

Death and Non-Death Grief Experiences of Filipino College Students

MYLA PILAR S. PAMPLONA*¹

¹De La Salle University, Taft Avenue Manila, Philippines
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1712-7174>

Corresponding Author: myla.pamplona@dlsu.edu.ph

Originality: 100%

Grammarly: 98%

Plagiarism: 0%

ABSTRACT

Article history:

Received: 17 Oct 2022

Accepted: 31 Oct 2022

Published: 30 Mar 2023

Keywords — Social Science, College students, death and non-death grief, IPA, COVID-19, counseling, Grief Program, Philippines

The experience of grief because of the loss of loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic and the loss of control resulting from uncertainties and broken relationships were among the concerns experienced by college students in the past two years. The study aims to understand the grief experiences of Filipino young adults and how they can be utilized to help others. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to understand the death and non-death experiences of three Filipino college students experiencing grief. An in-depth interview was conducted, and the steps using the IPA framework were carefully followed, which included reading and rereading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the following cases, and looking for patterns across issues. A conceptual framework based on the students'



© Myla Pilar S. Pamplona (2023). Open Access. This article published by JPAIR Multidisciplinary Research is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). You are free to share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material). Under the following terms, you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

experiences was developed, and recommendations were crafted. Themes include roller-coaster emotions and coping, connecting symbols to death, finding meaning to experience, remembering loved ones' wishes, loneliness, and emptiness of missed presence. The recommendation includes creating a Grief Program for Students aligned to their perceived needs.

INTRODUCTION

Grief is a natural response of the body as it encounters negative experiences. Grieving people may experience the feeling of sadness, longing, fear, and even isolation. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about varied experiences of grief, from the loss of routine to a broken relationship and even the loss of a loved one. The study by Verdery et al. (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic left 65 million people grieving because of lives lost and will reach millions with the experience of prolonged grief.

One of the most vulnerable populations during the pandemic is college students who tried their best to cope by doing online classes while engaging in the situation inside their homes. They experience many losses and uncertainties that can make them prone to the experiences of grief. Changing routines and missing important life events may cause weariness and disappointment in their lives (Ryan et al., 2023). The struggle of students to balance their academic activities, concerns, and uncertainties in the family remains challenging (Ignacio, 2021).

In the United States, a text-based crisis intervention showed more messages from young people 24 and less regarding feeling lost, overwhelmed, scared, and uncertain. The study also highlighted the increased need for bereavement counseling resources during high COVID-19 cases and deaths (Ryan et al., 2023). Non-death losses were also prevalent during the height of the pandemic. College students reported 6.33 losses, denoting loss of normalcy as the most prominent. These losses were noted as the significant predictor of loss of control and avoidance (Sirrinc et al., 2023).

The loss of family members and close friends amplifies the grief experiences of people in Brazil. The study of Joaquim et al. (2021) considers the responses of 9,024 Brazilians who were affected using the Brief Symptom Inventory. The results revealed that even people who did not have mental disorders during the pandemic reported symptoms related to the grief experience. In contrast, those with mental disorders struggle with their condition and report intensified psychological distress.

The study by Imran et al. (2020) gave significant importance to addressing immediately the mental health situation of young people, who comprise 50% of

the population in Pakistan, since it may cause long-term psychological effects. Parents also need to care for themselves and their mental health since they serve as role models to their children as they address everyday issues and concerns. A university in Greece reported increased depressive symptoms among students, and the school needed to create immediate intervention and support to address mental health concerns (Konstantopoulou & Raikou, 2020).

Lack of support from friends and family members and the death of caregivers exacerbated the experience of grief of university students in South Africa. They experienced intense and varying emotions related to the events during the pandemic, such as isolation, restrictions, and multiple losses. Although students were given online counseling interventions, they preferred face-to-face sessions since they are eager to connect with someone who can understand them and will serve as their support system as they go through the grieving process (Mabunda, 2022).

In Australia, the study by Tan and Andriessen (2021) highlighted not only the negative experiences of grief but also the personal growth experienced by the bereaved. Most participants shared their grief narratives with close and trusted friends, which served as their coping. They also focused on adopting values inculcated by the deceased as they continue the process and a balance between grief reactions and moving on with life. The need for peer support and interventions in school for college students who are grieving was also emphasized.

