

Coping Strategies of Teenagers with Bereavement of Parent in Nnewi, Anambra State Nigeria

Mary Felicia N. Nwosu, Obidoa Mabel A., Onyechi Kay N.
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Enugu State, Nsukka
Email of Corresponding Author: maobidoa@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study focused on how teenagers cope socially with bereavement of parent. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The design used was descriptive survey. A sample of 393 (155 males and 238 females) aged between 12-19 years was selected purposively from Secondary Schools in Nnewi Education Zone of Anambra State, Nigeria. The researchers designed questionnaire "Coping with bereavement of parent by teenagers (CBPT)" was validated and used for collecting data. The data was analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Some social coping strategies such as were identified. Age and gender did not make any significant difference in the teenagers' choice of coping strategies. It was recommended that school counsellors expose bereaved teenagers to different strategies of coping socially with bereavement of parent.

Keywords: Bereavement, Parent, Teenagers, Social, Coping Strategies.

1. Introduction

Bereavement is a state of sadness that follows the loss of a loved one through death. It is a condition brought about by the death of a member of the family. It is a period of grieving and mourning. The death of a parent is considered one of the most painful, if not traumatic experiences for teenagers (Tang, 2011). Losing a parent has an effect on social life of teenagers. Social as defined by (American Heritage Dictionary, 2009) is inclined to seek out or enjoy the company of others, spent in or marked by friendly relations or companionship. Social is relating to or involving activities which people spent time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other, like to be with and talk to people, or relate to people or society in general (Free Merriam Dictionary, 2000).

Some teenagers become closer to the surviving parent after a death while for others the death strains the relationships (Dettloff, 2012). However, Sandler, Wolchik, Tein, Ayers, Kwok, Hain, (2003) postulated that parental warmth, having general positive regard for the teenager, conveying acceptance, expressing affection, fostering open communication and unstructured time with the teenager, helps bereaved teenagers.

Findings from the Harvard child Bereavement study as reported by Worden, (1996), indicate that the best outcome were associated with an active coping style which is typically modelled after the behaviour of the surviving parent. Relationship with peers may change as well. Not wanting to feel different from their peers after losing a parent or believing other teens will not understand, many teens refrain from talking about their feelings surrounding the death. Some teenagers withdraw from social activities, which affect peer relations. Relationships with their friends can be deep and meaningful, sharing conflicts occurring at home and details of their love lives. Teenagers in schools are supported by peers and receive counsel from friends. Male and female teenagers benefit from peer support (Cohen, 1999). There may also be a long-term impact or relationship especially on male and female relationship. The teenager may feel abandoned and unloved by others. This feeling of being unloved may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wolfeit, 2007). To avoid experiencing another loss the teenager may not want any close relationship with others. Keeping others at a distance or leaving others before they get too close, serve as a defense mechanism against the pain of separation for bereaved teenagers (Wolfeit, 2007).

Bereavement can be times of major transition and significant disruption to the general flow of social life. 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). Studies have found that stable positive events and family cohesion are reduced following the death of a parent and that this reduction is associated with increased child mental health problems (Sandler, 1992, Worden, 1996). In the study of (Harrison and Harrington, 2001), it was found that as many as 92 percent of young people in the UK will experience bereavement of what they define as a "close or significant" relationship (including pets) before the age of 16. Teenagers are battling with developmental problems at the same time and will now face physiological and academic pressure (Wolfeit, 2010). Silverman and Worden (1993) found out that younger teenagers may be more "harassed" by peers and

that in general younger teenagers are more expressive than older teenagers. They also noted that older teens were more likely told they have to act more grown up than younger teenagers.

Coping can be defined as an effort to manage and overcome challenge, threat, harm, loss, or benefit to a person (Lazarus, 1991). The Dual Process theory of Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schute (1999) identified two Oscillating coping processes, loss and restoration. The theory stresses that in order to cope effectively, bereaved persons must oscillate between loss-oriented (LO) coping and restoration-oriented (RO) coping. The emphasis is on the ability to adjust to many changes triggered by bereavement. In coping socially with bereavement, (Smith and Segal, 2011) noted that sharing loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. They further asserted that the bereaved should connect to others for healing, turn to friends and family members and loved ones should be allowed to come closer. Sharing sorrow with others who have experienced losses can help. Some bereaved teenagers share with one another in some schools with the help of counsellors.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The death of a parent can have a significant negative impact on teenagers' self-esteem. Teenagers face particularly painful adjustment following the death of a parent. Bereaved teenager may isolate themselves from relating with surviving parent, relations, friends and peers. When a parent dies, life as teen knows it is disrupted and irrevocably changed. Teenagers are battling with developmental changes and at the same time facing physiological and academic pressure and so need help to cope with their social life after a parent's death. Thus the problem of this study is to find out the extent to which teenagers cope with bereavement of parent social and consequently discuss its implications for counselors.

