

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

NWOSU MARYFELICIA NWANNEKA; ONYECHI, KAY; DR. M. AZUKA OBIDOA*

Department of Educational Foundations, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State

*Corresponding author: maobidoa@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study aimed at finding out how teenagers cope with the bereavement of parent emotionally. Hopefully these teenagers will be empowered to adopt sustainable life styles after bereavement in the family. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. It used survey design and a sample of 393 (155 males and 238 females) aged between 12-19 years selected purposively from secondary schools in Nnewi Education Zone of Anambra State, Nigeria. The researcher-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 emotional coping strategies were identified. Age and gender did not make any significant differences in their choice of coping strategies. It was recommended that school counsellors expose bereaved teenagers to different strategies of coping emotionally with bereavement of parent and family living.

Key words: Bereavement, Emotion, Teenagers, Parent, Coping, Counselling.

1.1 Introduction

Bereavement is a term used to describe the sense of loss felt when a loved one passes on. This sense of loss may contain a host of emotions, such as sadness or loneliness (Miller, 2010). The term “Bereavement” is used when the loss is due to the death of a loved one. It is an immensely stressful event that can take a huge toll on the body, potentially causing all sorts of physical exhaustion uncontrollable crying, sleep disruption, palpitations, shortness of breath, headache, recurrent infections, high blood pressure loss of appetite, stomach upsets, hair loss, disruption of menstrual cycle, irritability, worsening of any chronic condition such as eczema or asthma, and visual and auditory hallucination (BBC Health Bereavement, 2011). Bereavement is a condition brought by the death of a member of the family. It is also a period of grieving and mourning. Bereavement of parent by teenagers is very common. A father or a mother can die in a family leaving children with or without a surviving parent. The loss of a mother or father is difficult to come to terms with at any age (Dent, 2012).

Teenagers are already in a period of transition. Teenagers are battling with developmental stages at the same time faces psychological, physiological and academic pressures (Wolfelt, 2010). The older teenager will see clearly how death of a parent affects their life. They may think they should do certain things to contribute to family needs. The younger teenagers may need help to make decisions which focus on their own needs. Coping with bereavement is not easy for them. They have to adjust to many changes triggered by bereavement in the family. Parentally bereaved teenagers experience range of emotions which can include feelings of sadness, guilt, anger and anxiety. (Silverman & Worden, 1996). Some teenagers who cannot express their feelings because of fear of rebuke need help. The older teenager will see clearly how death of a parent affects their life. The younger teenagers may need help to make decisions which focus on their own needs and family living.

Coping as defined by Flynn (2005) is action directed at the resolution or mitigation of a problematic situation. Coping with bereavement is the ability to deal with painful emotions as a result of loss all of which help the person come to terms with the loss of a loved one (Wolfelt, 2010). Coping covers bereavement and mourning rituals and other actions that are specific to each person’s culture, personality, and religion. Edward and Stoppler (2011) opined that coping with bereavement is very painful as a significant loss, one may experience all kinds of difficult and surprising emotions, such as shock, anger and guilt. Dowdney’s (2000) study on childhood bereavement, found out that children often experience an increase in anxiety, fears, angry outbursts, a combination of sadness and crying, irritability, mild depression appears to be frequent and can persist for at least a year. Boys in general were also found to exhibit higher levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties following parental death. Male and female teenagers express emotions but differently, Girls are more expressive than boys. Boys may avoid grief expression due to difference in socialization that encourages males to establish an independent and emotionally resilient identity (Sandler, Ayers, Wolchik, Tein, Kwok, Hain, 2003).

In managing stress, Folkman and Lazarus (1984) asserted that emotion focused strategies involve releasing pent-up emotions, distracting oneself, management of hostile feeling, meditating or using systematic relaxation procedures. Bonano (1992) asserted that genuine laughter and smiles rather than crying is a healthy

response to a loss or stressor event, not crying is protective. In his work Worden (1991) stressed that teenagers have to form an ongoing relationship with the memories associated with the deceased in such away that they are able to continue their own lives after the loss. In the culture of the area of study, Nnewi, people express their emotion through crying, shouting and hostile feelings.