Coping strategies of the bereaved young adults in Malaysia are based on their beliefs, affect, and social aspects (Aren & Sambasivan, 2021). The researchers utilized a tool to help students experiencing grief and loss. Using the 6PSM in helping grieving young adults, the study proved that it is an effective intervention in counseling young adults as it conforms to the BasicPh coping model.

Funeral rituals and the experiences of the bereaved in Japan continue to become an important component of coping and well-being. Although the pandemic restricted the number of people who will be mourning together with the nuclear family of the deceased, the respondents find comfort and solace in sharing their experiences of grief with someone. The study also noted that psychological distress may exacerbate medical symptoms if grieving people cannot find a venue to express their grief (Kondo et al., 2023).

The undetermined future, grief, and losses made the students more concerned about their safety and future in the Philippines. According to the Commission on Higher Education, the hybrid learning mode is here to stay, where students attend face-to-face and online classes. Some can adjust easily to the new setup, but others do not. It was reported that there is an increase in

students availing counseling services in many schools in the Philippines (Angara, 2023). The country's lack of guidance counselors and mental health practitioners made the situation even more difficult (Chi, 2023). The study of Billote et al. (2021), however, revealed that online counseling could also be an effective means to reach out to clients during the pandemic, and students find it more convenient to disclose important information in an online setup.

As a mental health advocate and counselor, the researcher delves into the study of grief experienced by Filipino college students to understand and create an intervention program aligned with the student's diverse needs. A thorough literature review was done, and the researcher discovered a dearth of literature on the topic, especially on Filipino college students' experiences. Although many interventions are already available, as indicated in foreign studies, there is a need to investigate their accuracy on the Filipino norm.

Young adults or emerging adults aged 18-40 (Erikson, 1993) belong to the student population already in the tertiary level of education. Their needs are different compared to adolescents since they are given more responsibilities to take care of family issues and concerns as incoming adults. The expectations and pressures to do well in their academics as a preparation for their career, the responsibility of taking care of the younger siblings even during online lectures, and the experience of grief because of death and loss make it difficult for them to remain strong and focused (Porter & Claridge, 2019).

The study aims to determine the death and non-death grief experiences of college students in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding their experience will be a great tool in creating a counseling intervention for Filipino College Students. A Higher Education institution in the Philippines continues to create counseling programs that fit students' needs, which aligns with the school's mission of educating and serving the youth. By utilizing the grief experiences of college students in a Higher Education institution, the researcher will investigate how it will help students navigate the difficulties of the grieving process and create an intervention that can address their needs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study on Death and Non-Death Experiences of Filipino College Students aims to (1) understand, explore, and investigate the varying experiences of participants on death and non-death events in their lives and (2) utilize the experiences in creating a Grief Program for Students based on Filipino experience.

FRAMEWORK

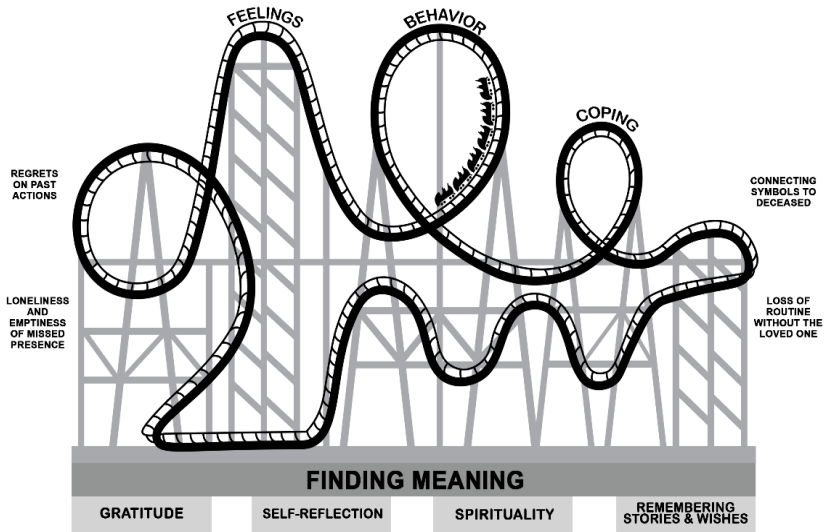


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Death and Non-Death Experiences of Filipino College Students

The framework depicts the roller coaster experiences participants encountered as they cope with the grieving process. The three participants confirmed experiences of being up and about in moving on with their lives but will again experience down moments of loneliness and longing. Roller coaster feelings, behavior, and coping were highlighted in their experiences. Regrets of past actions, the loneliness of missed presence, connecting symbols to death, and remembering the departed's wishes made the grief experiences personal and impactful to the participants.

