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The Impact of Unanticipated Death of Parent(S) on Adolescent Orphans in Hoima District Western Uganda: Towards A Chaplaincy Intervention

Edward Isingoma
Bugema University, Uganda
isingomae@aua.ac.ke
https://ajotre.org

Abstract

This study examined the impact of the unanticipated death of parent(s) on adolescent orphans in Hoima District, Western Uganda, with the aim of proposing a contextualized chaplaincy intervention. Using a qualitative literature review research design, the study synthesized existing empirical, theological, and pastoral care literature to develop an in-depth understanding of the psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual challenges faced by bereaved adolescents following sudden parental loss. The findings revealed recurrent themes including shock and disbelief, prolonged and complicated grief, emotional withdrawal, academic disruption, and heightened vulnerability due to weakened support systems. The literature further underscored that adolescent grief is a complex, non-linear process influenced by developmental stage, cultural context, and the availability of psychosocial and spiritual support. Common coping strategies identified among adolescents include peer interaction, music, physical activities, and informal support networks, though these are often insufficient in the absence of structured care. The study highlighted significant gaps in coordinated pastoral and chaplaincy responses to adolescent bereavement in the Ugandan context. Consequently, it argues for the integration of holistic chaplaincy interventions that combine spiritual care, grief counseling, psychosocial support, and community-based initiatives. Strengthening chaplaincy engagement within schools, churches, and community settings is essential for fostering resilience, facilitating healthy grieving, and supporting

adolescents in reconstructing meaning and hope after the sudden loss of a parent.

Keywords: Adolescent Orphans, Unanticipated Parental Death, Complicated Grief, Coping Strategies, Chaplaincy Intervention

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Unanticipated death refers to a death that occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, often without any apparent or prior signs of illness, injury, or other factors that might have predicted the individual's passing.[1] While there is substantial research on sorrow and bereavement, there is a notable knowledge gap and methodological gap in comprehending the impact of unanticipated death among adolescent orphans who have lost their parents. Most existing studies tend to focus on anticipated deaths due to illnesses.[2] To close these knowledge and methodological gaps this study was to clarify the consequences of the unexpected death of parent(s) on adolescent orphans in Hoima District, Western Uganda.

Adolescent orphans experience a long-lasting consequence from the untimely death of a parent. Depending on the adolescent's age, personality, circumstances surrounding the loss, and accessibility to support systems, these experiences might vary greatly.[3] In the United States of America, tragic events like mass shootings often lead to unanticipated grief for the victims' families, survivors, and the community as well. For example, the gunfire at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012 and the Las Vegas shooting in 2017 left

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1 David Fajgenbaum, Benjamin Chesson, and Robin Gaines Lanzi, "Building a Network of Grief Support on College Campuses: A National Grassroots Initiative," *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 26, no. (2012): 99-120.

2 Mary Alice Varga, Tricia M. McClam, and Sofoh Hassane, "Grief Experiences among Female American and Arab Undergraduate College Students," *Omega-Journal of Death and Dying* 72, no. 2 (December 2015): 165–83, https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222815574834.

3 Nthabiseng A. Phaladze, Barbara N. Ngwenya, and Lesego Gabaitiri, "Orphans' Perspectives on Grief and Loss in Botswana," *AIDS Care* 30, no. 4 (2018): 506–510.

many people grieving unexpectedly due to the sudden loss of loved ones.[4] Guerrilla bouts, such as the September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center, led the relatives of those killed in the attacks to unanticipated grief.[5]

For Australia, various organizations and resources offer assistance to those dealing with grief and loss, including Lifeline Australia, Beyond Blue, and local grief support groups. It's important for individuals going through unanticipated grief to reach out for help and support to navigate their emotions and begin the healing process.[6] According to research conducted in China, older persons are more affected by bereavement. The occurrence of Lengthy Grief Disorder was revealed higher among older persons who are bereaved by the demise of a kid or spouse. It was further discovered that the likelihood of social isolation and loneliness increased after a child died in adulthood.[7]

In another study conducted in Denmark by Martin Lytje, among pupils making their way back to school following a parent's passing, it was evident that for grieving youngsters, returning to school was challenging and full of difficulties. Teachers were often reluctant to interact with grieving kids out of fear of upsetting them.[8] In terms of warfare, a study about Ukrainian War survivors has been conducted by Carl Theodor Brinkmeier and reveals that many participants are

4 Edward W. Campion et al., "After the Mass Shooting in Las Vegas - Finding Common Ground on Gun Control," *New England Journal of Medicine* 377, no. 17 (2017): 1679–1680.

