

The Role of Gender on Holistic Grief Effects Experienced by College Students

Presenter Christiana Olaleye, Biology major

Mentored by Dr. Mary Alice Varga

The purpose of this paper is to present findings from a survey that measured holistic grief effects college students experience when losing a loved one and whether grief effects vary based on gender. This is important to examine since approximately 35% of undergraduate students are within 24 months of bereavement (Pollard, Varga, Wheat, & McClam, 2017; Varga & Varga, 2019; Walker, Hathcoat, & Noppe, 2012). Holistic grief effects were measured using the Holistic Impact of Bereavement (Balk, 2010), which outlines the six dimensions students are affected by their grief (emotionally, physically, cognitively, behaviorally, interpersonally, and spiritually).. Students have reported various grief effects, primarily emotional and cognitive effects (Varga, 2015; Walker et al., 2012); however, recent studies have not examined holistic grief effects specific to gender. Initial studies into college student grief indicated women experience greater grief effects; and more recent research is warranted (LaGrand, 1981 & 1985). The researchers hypothesized that college students would experience grief effects in all six dimensions, primarily in the dimensions of emotional and cognitive effects. The researchers also hypothesized that female students would experience statistically significantly greater grief effects than male students, specifically in the dimensions of emotional and cognitive effects. A total of 508 students completed the survey. Findings indicated that approximately 81% (n = 412) of students experienced the loss of a significant person in their life due to death. Emotional and cognitive were the most grief effects experienced by students. Independent-samples t-tests found a statistically significant difference in the emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral grief effects experienced between female and male students with female students experiencing greater effects than male students. Implications for these findings are addressed along with recommendations for future research.

References

Balk, D. E. (2011). *Helping the bereaved college student*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

LaGrand, L. E. (1981). Loss reactions of college students: A descriptive analysis. *Death Education*, 5(3), 235-248. doi: 10.1177/0011000010366485

LaGrand, L. E. (1985). College student loss and response. *New Directions for Student Services*, 31, 15-28.

Pollard, B. L., Varga, M. A., Wheat, L. S., Balentyne, P., & McClam, T. (2017). Characteristics of graduate counseling student grief experiences. *Illness, Crisis, and Loss*. Available online at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1054137317730525>

Varga, M. A. (2015). A quantitative study of graduate student grief experiences. *Illness, Crisis,*

& Loss. doi: 10.1177/1054137315589700

Varga M.A. & Varga, M.D. (2019). "Grieving College Students Use of Social Media." *Illness, Crisis, & Loss*. doi: 10.1177/1054137319827426

Walker, A. C., Hathcoat, J. D., & Noppe, I. C. (2012). College student bereavement experience in a Christian university. *OMEGA Journal of Death and Dying*, 64(3), 241-259.

doi: 10.2190/OM.64.3.d