1.1.1 Statement of the Problem

Bereavement is a period of sadness as a result of losing a loved one through death. Emotional insecurity is associated with parental death and teenagers often experience an increase in anxiety, fears, angry outbursts, a combination of sadness, crying or irritability and mild depression. Dealing with the death of a parent as a teenager presents emotional challenges. Coupled with this is the fact that teenagers are in a period of transition, a state of flux and so need additional help to cope with parental death. Thus the problem of this study is to find out the extent to which teenagers cope with bereavement of parent emotionally and consequently discuss its implications for counselors.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to find out the extent to which teenagers cope with bereavement of parent emotionally and how they can be helped by counselors.

1.1.2 Research Question

1. To what extent do teenagers cope with bereavement of parent emotionally?
2. Will their emotional coping strategy differ with age?

1.1.3 Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the mean emotional coping scores of male and female teenagers.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean emotional coping scores of older and younger teenagers.

2.0 Methodology

The design of this study was the descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 6, 577 post primary students within Nnewi Education Zone in Anambra State in South East Nigeria (2011/2013 Nnewi Zone School Enrollment). The study used a purposive sample of 393 students made of 155 males and 238 females. Their ages ranged from 12 – 19 years and were selected from junior secondary 2 (Js11) and senior secondary school 2 (SS11) classes to draw an average age difference of 3 years between the younger and older teenagers. Only the teenagers who lost a parent were used as sample in each school. Yaro Yamani formula was used to find the percentage sample.

The instrument in this study was questionnaire known as “Coping with Bereavement of Parent by Teenagers (CBPT) Questionnaire”. The questionnaire had 2 sections A & B. Section A deals with personal data while section B contained items that were rated on a 4 – point scale from “to very large extent “to “not at all.” To establish the validity of the instrument the questionnaire was subjected to face validation by experts in Guidance and Counseling 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 researcher. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics were employed to analyze the data collected. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

3.0 Results

The results are presented below according to research questions and hypothesis.

3.1 Research Question I

To what extent do teenagers cope with bereavement of parent emotionally.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the extent teenager cope with bereavement of parent emotionally.

	Item	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	Decision
1	Keeping busy to take mind off the dead parent	3.07815	.92879	.67795	A
2	Remembering memories of parent	2.6968	.92474	.06754	A
3	Distracting self by watching TV	2.3956	1.15581	.083855	D
4	Avoiding anger	2.76155	1.11115	.080875	A
5	Overcoming fear through prayer	3.0625	1.10128	.08001	A
6	Worrying less about the future	2.7991	1.17605	.08506	A
7	Avoiding depression	2.70135	1.080465	.078705	A
	Total	5.6243	.47780	.18059	

A = Agree

Data presented on table 1 shows the extent teenagers cope with bereavement of parent emotionally. The table shows that the mean value and standard deviation on keeping busy to take mind off the dead parent and overcoming fear through prayer were higher than the mean value of other items. The mean value and standard deviation were 3.07815 (.92879) and 3.0625 (1.10128). In worrying less about the future, the mean value and standard deviation were 2.7991 (1.17605) which shows that they are coping strategies. Also in avoiding anger and depression, the mean value and standard deviation were 3.76155 (1.11115) and 2.70135 (1.080465).

Item 3, distracting self by watching T.V was not a popular coping strategy among teenagers as it has a mean of 2.3956 which is below cut off point.

3.2 Research Question 2

Will their Emotional coping strategies differ with age?

