in second step of research. As per ethics, researcher provided counselling using self-disclosure. Many of participant stated they experienced catharsis because of the interview.

Analysis was carried out within IPA framework and themes were extracted from transcripts of interviews. IPA provides comprehensive insight into participants' lived experiences. The findings were converted into tabular form which presented themes and sub themes from all interviews. A final master table was then constructed which incorporated all these themes.

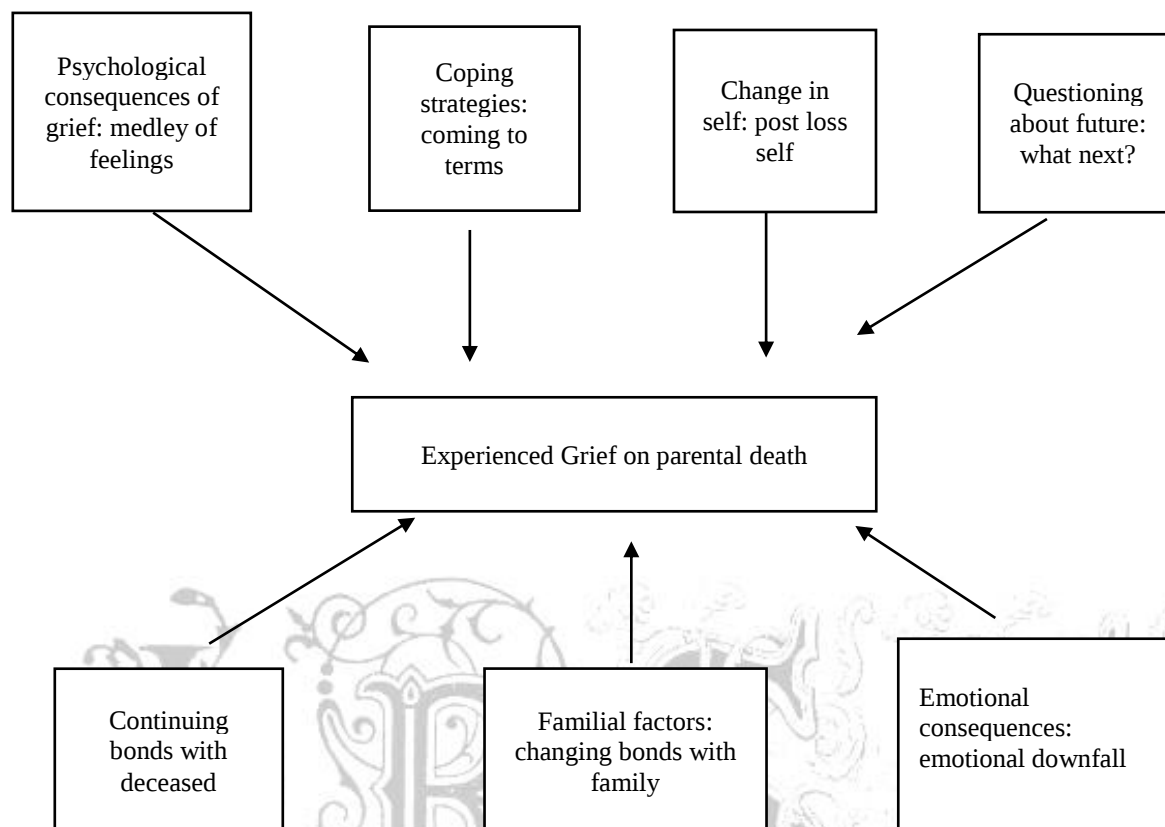


Figure 1. Main themes

Results and Discussion

The current research was conducted to study the phenomenon of ‘experienced grief on losing a parent by death’ and to explore the experiences of different individuals, their coping patterns and how grief affects them. The transcripts were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Seven master themes were explicated from data (see Table 2.)

Table No: 2

Major Themes	Sub themes
Psychological consequences of grief medley of Feelings	Sadness, Worries, loneliness, stress, unhappiness.
Coping strategies: coming to terms	Acceptance of death, life continuity, time, patience.
Change in self: post loss self	Lack of socialization, responsibility, resilience.
Questioning about future: what next?	Questioning future life, events of life, house management.
Continuing bonds with deceased	Missing deceased, attachment with deceased, worth of deceased.
Familial factors: changing bonds with family	Strong attachment with family, satisfaction with family, unsupportive relatives.
Emotional consequences: emotional downfall	Emotional withdrawal, difficulty in coping, emotional distortion of family.

