

Acceptance of Loss on Psychological Well-Being: Therapeutic Implications on Counselling Parentally Bereaved Students, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

When students lose either one or both parents, they become exposed to behavioral and emotional changes which affect their lives while at home and at school. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of acceptance of loss on the psychological wellbeing of bereaved students. The study was conducted in day public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-county, Murang'a County, Kenya. A sample size of 50 bereaved students was used. The findings indicated that there was no significant effect of acceptance of parental loss on psychological wellbeing at the $p < .05$ [$F(1, 48) = 0.933, p = 0.339$]. This demonstrates that the less the acceptance of parental loss, the lower the psychological wellbeing can be attributed to other factors outside acceptance of parental loss. Implications of this finding are discussed.

Keywords: Bereavement, acceptance of loss, bereaved students, psychological wellbeing, Gatanga Sub-County

1. Introduction

Acceptance is not the case of being alright but rather, accepting the reality of the loss and that our loved one is not coming back (Kubler-Ross and Kessler, 2014). This new reality is not acceptable but it is the truth and thus one has to learn to live with it. The individual now must learn to live in a world where their loved one is missing. Students who get to this point readjust their expectations and move on with life finding joy and happiness slowly along the way.

Akerman and Statham, (2014), investigating bereavement in students and its impact on education and psychological outcomes and the effectiveness of support services in the UK observed that after parental loss, assisting the students to come into terms with the loss largely improved their educational and psychological outcomes. They established that once students could be able to accept that their parents have passed on they could carry on with activities that previously might have seemed impossible, starting slowly at first. At adolescence, a person can differentiate reality and fantasy and the sooner they can do this the easier it gets for them to feel well again. Kristensen, Weisæth and Heir, (2012) comment that mitigation strategies that help students to realize that they are not betraying the memory of their loved ones by resuming their normal activities and improve their overall activities sooner than those who do not. Therefore, students in acceptance of loss could be observed to resume their daily chores at home and engage in school activities appropriately. Rastogi, and Singh, (2015) also claim that female students who embrace

art forms to celebrate their loved ones as opposed to lamenting them quickly get to a point where they find meaning and purpose in life.

Studying the coping mechanisms among Nigerian students, Domingo *et al* (2016), concludes that most important of all, acceptance is the one mechanism that brings to an end to all the suffering associated with parental loss. Among the various mechanisms that Nigerian students applied to cope with loss, acceptance of loss was the only thing that brought about total peace. Another study among Nigerian nationals demonstrated that accepting one's condition among the Nigerian youth helped them to move on with the death of a parent Ogbuagu (2012). Therefore, students who go through acceptance of loss tend to embrace life without their parents better. Rwandese adolescents who managed to cope with the loss of their parents did so after accepting that they shall never see their loved ones again (Schaal, Dusingizemungu, Jacob, Neuner, & Elbert, 2012). The awareness of the finality of death of their parents helps them to accept the loss and move on in life. Understanding that life has forever been changed helps adolescents in Senegal to reorganize their lives and take charge of things that have seemingly gone out of hand. They can start studying as they used to and perform chores that they previously had neglected like personal hygiene. Mellins, and Malee, (2013), comment that when Zambian students realize that death is a natural process, they stop blaming the gods for punishing them.

The loss of a parent is painful and tragic experience and coming into terms might not be easy. However, putting in place mechanisms that can drive the student to grieve in a healthy manner so that they can reach the acceptance stage faster can help the student to resume normal activities Muchai, Ngari, and Mumiukha (2014). Grief Counsellors should aim at assisting bereaved students to come into an acceptance with the new lifestyles so that they can start planning for life without their parents Owaa, Aloka & Raburu (2015). When the individual learns that life moves on despite the loss of their loved one, they can build healthy relationships both spiritually and emotionally (Kamau, Kuria, Mathai, Atwoli, & Kangethe, 2012). Religion can also be used both at home and at school to help the grieving students come to terms with the loss in a healthy manner (Puffer, Watt, Sikkema, Ogwang-Odhiambo, & Broverman, 2012). By participating in religious activities, students feel like the void left by the departure of a parent is being filled with a new purpose.

2. Methods and Procedures

The study employed descriptive research design on the variables and explained them in details resulting to a comprehensive study on the phenomenon in the area of study. The dependent variable for this study was psychological wellbeing that is manifested in three levels; levels of anxiety, levels of attentiveness, and self-awareness. The independent variable was acceptance of loss in bereavement. Information on acceptance of loss in bereavement and psychological wellbeing was collected using questionnaires. The study was conducted in day public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-county in Murang'a County, Kenya. The Sub-county has a significantly high cases of adult deaths in Muranga County.