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

	Item	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	Decision
1	Keeping busy to take mind off the dead parent				
	Younger Teenagers	3.0191	.93522	.06469	A
	Older Teenagers	3.1630	.89659	.06610	A
2	Remembering memories of parent				
	Younger Teenagers	2.9426	.91806	.06350	A
	Older Teenagers	2.8261	.90667	.06684	A
3	Distracting self by watching TV				
	Younger Teenagers	2.4737	1.16459	.08056	D
	Older Teenagers	2.2554	1.14757	.08460	D
4	Avoiding anger				
	Younger Teenagers	2.7895	1.14928	.07950	A
	Older Teenagers	2.7446	1.05321	.07764	A
5	Overcoming fear through prayer				
	Younger Teenagers	3.0957	1.10525	.07645	A
	Older Teenagers	3.0326	1.09096	.08043	A
6	Worrying less about the future				
	Younger Teenagers	2.7608	1.20902	.08363	A
	Older Teenagers	2.8043	1.16268	.08564	A
7	Avoiding depression				
	Young Teenagers	2.6507	1.12554	.07786	A
	Older Teenagers	2.7609	1.00675	.07422	A

The result on table 2 shows that the older teenagers mean score and standard deviation were higher for in keeping busy to take mind off the dead parent with mean value and standard deviation of 3.1630 (.89659) while younger ones were 3.0191 (.93522). With mean value and standard deviation of 2.9426 (.91806), the younger teenagers scores higher in remembering memories of parent. The older teenagers scores 2.8261 (.90667). The mean value and standard deviation of older and younger were 2.2554 (1.14757) and 2.4731

(1.16459) in distracting self by watching T.V. the score is below cut off point which shows that it is not a coping strategy. In avoiding anger the younger ones and older teenagers mean value were 7.7895 (1.14928) and 2.7446 (1.05321). The younger ones score higher in this item. The mean value and standard deviation of younger ones in overcoming fear through prayer were 3.0957 (1.10525) which was higher than the older teenagers mean value and standard deviation 3.0957 (3.0326).

The mean value and standard deviation of older teenagers were higher in worrying less about the future with 2.8043 (1.16168) while the mean value of the younger ones were 2.7608 (1.20902). The result also shows that the older ones scored higher in avoiding depression with mean value of 2.7609 (1.00675) while younger ones scored 2.6507 (1.12554). The above result shows that younger ones and older teenagers are coping but the younger ones are coping better with bereavement of parent emotionally.

3.3 Hypothesis I

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

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

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Mean Equal variances assumed	.278	.607	.225	391	.826
Equal variances not assumed			.225	10.753	.827

The independent samples t-test for the difference between male and female means (assuming equal variances) equals .225 and has a value of .826. 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: fail to reject null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant difference in the mean emotional coping scores of male and female teenagers.

3.4 Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean emotional coping strategy scores of younger and older teenagers.

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

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Mean Equal variances assumed	.009	.925	.126	391	.902
Equal variances not assumed			.126	11.266	.902

The independent samples t-test for the difference between younger and older teenagers means (assuming equal variances) equals .126 and has a value of .902. 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: fail to reject null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant difference in the mean emotional coping scores of younger and older teenagers.

4.0 Discussion

The results indicated that teenagers in secondary schools adopt different coping strategies in coping with bereavement of parent emotionally. This finding confirms those of Worden and Silverman (1996), who observed that parentally bereaved teenagers experience feeling of sadness, guilt, anger and anxiety. They

reported that while highly prevalent soon after the death, overtime teenagers avert affective responses such as crying and sleep disturbances do decrease. This finding can be explained that with time after parent's death, teenagers adopt strategies in coping with their emotions. Contrary to this opinion, Bonanno (1992), asserted that genuine laughter and smiling rather than crying is a healthy and protective response to a loss or stressor event, not crying.

Another major finding is that there is no significant difference in emotional coping scores of male and female teenagers. This finding agrees with those of Sandler et al (2003), male and female children express emotion but differently. Girls are more expressive than boys. Boys may avoid grief expression due to difference in socialization that encourages males to establish an independent and emotionally resilient identity. The findings therefore demonstrate the need for emotional coping strategies for parentally bereaved teenagers to avoid psychological disturbance as asserted by Dowdney (2000).

5.0 Implications for Counseling

Bereaved teenagers need assistance to face a future in which he or she, must perform roles previously assumed by the deceased and in which a need to establish new relationship exists. The counselor can assist the teenagers to work through the emotions of anger, guilt, anxiety, and helplessness that he or she is feeling, and reassuring the person that what he or she is experiencing is normal. Counselor can elicit discussion about emotion-laden topics. Sentences focused on bereavement issues can also be used. Counselors can prompt teenagers to discuss the deceased parent by focusing on a favorite time together, favorite memories, or a favorite gift from the deceased. The counselor can organize group to allow teenagers expand upon experience, bond with others who share similar experiences of loss. Also joint book reading can be used to express negative emotions, promote discussion and understanding about death in the family living.