Finding meaning served as the foundation for all the grieving experiences. Although the roller coaster experiences made them feel lonely and overwhelmed,

finding meaning in the loss grounded them to continue with their life guided by gratitude, self-reflection, spirituality, and the stories and wishes of their loved ones. Finding meaning is the sixth stage added by Kessler in the 5 Stages of Grief by Kubler Ross (Moorhead, 2021). It depicts the author's personal experience of how he achieves meaning in his life after the death of his son. Finding meaning after the death of a loved one or any form of loss is a personal and subjective path. After going through the roller coaster experience, after mourning and psychological distress, "finding meaning is the stage where the healing often resides."

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized in this study to better understand Filipino college students' death and non-death experiences. This method explores and investigates how participants perceive their experience, relatedness, and involvement in a particular event or process; an idiographic approach focuses on individuals' cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being (Larkin et al., 2021).

IPA enables a process called interpretative activity to allow the researcher to scrutinize and look in detail from an "insider's perspective" the death and non-death experiences of the participants and capture how the participants are making sense of their experience. IPA researchers accept the inevitability of prejudices, perceptions, and assumptions in research. Simply put, IPA is rooted in the idea that "Without the phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

IPA is committed to clarifying and elucidating a phenomenon (be that an event, process, or relationship), but its interest is in how this process sheds light on experiences as they are lived by the participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The phenomenological underpinnings of the IPA enable the researcher to describe how university students' death and non-death experiences impacted their lives.

Participants

In terms of the number of participants in IPA, no rule was given and will depend largely on the purpose of the study (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012), which includes the extent of analysis of a single case study, the abundance of experience of individual cases, the comparison and contrast of the single cases, and the realistic limitation of the condition of the researcher. "IPA studies have been published with one, four, nine, fifteen participants. Larger sample sizes are

possible but less common."

In the study of Alase (2017), it was discussed that in the "phenomenological research tradition, the size of the participants can be between 2 and 25." Homogeneity is an important factor and would be given importance in the IPA research study to grasp the overall lived experiences better as perceived by the participants. Creswell (2013) confirmed this principle when he stated, "It is essential that all participants have [similar lived] experience of the phenomenon being studied."

Participants who volunteered for the study were three female students and young adults who were able to experience grief because of death and non-death events in their lives. The number of respondents was based on the richness of their experiences on the phenomenon at hand. IPA allows the participants to expound, elaborate and describe comprehensively their death and non-death grief experiences.

Instrumentation

The study used purposive sampling to set the criteria for choosing the participants. Students need to be enrolled in AY 2022-2023 in a Philippine university, can be at any level, be able to experience death and non-death grief, and voluntarily agree to be interviewed and be one of the participants in the study.

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview to gather data from the participants. Three experts validated it. The participants were given a chance to relate their experiences with grief and were asked follow-up questions to discuss their experiences further. For IPA, the semi-structured interview is the best tool to gather significant data from the participants. It allows both the participants and the researcher to engage in meaningful dialogue and will allow further questioning and probing for essential issues that may arise (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Data Gathering

Several steps were undertaken to acquire the necessary data for the study. Approval from the higher authorities was requested to proceed with the data gathering. Coordination was done with counselors in charge of student representatives to help the researcher identify volunteers as participants. The informed consent was thoroughly discussed with the participants, including the data privacy, ethical considerations, and how their data will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Data Analysis

According to Smith and Osborn (2007), this method aims to explore in a detailed manner how participants are making sense of their personal and social world. The IPA studies the meanings of particular experiences, events, and states held for participants. A two-stage interpretation process or double hermeneutic is involved: first, the participants are trying to make sense of their world; second, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world insider's perspective (Conrad, 1990). Smith and Osborn (2007) elaborated on the steps in performing interpretative phenomenological analysis. They are: (1) Transcription and Provision of Exploratory Comments. The researcher listened to the recording and transcribed the participants' responses regarding their death and non-death experiences. Rereading and rereading the transcripts was done to understand the experiences of the participants fully. (2) Identifying Emergent Themes. Exploratory comments and notes were derived from the responses, allowing the researcher to develop appropriate themes that summarized the contents of the participants' statements. (3) Clustering of Themes. Different clusters or superordinate themes were also identified based on the commonalities of the emergent themes or subthemes generated in the previous stage. Similar to the subthemes identified, the clusters or superordinate themes were also determined based on the consistency and significance of the subthemes obtained from stage 2. (4) Cross-cluster Analysis. A cross-cluster analysis was done to determine converging themes among participants and to understand the participants' responses per cluster. Cross-clustering was conducted to investigate if the clusters or superordinate themes identified were already standalone themes and not in any way redundant or factorial with the rest of the clusters. Qualitative studies require in-depth analysis in which the researcher focuses on context analysis, explores the deeply rooted causes of phenomena, and highlights the explanations of what happened (Alase, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the answer to the specific problem raised in the study. It contains analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. The names used are not the actual names of the participants.