Here, a narrative account of emerged themes is being given. The first persistent theme was psychological consequences: medley of feelings. It included persistent sub themes of depression, loneliness and emptiness. This statement illustrates this:

"As the griever is not in the state of listening, understanding and saying anything. Because it is depressive for him/her and it is a kind of depression state." (interview 1).

Another participant stated

"I cried a lot and was hiding my tears from everyone. And I was so depressed and I came back to hostel after ten days of my father's death." (interview 3).

Another participant shared her feelings and said,

"My first reactions were like I was in shock and depressed and I don't know what is going on. It's like I was in a situation of complete trauma, just like that." (interview 4).

Similar results were found by Stroebe et al., (2007). They posited that such symptoms (sadness, shock, depression) are expected to occur in normal process of grief. After the death of loved one, many people report feeling an initial stage of numbness. After first learning of a death, commonly experienced changes included psychological disturbance, that may lead to prolonged grief and depression (MHA, 2019).

Another theme that emerged was 'coping strategies: coming to terms'. It included sub themes of different coping strategies such as coping with time, life continuity, spirituality and acceptance. One participant said:

"One should cope through patience, at such loss. And We are Allah's creatures and we have to return to Him. And we should move on with our lives and pray for deceased." (interview 2).

Another participant shared her coping terms as:

"yes! I remember that one of my coping thing was my relationship with Allah. I coped through the closeness to Allah, I was complaining to Allah all the time... And I started my regular prayers those days and cried a lot." (interview 3).

Different coping strategies are used by griever to cope with their grief and loss such as turning to friends and family members and drawing comfort from faith i.e. spiritual activities (Smith, Robinson & Segal, 2018).

Other researchers have found that spirituality helps in managing the grief of losing someone and decreases risk for developing complicated grief (Shear, Ghesquiere & Glickman, 2013; Smith, Robinson & Segal, 2018).

Another main theme was 'change in self/personality: a post loss self'. This theme included subthemes i.e. enhanced maturity, seriousness, empathy, bravery, strength upsurges, less socialization, non- stereotypical personality, being responsible. For example:

"After death, it seems like I became grown-up or adult and my responsibilities increased. I have to maintain school too and have to attend my siblings PTMs." (Interview 4).

Another participant said:

"I stand with my brothers to manage finances of our house and I said okay, if I have to do one more job and I started doing the second job too. So that we can avoid crisis, so in that way we manage all the things perfectly..." (interview 5).

Findings of different researches showed that different individuals experienced different responses to death of parent like physical, emotional and psychological which led to change in their selves (Krisch, 2019; Sack, 2017, Anonymous, 2017). Activities that support creative self-expression such as managing house, cooking, gardening, crafts and writing help in self-development after losing a loved one (Tyson, 2008).

Another main theme which was persistent in every interview was 'questioning about future: what next?' In this theme participants expressed their concerns about future without their parents. For instance, a participant said that:

"Thoughts which came to my mind at the time of experiencing griefs were, like what will happen next without her (mother). How do we live without her? (interview 2).

One of the women stated that:

"Difficulties have to come in future without father, we had to leave our house and shift to grandmother's house...thoughts that came to my mind were, what is next? And I thought about my mother, how would she spend her life alone without husband." (Interview 4).

According to Cimete and Kuguoglu (2006), dealing with loss distinctively influences everyone, including how each person speaks, thinks, acts, and deals after death. In their study, the results showed that post death concerns about future life disturbed every participant. Likewise, in present study participants were anxious about their life transition. According to Ketron (2008) grieving the death and expressing of emotions, seemed to provide the hope of future development.

One of the main theme was 'continuing bonds with the deceased: post loss feelings' which included subthemes of attachment with deceased, missing the deceased, awareness of health issues of deceased, importance/ worth of father, love with deceased, religiosity, spirituality and more. Participant shared their feelings about deceased such as one of the ladies stated that:

"I am the one who spent most of the life with him and I felt so attached with him. My father and I have a lot of love and affection. His place in my life will never ever get filled and I still miss him and I will always remember him and never forget him...because we all siblings were very attached to our father like very strongly and had a strong love bond emotionally."

(Interview 1)

One of the participant said that:

"He wandered on roads in hot summer days only for us. I thanked God because now he is going where he is in peace only and he is going far away from all worries and problems. Now he is in peace only." (Interview 4).