This study has shown that there are popular coping strategies used by bereaved teenagers. These include keeping busy to take mind off the dead parent, remembering memories of dead parent, avoid letting anger, overcoming fear through prayer, worrying less about the future, avoiding depression. The counselor's help is needed by teenagers to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. Teenagers have to form an ongoing relationship with the memories associated with the deceased in such away that they are able to continue with their own lives after the loss (Worden, 1991).

The older teenagers who are unable to express their feelings should be helped by counselor through group counseling. Groups allow the teenager to expand upon experiences vicariously, bond with others who share similar experiences of loss, provide social support, offer a setting for catharsis and validation, permit grieving, reduce isolation, and put people together who may be reluctant to grieve (Sandler et al 2003).

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The result of the study showed that teenagers adopt strategies to cope with bereavement of parent emotionally. The counselors have professional skills that will enable them to help bereaved teenagers in coping with bereavement of parent emotionally. School counselors and staff have important roles to play in supporting bereaved teenagers and their families. These include recognizing grief, identifying when bereaved teenagers need additional support and referring them to bereavement support services.

REFERENCES

- BBC. Health Bereavement (2011) Losing a parent. Available: www.bbc.co.uk/1/health/2011/07/110710_bbc_health_bereavement.shtml, (July 10, 2012)
- Bonanno, G. (1992), The other side of sadness: What the new science of bereavement tells us about life after loss. Available: Amazon.com/en.wikipedia.org/wiki/george-bonanno. (May 3, 2010)
- Dent, A. (2012), BBC Health: Bereavement-Death of a Parent. Available: www.bbc.Co.UK/health/emotional-heel... (April 10, 2012)
- Dowdney, L., (2000). Annotation: Childhood bereavement following parental death. *Journal of child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 41 (7), 819 – 830. Available: [htt://publications.education.gov.Uk/e.orderingDownload/DCSF-RR232.pdf](http://publications.education.gov.Uk/e.orderingDownload/DCSF-RR232.pdf). (September 5, 2012)
- Edward, R. D. & Stoppler, M. C. (2011), Loss, grief and bereavement. Available: www.medicinenet.com. (April 17,2011)
- Fitzgerald, C. T. (2010), The grieving teen: Grief support at legacy connect. Available: [legacy connect ning.Com/.show](http://legacyconnect.com/show). (November 22, 2010)
- Flynn, P. (2005), Grief Loss and Bereavement Retrieved August 11, 2012, from www.motivateus.com/grieve-14.htm.

- Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S., (1984), Stress, appraisal, coping. Available: www.amazon.com>Books>Health,fitness& Dieting>MentalHealth. (August 5, 2012)
- Miller, M. (2010), Bereavement and grief. Available: www.athealth.com > consumer. (January 3, 2010)
- Post Primary School Management Board, (2013), Nnewi Zone School enrollment by class, sex, 2011/13
- Sandler, I.N., Ayers, T.S., Wolchik, S.A., Tein, J.Y., Kwok, O.M., Haine, R.A. (2003). The family bereavement program: Efficacy evaluation of a theory-based prevention program for parentally-bereaved children and adolescents. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 71 424 – 438.
- Wolfeit, A. D. (2010), Helping teenagers cope with grief: Home services patients children caregivers. www.hospicenet.org/html/teenager.html. (April 11, 2011)
- Worden, J.W. & Silverman, P.R. (1996), Parental death and the adjustment of school age children. Available: baywood. Metapress.com/index/P77F6F65. (January 5, 2012)
- Worden, J.W., (1991).Grief counseling and grief therapy. NY: Springer publishing Co. Available: www.aboutourkids.org>for families>keeping kids healthy>talking about tough topics. (September 6, 2012)

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Recent conferences: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