The story of *Charity*.

Charity is a 21-year-old student who is presently experiencing non-death grief because of the critical situation of her mother. She contracted a critical form

of tuberculosis and is on strong medication by the World Health Organization (WHO). She described her mother as caring and responsible, and she missed her presence when she was reminded of what she needed in school. She often sees her sleeping because of the effects of her medicine. She said she felt very lonely when she recalled her mother's questions about what food she liked. She misses her early morning ritual when she gets up early to prepare the food for her family. One very challenging request from her Mom was for her to continue her studies. She enrolled in only twelve units during the summer term mainly to be with her most of the time, help with the household chores, and cope with the void and loneliness she presently feels.

The story of *Hope*.

Hope started with her story about the roller coaster experience with grief. She shared the death of her mother when she was 10 years old. Her Mom died because of ovarian cancer, and she remembered pretty well how unsure she was about being young. She remembered that the family learned about her Mom's illness quite late since it was already stage 3. She witnessed how her family struggled and fought to make her Mom well again. Although it was many years ago, she said the grief experience will never disappear. There were times when they were watching movies, and there were instances related to their experience. She can still feel the loneliness and longing for her Mom.

Now that she is older, she realizes that the grief experience also varies with age. She narrated a story where their Mom would request them to sing for her. She did it half-heartedly since she was only 10 years old, not knowing it would be her Mom's last request. Now that she is already 21, she regrets that she could not give her best for her Mom. Her mother's last moments and words for her are for her take of herself. There are times when she reflected, especially now that death is everywhere because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is she taking care of herself. Is she being true to her Mom's wish? Hope also shared that everything will be meaningful for her when she sometimes feels lonely because of the grief process. She remembered that when her mother passed away, she saw a butterfly in their room and connected it immediately to her Mom as if she was telling her that she was in a good place and not in pain anymore. She also remembered during her last moments that it was rainy and gloomy in Manila, but when her Mom passed away, it suddenly became sunny and bright as if telling them that she was fine and all would be well.

The Story of *Faith*.

Faith, a 20-year-old student, was emotional as she narrated her grief

experience. She experienced multiple deaths at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her dog died in 2020, and her grandfather died from COVID-19 in 2021, and her aunt in 2022. She tried her best to cope with the grief but often felt overwhelmed with loneliness and safety concerns. She was an active student before the pandemic and did well academically. She was caught off guard when a sudden shift in learning modality occurred in 2020. She thought classes would resume immediately after a few months but was forced to accept that she must finish her senior high school year online.

Faith was close to her grandfather and often accompanied him during annual physical exams, ensuring he was physically fit at 75. 2019 was the last time she accompanied her grandfather. She remembered that the doctor told them that his heart condition was worsening and he may not live very long. Her grandfather had a heart-to-heart talk with her and said that he might not last long and reminded her to always take care of herself and pursue a medical degree since he always wanted her to be a doctor. She remembered that she could not speak and just cried during their talk. Her grandfather consoled her that it was a reality in life that needed to be accepted.

It was Tuesday morning when he was rushed to the emergency room in a nearby hospital in Bulacan because of difficulty breathing. Her uncle was the one who stayed in the hospital. Faith said she cried and was afraid to lose her grandfather. He died after two days and was permitted three days to have his remains in the church, being a devoted member. Faith felt numb the whole time, as if it was just a dream and not a reality. She said she could not sleep well and had no appetite for about two weeks. She tried her best to busy herself with her studies, but to no avail. She had no energy or motivation and wanted to stay in bed all day. What consoled her during that time was that when she prayed, she often talked to her grandfather about her thoughts and feelings, and she prayed that he would be fine wherever he was now.