This study seeks to find out the extent to which teenagers cope with bereavement of parent socially and how they can be helped by counsellors.

1.2 Research Questions

1. To what extent do teenagers cope with bereavement of parent socially?
2. Will their social coping strategies differ with the age of the teenagers?

1.3 Hypothesis

Ho 1. There is no significant difference between the mean social coping scores of male and female teenagers

Ho 2. There is no significant difference between the mean social coping scores of older and younger teenagers.

2. Methodology

This study used the descriptive survey design. The population of the study is the 6,577 Post Primary students within Nnewi Education Zone, in Anambra State in South East Nigeria (2012/2013, Nnewi Zone school Enrollment). The study used a sample of 393 students made up of 155 males and 238 females. Their ages ranged from 12-19 years and were selected from Junior Secondary 2 (JS II) and Senior Secondary School (SS II) classes (grades 8 and 11) to allow an age difference of 3 years between the younger and the older teenagers. Purposive sampling technique was used to select only teenagers who lost a parent in each school.

The instrument in this study was a questionnaire titled "Coping with bereavement of parent by teenagers Questionnaires" (CBPT). The questionnaire has 2 sections, A & B. Section A deals with personal data while Section B contains items that were rated on a 4-point scale from "to very large extent" to "not at all". These items were derived from statement of the problem, purpose of the study and research questions. To establish the validity of the instrument the questionnaire was subjected to face validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation. Cronbach Alpha was used in determining the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient was .754. The questionnaire was administered and collected by the researchers. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics were employed to analyze the data collected. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance.

3. Results

The findings of this study are presented below according to research questions and hypotheses

3.1 Research Question 1

To what extent do teenagers cope with bereavement of parent socially?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent to which teenagers cope with bereavement of parent socially

SN	Coping Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error mean	Decision
1	Trusting others	2.4653	1.131665	.081785	D
2	Relating with friends	2.9913	.985905	.07166	A
3	Getting effective support from friends	2.6987	1.08416	.078605	A
4	Relating well with relatives	3.0892	1.009025	.07326	A
5	Being close to surviving parent	3.2688	.980095	.071235	A
6	Caring about others	3.16215	1.018425	.07403	A
7	Living with surviving parents	3.0087	1.221035	.088575	A
	Total	5.9187	.56683	.21424	

A – Agree, D – Disagree

The data on table 1 above revealed that the mean for being close to surviving parent was higher with 3.27. Also the mean for caring about others was 3.16 while that relating with relatives is also high with 3.09. Moreover, the mean value on living with the surviving parent and relating with friends were 3.01 and 2.99. The mean value for getting effective support from friends was 2.70. The result also shows that item 1, trusting others was not a popular coping strategy among teenager as it has a mean of 2.47.

3.2 Research Question 2

Will their social coping strategies differ with the age of the teenagers?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on age difference in social coping strategies.

	Coping strategies	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	Decision
1	Trusting Others				
	Younger teenagers	2.4211,	1.15806	.08010	D
	Older teenagers	2.4402,	1.14839	.08466	D
2	Relating with friends				
	Younger teenagers	2.9809,	1.00939	.06982	A
	Older teenagers	3.0109,	.95236	.07021	A
3	Getting effective support from friends				
	Younger teenagers	2.6507	1.11696	.07726	A
	Older teenagers	2.7337	1.05050	.07744	A
4	Relating well with relatives				
	Younger teenagers	3.0574	1.05455	.07294	A
	Older teenagers	3.0870	.95987	.07076	A
5	Being close to surviving parent				
	Younger teenagers	3.2440	.99652	.06893	A
	Older teenagers	3.2989	.95402	.07033	A
6	Caring about others				
	Younger teenagers	3.1722	1.04651	.07239	A
	Older teenagers	3.1685	.98007	.07225	A
7	Living with surviving parent				
	Younger teenagers	2.9043	1.24824	.08634	A
	Older teenagers	3.1196	1.18130	.08709	A

A – Agree, D – Disagree

The result on table 2 show that the mean value and standard deviation of older teenagers were higher with 3.30 (.954) on being close to surviving parent while younger ones score 3.24 (.996). The mean value and standard deviation of younger teenagers were high on caring about others with 3.17 (1.046) while older teenagers mean and standard deviation were 3.7 (.98). The older teenagers score higher living surviving parent with mean value and standard deviation of 3.12 (1.181) while the younger ones mean value and standard deviation were 2.90 (1.248). Moreover, on relating well with relatives, the older teenagers mean value and standard deviation were also higher with 3.0870 (1.0) while younger teenagers were 3.06 (1.055). The older teenagers mean value and standard deviation on relating with friends were 3.01 (.952) while the younger ones were 2.98 (1.009). In item 3, getting effective support from friends, the mean value of older teenagers were 2.73 (1.051), while younger ones

scored 2.65 (1.11). Also in item 1, the result shows that trusting others was not a popular coping strategy for both the younger teenagers and the older teenagers. They have mean value of 2.42 and 2.44 respectively. It is interesting to note that deviation from the mean was not great so there was broad agreement in teenagers views.