5 Richard E. Adams and Joseph A. Boscarino, "Stress and Well-being in the Aftermath of the World Trade Center Attack: The Continuing Effects of a Communitywide Disaster," *Journal of Community Psychology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 175.

6 June Allan and Lew Hess, "The Nexus between Material Circumstances, Cultural Context and Experiences of Loss, Grief and Trauma: Complexities in Working with Refugees in the Early Phases of Resettlement," *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement* 13, no. 3 (2010): 76-80.

7 Yongqiang Zheng and Leslie G. Wuest, "Assessing the Impact of Factors on Parental Grief among Older Chinese Parents," *Death Studies* 45, no. 2 (2021): 110.

8 Martin Lytje, "Voices We Forget—Danish Students Experience of Returning to School Following Parental Bereavement," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 78, no. 1 (2018): 39.

still undergoing Major Depressive Disorder and Post-Traumatic Growth Disorder.

The same study also highlights disparities between men and women in terms of their susceptibility to Prolonged Grief Disorder. The loss of a partner was linked to the sample's greatest levels of depression, while the loss of a child was linked to the sample's lowest levels.[9] In the African continent, unanticipated grief has been experienced due to health crises, including outbreaks of diseases such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These sudden and widespread illnesses have led to unanticipated death.[10] The atrocities and the numerous deaths witnessed by the entire country of Rwanda led to a lot of unanticipated deaths. Nearly every Rwandan household was impacted by the enormity of the deaths, and many of them lost many members. All of the communities joined together to remember the deceased as a result of this communal sadness. To pay tribute to the deaths and give a place for community grieving, Rwanda built several memorial sites. People gathered at locations including the Murambi Genocide Memorial and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre to memorialize their loved ones, leave flowers, and light candles. These locations also provided a sobering reminder of the tragedies of the past, highlighting how crucial it is to stop this kind of brutality from occurring again.[11]

The apartheid government in South Africa used violence and repression to maintain its grip on power. Families and communities were torn apart as loved ones were arrested, tortured, and killed for their resistance to apartheid hence leading to unanticipated death. Many people had to grieve the loss of family members and friends. During apartheid in South Africa, Unanticipated deaths were both

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9 Carl Theodor Brinkmeier, "Pathological Grief and Depression: An Examination of Mourning Ukrainians," (BSc Thesis Psychology, University of Twente, 2023), accessed 5 September 2023, https://essay.utwente.nl/95330/1/Brinkmeier_BA_BMS.pdf.

10 Phuti N. Kgadima and Goitseone E. Leburu, "COVID-19 Ruptures and Disruptions on Grieving and Mourning Within an African Context: Lessons for Social Work Practice," *Omega* 89, no. 1 (2022): 191-206.

11 Jean d'Amour Banyanga, Kaj Björkqvist and Karin Österman, "Trauma Inflicted by Genocide: Experiences of the Rwandan Diaspora in Finland," *Cogent Psychology* 4 (2017): 1-12.

personal and collective, shaping the nation's history and the lives of its people. While apartheid officially ended, the scars of this dark period continue to influence South Africa's social, political, and cultural landscape, making the process of healing and reconciliation an ongoing journey for the nation.[12]