Table 1

Emergent Themes and Superordinate Themes Based on Participant's Death and Non-Death Experiences

Emergent Themes and Subthemes	Superordinate Themes
Roller Coaster Emotions Roller Coaster Behaviors Roller Coaster Coping	Roller Coaster Experiences of Grief
Butterfly Experience Change in Weather	Connecting Symbols to the Deceased

Gratitude
 Self-Reflection
 Spirituality
 Remembering Stories & Wishes

Finding Meaning

Loss of routine without the Loved One
 Regrets of Past Actions

Loneliness and Emptiness on
 Missed Presence

Roller Coaster Experiences of Grief

Kubler Ross' Theory on the five stages of grief includes denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Tyrrell et al., 2023). The grieving process is not linear or hierarchical but goes on navigating back and forth to the stages (Moorhead, 2021). In the experiences of Filipino college students, the roller coaster experiences are focused on three areas - emotions, behavior, and coping. Roller coaster experiences of grief create mixed emotions in young adults. The study by Porter and Claridge (2019), where 15 emerging adults were interviewed, confirmed that mixed emotions may be experienced after losing a parent. They also discussed the unique experiences of emerging adults as they transition from being dependent on their parents to being on their own and exploring life independently.

Roller Coaster Emotions

The three respondents resonated with the roller coaster experience as they grieve. They shared that one day, they felt they were coping well, but sometimes, they felt an overwhelming feeling of loneliness and grief. Charity wanted to be with her Mom most of the time and planned to quit her classes, but her Mom insisted that she continue, *"I wanted to quit my classes kasi I wanted to be with her pero she kept insisting na I do not quit my cla.. (cries) sorry my classes. So, come term 1, I have only 12 units, which I'm partially grateful for kasi if it's too many, I don't think I can handle it. She also noticed that she could easily be annoyed, and then, ahmm, anger is another way kind of, kasi recently I've been getting more angry or erratic. Parang, one moment I'm okay, then the next minute I'm very annoyed, angry at people."*

Hope also shared that even though her Mom passed away many years ago, she still felt lonely when some movies or songs reminded her of her Mom, *"grief has this weird process that it goes everywhere, and so I would say like when I see movies that hit too close to home it remind of her. There are times my sisters and I will be watching a movie and then it will remind us of her I think one of the movies was Mama Mia."*

Faith's roller coaster experience because of multiple deaths made her feel confused and overwhelmed, *"Right now, I do not know what to feel. Sometimes, I can cope and connect with my friends, but sometimes, I feel empty even though we are at a party or having fun.* She narrated that she longs for the presence of her grandfather, who passed away because of COVID in 2021. She was very close to him and was instrumental in replacing her pet dog, who died in 2020.

Roller Coaster Behavior

Charity shared that she noticed many changes in her behavior, *"Uhhh and I would Uhhh kinda distract myself. I would do or work, much work,"* She also noted some of the behaviors that are new to her, *I just want to sleep the whole day...sometimes I think I am slow. Before I was able to handle 21 units na. Now I'm struggling with 12 units.* On the other hand, Faith also noted changes in how she copes with her academics: *"my grades are affected, and I cannot concentrate...I cannot study well and cannot focus."*

Roller Coaster Coping

Coping strategies are ways being used by people to be able to manage or control the situation. An article in the American Psychological Association highlights ways to cope with grief, including talking to someone about your loved one, accepting feelings instead of avoiding them, taking care of self and family members, and honoring the loved one with rituals (Nordal, 2020). Charity's experience on coping *"I will try to resolve issues at home by doing the household chores...sometimes I think that my siblings and I busy ourselves to cope and not to think about the situation."* Faith shared that she is busying herself by looking on means that can still make her productive, *"I tried concentrating on my studies...I tried to focus and not think of the loss, but sometimes I cannot focus and cannot cope"* while Hope consoled herself by being with her family as they go through the loss of her Mom, *"I always talk to my sister about my Mom...I always express what I feel when I am not sure."*

Loneliness and Emptiness of Missed Presence

The presence of the loved one plays an important role in the lives of the bereaved. The sudden loss of a family member disrupts the usual activity inside the home. Varying emotions can be felt and experienced by participants. Subthemes include loss of everyday routine and regret of past actions. The emptiness and loneliness of being unable to see and be with the loved one makes one reminisce about the times they were together and the actions bestowed upon the deceased.