2. Results

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of acceptance of loss on psychological well-being of parentally bereaved students in day public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub-County, Murang'a County, Kenya. Results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Acceptance and Psychological Wellbeing

			psychological wellbeing		Total
			Low	High	
Acceptance of parental loss	Little acceptance	Count	8	5	13
		% within Acceptance of parental loss	61.5%	38.5%	100.0%
Acceptance of parental loss	More acceptance	Count	28	9	37
		% within Acceptance of parental loss	75.7%	24.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	36	14	50
		% within Acceptance of parental loss	72.0%	28.0%	100.0%

Table 1 indicates that 8(61.5%) of participants who had little acceptance of parental loss had low psychological wellbeing while 5(38.5%) had high psychological wellbeing. Further, it was established that among students with more acceptance of parental loss, 23(75.7%) had low psychological wellbeing while 9(24.3%) had high psychological wellbeing. Majority of the bereaved secondary school students have more acceptance of parental loss. Also, majority of the bereaved students have low psychological wellbeing. The study concludes that the more the acceptance of parental loss, the lower the psychological wellbeing. These findings implied that acceptance as a result of parental loss affected the psychosocial wellbeing of students in the study area. The study established that acceptance of emotions significantly dominate the daily experiences of majority of parentally bereaved students as they come to term with the reality of the loss. To determine whether the descriptive results of the relationship between acceptance of parental bereavement and psychological wellbeing was statistically significant, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of acceptance of loss on psychological wellbeing on whether the littler the acceptance of parental loss, the lower the psychological wellbeing. The hypothesis posed was: There is no statistically significant relationship between acceptance of loss of a parent and psychological wellbeing of students in day public secondary schools in Gatanga Sub County, Murang'a County. Results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: ANOVA of Acceptance of Loss and Psychological Wellbeing

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.192	1	.192	.933	.339
Within Groups	9.888	48	.206		
Total	10.080	49			

Table 22 shows that there was no significant effect of acceptance of parental loss on psychological wellbeing at the $p < .05$ [$F(1, 48) = 0.933, p = 0.339$]. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This demonstrates that the finding that the less the acceptance of parental loss, the lower the psychological wellbeing can be attributed to other factors outside acceptance of parental loss.

These study outcomes therefore implied that bereaved students in Gatanga Sub-County experienced numerous psychological challenges as a result of parental loss and or deaths. According to Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2014) acceptance is not the case of being alright but rather, accepting the reality of the loss and that our loved one is not coming back. This new reality is not acceptable but it is the truth and thus one has to learn to live with it. The individual now must learn to live in a world where their loved one is missing. Students who get to this point readjust their expectations and move on with life finding joy and happiness slowly along the way. Based on an investigating by Akerman and Statham, (2014), assisting the students to come into terms with the loss largely improve their educational and psychological outcomes. They established that once students could be able to accept that their parents have passed on they could carry on with activities that previously might have seemed impossible, starting slowly at first.

Acceptance of loss also helps the students to attain a sense of purpose in life. A sense of purpose is reflected in one’s conviction that life holds a meaning and is worth living. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2014) reiterate that acceptance is not the sense that its okay that one’s loved one has passed but rather, despite the loss, one is still going to be okay. It is during this stage that one’s emotions start to stabilize and re-enters reality. Individuals begin to adjust and readjust to normal life, but with a keener sense of awareness courtesy of the experience they have gone through. Life holds new meaning and some people are even observed to transform for the better in what Michael and Cooper (2013) refer to as post traumatic growth. Gaining a sense of purpose in life is an indicator of high psychological wellbeing, and which is enhanced by the acceptance of a student’s parental loss.

Acceptance can also lead to increased confidence and self-acceptance. An individual with high self-acceptance has a positive attitude about themselves. Self-acceptance is reflected in an individual’s ability to accept themselves despite their limitations and in the case of a grieving individual, to accept themselves despite the loss and stop blaming themselves, others or the deceased. After losing a loved one, it is easy to forget about nurturing and taking care of oneself which can further worsen a person’s wellbeing. However, self-acceptance enables one to start taking care of themselves by participating in activities that look out for their happiness. This includes emotional, spiritual and physical nurture activities. Students who have accepted the loss of a parent could start seeking help or talking about the loss (emotional), start seeking God and religious practice (spiritual) as well as participating in games at school (physical). Collectively these activities improve their wellbeing and eventually, they can heal and resume normal lives.

Finally, acceptance can lead to environmental mastery, a core aspect of high psychological wellbeing. Autonomy means the ability to govern oneself and thus connotes the ability for self-regulation. According to Benita, Roth and Deci (2014), autonomy in psychology refers to the extent by which a person's behavior is self-determined instead of being coerced or compelled. It is a strong indicator of an individual with high psychological wellbeing. A person with a high score in this aspect can regulate their behavior independent of social pressure or outside motivation. This means that a student who has autonomy does not rely on teachers, adults or peers to tell them what to do. Moreover, they independently choose to participate in school activities such as learning and co-curricular activities. They thus do not get in trouble for failure to carry out what is expected of them at school or at home. Moreover, they are confident of their choices and opinions and are strong decision makers (Benita, Roth and Deci, 2014). Palmer, Saviet and Tourish (2016) discusses how grieving students are more dependent and are unable to manage their own life and affairs. Such students rely on the instruction of adults in their lives which can sometimes even result to being forced to go about conducting their affairs. Loss of autonomy during grief can impair a student's ability to handle their studies or even gather the motivation to stay focused in school. Acceptance, however, gives an individual direction and enables them to consciously make decisions that impact their lives. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2014) indicate that a fog is lifted during the acceptance stage and an individual grows and evolves. This motivates them to make new plans to move on which include improving relationships and focusing more on what is happening around them. Acceptance, hence, leads to increased autonomy which has positive outcomes for the psychological wellbeing of students.

5. Implications

There is need for teachers to reach out to students who may be experiencing problems related to their emotional life and guide them towards acceptance of loss. Religious organizations and the community at large should take a step to provide for children who have lost their parents in the society to give them a chance to focus on building their lives. Organizations which are concerned with child welfare should be in the forefront in visiting schools in an effort to provide for the students who are bereaved.

6. References

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