ABSTRACT

The loss of an important person, in any situation, is likely tough to handle. A person may lose someone as the result of a move or a break-up, or even just growing apart. Grief may be involved in several types of loss. Grief has no deadline to leave; it can be short-term or long-term. Both short-term and long-term consequences can be noted (Crook & Elliott, 1980). Grief affects people in different ways. Some individuals may become depressed. Others might show internalizing or externalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety or aggression). Grief may look different at different times (Crook & Elliott, 1996; Downey, 2000; Kaltredo & Mendelson, 1985; Worden, 1996). It could be argued, however, that the finality of death complicates the loss. Death of a loved one may affect every living member of the family (Jordan, Kraus, & Ware, 1993) and every family will experience, at some point, the loss of a loved one. Many survivors will experience what is known as grief.

It is estimated that 3.5% of children in the United States will experience the death of a parent by the age of 15 (Mireault & Bond, 1992; Social Security Administration, 2000). Rainbows, n.d). The prevalence may be higher by the time the child becomes a college student. According to Ball (2001), nearly 30% of undergraduates are within 12 months of a death of a close family member or friend. The loss of a parent, whether in childhood or adulthood, is a “universal life changing event” which could hinder a person’s motivation to continue moving forward in life (Kaltredo & Mendelson, 1985; West, Sandler, Pillow, Baca, & Gersten, 1991; Lin, Irwin, Sandler, Ayers, Sharlene, Wolchik & Lueck, 2004). Parents are typically responsible for ensuring the safety and growth of their children; therefore, a child’s loss of a parent may be accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and stress as well as sadness (Mancini & Bonanno, 2006; Worden & Silverman, 1996). Several other negative consequences are associated with losing a parent, such as the development of mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression, somatic complaints) as well as withdrawal and conduct issues (Dowdery, 2000; Lutze, Ayers, Sandler, & Barr, 1997; Cohen, Mannarino, & Deblinger, 2006).

There are several negative consequences which may occur after the death of a parent (Worden & Silverman, 1996; Hane, Ayres, Irwin, Sandler, Wolchik, & Weyer, 2003; Crook & Elliott, 1980; Harrington & Harrison, 1999).

On the other hand, there are numerous factors that may contribute to an individual continuing with pursuit of important life goals after experiencing the death of a parent. The factors include gender of the deceased parent, the quality of the child’s relationship with the living parent, and the child’s locus of control, resilience, valuing, and social support (Kwok, Hane, Sandler, Ayers, & Tein, 2005; Lin, Sandler, Wolchik, & Tein, 2004).

The existing literature has investigated how variables such as gender of deceased parent, relationship with living parent, loci of control, the resilience and social support of the child all relate to individuals who have experienced the death of someone. However, the literature to date is not consistent across all factors, and this study includes assessment at the relationships among the variables in the data collected.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this experiment is to examine the variables that motivate someone to achieve their desired goals in life after experiencing the death of a parent.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The results will expose variables related to the motivation among bereaved individuals who have experienced the death of a parent. By examining these particular variables, we will be able to identify variables that contribute to the positive outcomes of bereaved college students.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this experiment is to examine the variables that motivate someone to achieve their desired goals in life after experiencing the death of a parent.