Loss of Everyday Routine without the Loved One

Grief and Loss are common experiences during the pandemic. The loss of everyday routine was experienced by Charity when her mother was diagnosed with a rare kind of tuberculosis and needed the strongest medication to be able to recover. The medication the World Health Organization (WHO) gave can be compared to chemotherapy, which aggressively treats her mother's condition. She felt the loss of certainty in their everyday life when she narrated that *"it is like I lost a routine in a sense kasi she is always there like at 3 am, she wakes up to cook and then she comes home and asks us if we want to buy food, parang ganun kasi sya laging parang "gusto mo ng Shakey's, gusto mo ng...gusto ko ng... but now she is always sleeping."* Although she knows that her mother will recover, adjusting the household to the chores that must be accomplished can contribute to uncertainties and weariness among family members.

Faith also had the same experience with the loss of routine. She grew up with her grandparents because both of her parents are working. When her lolo got sick, Faith had difficulty accepting that things had changed, and she needed to adjust accordingly, *"since my lolo was weak, I am helping my lola with the household chores as I do my online classes. It was hard since I am used to focusing only on my studies, but now, I need to help them. I sometimes felt at loss since this was a new experience for me. The routine has changed drastically, and I could not cope."*

Loss of routine is common to people who are grieving. There are many types of loss, according to the study of Nabulsi (2022), where 119 students answered a survey to identify different kinds of losses in their lives. The four most impactful losses among the participants are the loss of a family member/close relative, friend, or loved one, followed by loss of social connection, loss of traditional college/university experience, and loss of a sense of certainty, predictability, and control. Although restrictions are lifted in most parts of the country and the world, people may still feel uncertain and frightened, for the entire population was caught off guard when COVID-19 hit the world.

Regret of Past Actions

Regret is determined as a painful feeling of past actions and how a person could have done better to achieve a better result. Particularly in the grieving process, regret is something that a person could have done when the loved one was still alive but failed to do so. Hope remembered it vividly when family members surrounded her Mom during her last moments, *"I am with my two older sisters. My eldest sister and I are singing to her. I didn't want to sing this one song, but my Mom liked the song. Yes, I am singing it with my sister, but I am doing it half-heartedly because I don't like singing the song. After we sang the song that is when she passed. I*

could have done better for her..I could have sung the song the best I could.”

Faith also regretted the time she could not spend with her grandfather when he was still alive. She felt that she could have done better the first time she learned that her grandfather might not live longer, *“although I knew from the start that he will not live longer, I was not able to spend more time with him...to listen to him and to talk to him.”*

Feelings associated with regret include pain, loneliness, and guilt. Unfinished business with the deceased can make someone feel guilty and regret past actions. Sometimes, self-blame may be present as one may ascribe weakness by failing to make an immediate decision during that crucial time (Stroebe et al., 2014).

Connecting Symbols to the Deceased

Butterfly Experience

People need to connect to the deceased, a symbol that will make them feel better. Candles, clouds, flowers, pictures, and butterflies are being used as a symbol so that the bond with the loved one who passed away will continue. Hope remembered her experience when her Mom passed away, *“I think seeing a butterfly before, like when she just recently passed. I think seeing a butterfly that told us, you know that is hey, she is okay, or maybe oh. Maybe it is her. Living in things like that is one way it comforted us, knowing that she was not in pain anymore and she was in a better place.”*

A Change in Weather

She also noticed the change in weather before her mom passed away. Hope narrated that her parents stayed in Manila most of time even though they are from Davao because of her treatment. *“When she passed days before that, it was really gloomy in Manila. It was raining hard but then the day she passed was really clear skies... it was so nice and bright outside so again it’s another way knowing that you know she’s okay.”*

Painter (2020) discussed in her article that people tend to look for something related to their loss experience. They want to continue communicating with their loved ones. If a loved one has an extraordinary experience with a butterfly, they will interpret it as a form of communication from the deceased family member. The butterfly tells them their loved one is in a better place. Often, the experience will elicit a positive feeling that will allow a grieving person to cope with the loss.

Finding Meaning

David Kessler adds a stage in Kubler Ross's 5 stages of grief (Tyrrell et al., 2023). He felt that it must not end on acceptance alone but on how to move forward after the grief process. Finding meaning in the loss will allow the loved one to plan (Kessler, 2019).