3.3 Hypotheses 1:

There is no significant difference between the mean social coping strategy score of male and female teenagers.

Table 3: Mean standard deviation and t-test of social coping scores of male and female teenagers.

	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Mean Equal variances assumed	.674	.428	.529	12	.607
Equal variances not assumed			.529	10.686	.608

The independent sample t-test for the difference between the male and female means (assuming equal Variances) equals .529 and has a value of .607. This value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05 that is associated with 95% confidence level. Test statistics fall outside critical area.

Decision: Accept the null hypothesis therefore there is no statistically significant difference in the mean social coping scores of female and male teenagers.

3.4 Hypothesis 2:

Will the teenagers' social coping strategy differ with age?

Table 4: Mean, standard deviation and t-test of social coping scores of younger and older teenagers.

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Mean Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	.000	391	1.000
Equal variances not assumed			.000	12.000	1.000

The independent samples t-test for the difference between younger ones and older teenagers' means (assuming equal variances) equals .000 and has a value of 1.000. This value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05 that is associated with 95% confidence level. Test statistics falls outside critical area.

Decision: Accept the null hypothesis therefore there is no statistically significant difference in the mean social coping scores of younger and older teenagers.

4. Summary of Findings

This study has shown that there are popular social coping strategies used by bereaved teenagers. These include relating with friends, getting effective support from friends, relating well with relatives, being close to surviving parent, caring about others and living with the surviving parent. No difference was found in the coping strategies of younger and older teenagers between males and females.

5. Discussion

The results revealed that teenagers in secondary schools adopt some coping strategies to enable them cope with bereavement of parent socially. The finding confirmed those of Wolchik et-al (2006) who reported that parental death involves series of stressors that may affect numerous aspects of life and functioning of teenagers, such as loss of contact with peers and significant others, loss of time with the surviving parent, and a change in caretakers and family system. This finding can be explained that helping the surviving parent to implement positive parenting practices and foster a positive parent child relationship is consistently regarded as important to the adjustment of parentally bereaved teenagers (Sandler et al, 2008). Contrary to this opinion, findings from the

Harvard child Bereavement study as reported by Worden, (1996) indicate that the best outcomes were associated with an active coping style, which is typically modeled after the behaviour of the surviving parent.

This study also found out that no significant difference exist in the social coping scores of younger and older teenagers. The finding agrees with those of (Worden, 1996) which reported that the way in which a family responds to a death of one of its own influences each of its individual members.

Another major finding is that there is no significant difference in social coping scores of male and female teenagers. This finding agrees with those of Cohen, (1999). Teenagers in schools are supported by peers and receive counsel from friends. Adolescent male who experience peer support have lower drop out rates, drug abuse, aggression, and delinquency. Girls also benefit from peer interactions, and rely more heavily on the interactive nature of friendship to express grief and loss (Cohen, 1999). Similarly, Sandler et al (2003) added that parental warmth by having general positive affection, fostering open communication and unstructured time with the teenagers. The use of active coping strategies and coping efficiency have been associated with more positive adaptation following the death of a parent (Wolchik et al; 2006).

Implications for Counseling

Bereaved teenagers face additional challenges in coping with their social life. They need assistance to face a future in which they must perform roles previously assumed by the deceased and in which a need to establish new relationships exists. As teenagers spend a great deal of interactive time in schools, counsellors can encourage them to engage in various activities and games. They can belong to drama group, football club, basketball team and support group counseling. In the work of Sandler et al (2003), they asserted that group counseling has the advantage of addressing all the salient issues surrounding adolescent adjustment to bereavement. Groups allow the teenagers to expand upon experience vicariously, permit grieving, provide social support, reduce isolation and put people together who may be reluctant to grieve.

They need help in their responses to and experiences following the death of a parent. The younger teenager who is harassed by peers should be assisted by the counselor. Counselor can organize a programme involving teenagers and surviving parent to encourage the parents to increase their use of regular positive reinforcement by noticing the child behaving well and giving positive physical (hug, smiles) and verbal (compliments) attention for the child's positive behaviors, qualities, and ideas. Also parent should be encouraged to have positive regard for the teenagers through conveying acceptance (Sandler et al., 2003).

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The result of the study showed that teenagers adopt strategies to cope with bereavement of parent socially. School counsellors have been trained specially to assist school teenagers in their needs. The counsellors and staff have important role to play in supporting bereaved teenagers to relate well with the surviving parent, relatives, friends, and peers in the school and face the future.

The School Counsellors and staff should pay attention to troubled bereaved younger teenagers who may have faced significant bereavement trauma earlier in their lives. They should also pay attention to bereaved teenagers living in disadvantaged circumstances and those who have been moved to foster homes.

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