What eased the experience of participants' bereavement and grief was the way in which they viewed their continuing association with the deceased although no longer physically present. Matthew's (2017) study reflected the themes of health, religion, gratitude, and education as experience of grief on loved one's death. Continuing bonds theorists propose a sense of spiritual involvement with the dead. In the same way, in present research, themes of religious, spiritual activities, gratitude and sympathy towards deceased showed the ongoing bond with deceased. Both continuing bonds theorists and traditional psychodynamic theorists support that death ends a life not a relationship (Ketron, 2008).

Another main theme was 'familial factors: changing bonds with family' which included subthemes of importance of family, being strong for family, difficulty in running the house, no importance to others (relatives and the world around), caring for and loving the family, supportive relatives (maternal), fear of financial crisis, lack of control in the house, unsupportive relatives (paternal), strong attachment with family, love for family. For example, one participant reported that:

"We all became quiet and sad. And went through tough time. We all went through emotional downfall just because we all siblings have strong attachment with each other and we take care of each other... once my brother said to me, that I will love you always but I could not fill the place of father in your life" (interview 1).

One participant shared her conflictual relationship with family and relatives and said:

"The most important thing which is missed now is our family bond, our family bond is not the same as before. We are not anymore close after the death of my father. Our family bond is just getting weak... Our family became scattered and our family bond is almost breaking... people (relatives) gave us a very hard time after my father's death" (interview 3).

Familial factors included in this study include both negative and positive relations with family as an outcome of grief after death. Death may make you angry and bitter (Ketron, 2008). One of the participants showed such anger and bitterness as a post-death outcome. One of the post grief outcomes found in previous studies is better attachment and communication after losing a loved one among the family (Ketron, 2008; Kiaassen et al. 2014). According to Kissane and Parnes (2014) grieving is a family affair. Most of the participants in this study, experienced strong bond and attachment with family members as a result of grief on losing loved one. Open communication and cohesion act as a protective factor for family members.

One master theme was 'emotional consequences of grief: emotional downfall' which included subthemes of difficulty in coping, sacrificing her self-respect/ emotional downfall, inexpressive emotions, intensive emotional expression, emotional symptoms (emptiness, incompleteness), emotional distortion of whole family. One participant said that:

"Our all family did not face any difficulty after death, the only difficulty we faced was our emotional downfall, we all are like emotionally broken from inside. I also fainted when I saw the place where my 's body got its last bathing. I feel incomplete without him, and his place in my life is never filled by anyone" (interview 1).

One of the participant shared her feelings and stated that:

"I cried a lot after my father's death but secretly and hid my tears and emotions from my roommates. I did not get out from this grief easily, it took a long time. I used to cry all the time. (interview 4).

The emotional consequences of grief can often resemble with depression and some people develop depression following a significant loss. It is common to cry a lot and feel incredibly sad as it is a part of grief. Every individual shows different symptoms of grief which could be physical, psychological and emotional. Sometimes, grief, may manifest as positive and negative coping, emotional break down, and emotional crisis (Crunk, 2017).

Conclusion

It was found that experience of grief changed relationship with family, and self and made one more responsible and stronger. Psychological consequences of grief were also reported persistently by every

participant such as shock, depression, loneliness, denial, anger, resentment, fear, bargaining, helplessness and emptiness. Parents are significant figures of our life; their death brings about many changes in one's life. Attachment with deceased and continuing bond with them were also reported by every participant. Grief may get complicated if it is not resolved in time. This study explored different factors which influence the adaptive and maladaptive coping of individuals who experience grief. It is important to understand the nature of the grief experience, to help promote healthy grieving and to inform counseling and therapy.

Limitations

There are few limitations of the study also:

- Since the research was qualitative in nature and a small sample was studied in depth, claims about generalization cannot be made. However useful insights were gained about the nature and experiences of grief on losing parent by death.
- The participants in the study were females only; gender differences were not explored. The men and their perspective were excluded.

Implications

As delineated in the literature review, experienced grief on parental loss by death affects in different ways such as affecting emotional and psychological wellbeing, academics, transition in life and self, grief symptoms and concerns about future. This study indicated different factors which affect the coping of individuals who experience grief. It is important to understand the nature of the grief experience, to help promote healthy grieving and to inform counseling and therapy.

Declaration

There is no potential conflict of interest. The study did not receive funding. The project was approved by the Board of Studies and Advanced Study and Research Board, Lahore College for Women University. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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