Gratitude

The participants find meaning in their experience by expressing gratitude for the life well-lived of their loved ones. Faith said, *"I thank God for having a grandfather like my lolo. He always wants me to be a doctor. Although I did not take that path, he just wants me to be happy on whatever path I take."* Charity shared that although the adjustment was difficult without her Mom she is still very thankful, *"I am grateful that she is still here. Another chapter is a new way of looking into life."*

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection made Hope evaluate her present state as she copes with the loss. She shared that during the last moment of her mom, they had individual time with her to say goodbye...*I promise to her that I will take care of myself. Sometimes I question myself am I living up to that promise..will she be proud of me."* Charity also shared her thoughts on how she can become a good daughter to her mom, *"I often reflect on the good things that my mom did to me...it inspires me to help in doing the household chores."*

Finding meaning in the experience makes one reflect on the impact of the loss on one's lives. Self-reflection allows the loved ones to evaluate their present condition and how they can be a better person guided by the examples given by their loved ones who already passed away.

Remembering Stories and Wishes

Remembering the loved one's wish made Hope evaluate her present state as she copes with the loss. She shared that during the last moment of her Mom, they had individual time with her to say goodbye...*I promise her that I will take care of myself. Sometimes I question whether she will be proud of me if I live up to that promise?"*

Charity remembered that her mom's wish is always to see them active, *Alam mo yung feeling na, when someone is recovering, they want to see the people around them being okay. Kasi my Mom would blame herself if we didn't...sorry... if we didn't look okay.* Finding meaning also allowed the participants to remember good stories with their loved ones. Faith shared memories about her lolo, and

my Dad told me a story about my lolo. Whenever my Titos and my Lola tell me the good things he has done, it makes me happy. Hope also shared that her older sisters had more memories with their mother since she was still young; *our Mom loves music and will always ask her children to sing for her. It also becomes our bonding, I think,*” Charity shared stories about how her mom has this unique personality that affects her children positively. *“She is a responsible mom and always checks on us, especially when asking what food we like to eat... That is what I missed more about her.”*

Spirituality

Faith shared that when she is alone and misses her lolo, she will pray and talk to him, *“when I cannot cope with what I feel, I pray and talk to my lolo... when I do that, I feel a sense of peace that he is in a better place where he is happy.”* The study by de Diego et al. (2022) discussed the important role of spirituality in well-being and coping. Healthcare professionals acknowledged the importance of spirituality as a positive coping strategy they used to care for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. Spirituality allows them to cope by looking deeply into their purpose and how to respond to people’s immediate needs.

The world is currently coping with many losses amid the pandemic. Moorhead (2021) discussed Kubler Ross’ documentation of such experiences, which may include how people cope by denying the reality of the loss, bargaining on what actions they should have taken to prevent the situation, or being lonely and afraid of another pandemic that may occur and acceptance that the world we used to know is not the same anymore. However, the sixth stage, finding meaning, gives bereaved loved ones and the general population hope...a new chapter to look forward. It serves as a roadmap to remember those who passed away with more love than pain. It is also a means to honor them with beautiful memories and rituals (Kessler, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Grief due to death or non-death means can affect Filipino college students differently. The themes confirmed the difficulty of navigating the grief process as a person will experience the roller coaster ride of emotions, behavior, and coping. Other experiences include connecting symbols of grief and regrets of past actions. Experiences that include connecting symbols to the deceased can make a loved one feel hopeful and relieved that the dead person is in a good place.

On the other hand, loneliness and emptiness of missed presence made students feel the loss of routine without the loved one and regret past actions.

Finding meaning is the foundation for the students to endure the grieving process. Gratitude, self-reflection, spirituality, and remembering good stories and wishes allowed the students to have the desire to move on with their lives.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The study about Filipino college students' death and non-death experiences aims to create a counseling intervention program for young adults' needs. Many foreign approaches are available to address symptoms related to grief, but their efficacy to the Filipino norm needs to be tested. The need to continue doing research that is culturally based in approach will contribute to the counseling profession on how Filipinos will make the most of the services of the counselors.

REFERENCES CITED

- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9-19.
- Angara, S. (2023). Addressing the 'silent' pandemic. *Manila Bulletin*. <https://bit.ly/44WSQko>
- Aren, M., & Sambasivan, V. (2021). Exploration of coping strategies among bereaved young adults using six-part story method (6PSM).
- Billote, W. J. S., Escoto, M. F., Ponce, R., Ponce, T. E., Pama, E., Montoya, R. M., ... & Adam, M. J. (2021). A Document Analysis on the Efficacy and Ethical Considerations of Online Counseling. *JPAIR Multidisciplinary Research*, 43(1), 21-35.
- Chi, C. (2023). Lack of guidance counselors hampers prevention of student suicides. *Philstar.com*. <https://bit.ly/44VHfK>
- Conrad, P. (1990). Qualitative research on chronic illness: a commentary on method and conceptual development. *Social science & medicine*, 30(11), 1257-1263.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and research design choosing among five approaches* (3rd Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

de Diego-Cordero, R., Ávila-Mantilla, A., Vega-Escañó, J., Lucchetti, G., & Badanta, B. (2022). The role of spirituality and religiosity in healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic: An integrative review of the scientific literature. *Journal of religion and health*, 61(3), 2168-2197.

Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 193-209.

Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society*. WW Norton & Company.

Ignacio, A. E. (2021). Online classes and learning in the Philippines during the Covid-19 Pandemic. *International Journal on Integrated Education*, 4(3), 1-6.

Imran, N., Zeshan, M., & Pervaiz, Z. (2020). Mental health considerations for children & adolescents in COVID-19 Pandemic. *Pakistan journal of medical sciences*, 36(COVID19-S4), S67.

Joaquim, R. M., Pinto, A. L., Guatimosim, R. F., de Paula, J. J., Costa, D. S., Diaz, A. P., ... & Malloy-Diniz, L. F. (2021). Bereavement and psychological distress during COVID-19 pandemics: The impact of death experience on mental health. *Current Research in Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 100019.

Kessler, D. (2019). *Finding meaning: The sixth stage of grief*. Simon and Schuster.

Kondo-Arita, M., & Becker, C. B. (2023). Changing Funerals and Their Effects on Bereavement Grief in Japan. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 00302228231158914.

Konstantopoulou, G., & Raikou, N. (2020). Clinical evaluation of depression in university students during quarantine due to covid-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Public Health Studies*, 3(1).

Larkin, M., Flowers, P., & Smith, J. A. (2021). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*, 1-100.

Mabunda, N. B. (2022). *University of KwaZulu-Natal students' experiences of loss, grief and bereavement during Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic* (Doctoral dissertation).

- Moorhead, J. (2021). Finding meaning in the life of a loved one who dies is part of grief. *The Guardian*. <https://bit.ly/3rgM3V0>
- Nabulsi, E. H. (2022). 2 Years On: Loss and Grief Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Nordal, K. C. (2020). Grief: Coping with the loss of your loved one. *American Psychological Association*.
- Painter, S. (2020). Significance of Butterflies in Association with Death. *Lovetoknow*. <https://bit.ly/3Zn9oRF>
- Pietkiewicz, I., Smith, J.A. (2013). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne (Psychological Journal)*. 18(2), 361-369.
- Porter, N., & Claridge, A. M. (2019). Unique grief experiences: The needs of emerging adults facing the death of a parent. *Death Studies*.
- Ryan, S. C., Runkle, J. D., Sugg, M. M., Singh, D., Green, S., & Wertis, L. (2023). Spatio-temporal clustering of adolescent bereavement in the United States during the extended response to COVID-19: A follow-up study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 72(1), 156-159.
- Sirrine, E. H., Kliner, O., & Gollery, T. J. (2023). College student experiences of grief and loss amid the COVID-19 global pandemic. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 87(3), 745-764.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2007). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a useful methodology for research on the lived experience of pain. *British journal of pain*, 9(1), 41-42.
- Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W., Van De Schoot, R., Schut, H., Abakoumkin, G., & Li, J. (2014). Guilt in bereavement: The role of self-blame and regret in coping

- with loss. *PLoS One*, 9(5), e96606.
- Tan, J., & Andriessen, K. (2021). The experiences of grief and personal growth in university students: a qualitative study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(4), 1899.
- Tyrrell, P., Harberger, S., Schoo, C., & Siddiqui, W. (2023). Kubler-Ross Stages of Dying and Subsequent Models of Grief. In *StatPearls [Internet]*. StatPearls Publishing.
- Verdery, A. M., Smith-Greenaway, E., Margolis, R., & Daw, J. (2020). Tracking the reach of COVID-19 kin loss with a bereavement multiplier applied to the United States. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117(30), 17695-17701.