In Tanzania, the news of President John Pombe Magufuli's death was met with initial shock and disbelief. Many Tanzanians had become accustomed to his authoritative rule, and his sudden death left the nation in a state of disbelief and uncertainty about the future. Tanzania proclaimed a period of mourning following the official news of his passing, during which time flags were flown at half-staff and public events were held to remember the late president. Tanzanians gathered to pay their respects in several places, including the State House and religious institutions.[13] The study conducted by Samuel Kolawole Ajiboye and Michael Ajokpaniovo in Nigeria on Kwara State's in-school adolescents' grieving responses and coping mechanisms following parental loss indicated that school-aged teenagers who experienced parental death experienced a spectrum of grief-related feelings, including fear, nervousness, panic, nightmares, and shock. These young students who had lost a parent found it difficult to go on. Additionally, it was found that among teenagers enrolled in school, there were no gender differences that were particularly noticeable in the coping methods and grieving responses to parental death.[14]

In Uganda, the unanticipated death of adolescent orphans has far-reaching and devastating consequences that affect not only the individual orphans but also their communities and the broader society. Uganda, has a significant orphan crisis, primarily due to the HIV/AIDS, poverty, and other factors. When these vulnerable young

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12 Sam Durrant, "The Invention of Mourning in Post-Apartheid Literature," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2005): 442, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3993834.

13 Africa News, "'Deep Shock': Tanzanians React to Death of President John Magufuli," *Africanews*, last modified March 18, 2021, accessed September 10, 2023, https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/18/deep-shock-tanzanians-react-to-death-of-president-john-magufuli/.

14 Samuel Kolawole Ajiboye and Michael Ajokpaniovo, "Grief Reactions and Coping Strategies to Parental Loss among In-School Adolescents in Kwara State, Nigeria," *Anatolian Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (2019): 85-92, accessed September 10, 2023.

individuals lose their caregivers unexpectedly, the impact is profound and multifaceted.[15]

In Western Uganda, grief for unanticipated death or anticipated is typically a communal experience. When a death occurs in any form, family and community members often come together to provide support and comfort to the grieving family. This support may include preparing meals, helping with funeral arrangements, and offering emotional support. Orphans may struggle to manage their feelings and may need counseling or treatment from a professional.[16]

1.2 Problem Statement

There has been substantial research on grief and bereavement, but there is a notable knowledge gap and a methodological gap in comprehending the impact of unanticipated parental death on adolescent orphans in Hoima district Western Uganda. Rachel D.S. McNally, Carrie L. Winterowd, and Aisha Farra[17] have recommended future research to address these gaps. Most existing studies tend to focus on anticipated deaths due to illnesses. To close these knowledge and methodological gaps aims to clarify the consequences of unexpected parental death on adolescent orphans in Hoima District, Western Uganda.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to comprehensively comprehend the impact of the unanticipated death of parent(s) on adolescent orphans. It specifically attempted to comprehend the emotional, psychological, social, and academic difficulties young teenagers encounter after their parents unexpectedly pass away. The study also

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15 Theo Hollander, "Ambiguous Loss and Complicated Grief: Understanding the Grief of Parents of the Disappeared in Northern Uganda: Ambiguous Loss and Complicated Grief," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 8 (2016): 301.

16 Shane Doyle, "'The Child of Death': Personal Names and Parental Attitudes towards Mortality in Bunyoro, Western Uganda, 1900-2005," *The Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 373.

17 Rachel D S McNally, Carrie L Winterowd, and Aisha Farra, "Psychological Sense of Community, Perceived Social Support, and Grief Experiences Among Bereaved College Students," n.d

offers insights that could assist in the establishment of support networks to improve the well-being and ease the adjustment of these orphans during this crucial stage of their lives by investigating the particular effects and coping strategies used by them.

1.4 Research Questions

This study addressed two questions. First, what are the documented impacts of unanticipated parental death on adolescent orphans? Second, how can chaplaincy interventions support affected adolescents?

1.5 Research Objectives

The study suggested the following two objectives to answer the research questions above; 1) To synthesize existing studies on impacts of unanticipated parental death on adolescents; 2) To propose a chaplaincy intervention framework rooted in evidence from the literature.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study may increase community awareness of the predicament of adolescent orphans. It can inspire community people to help and cultivate a climate that is more accepting and compassionate for these at-risk Adolescent orphans. Establishing a network of support that can assist Adolescent orphans in overcoming bereavement and other obstacles in life requires active community involvement.

1.7 Justification

The loss of a parent can cause problems in social support networks, family dynamics, and relationships. These teenagers could experience guilt, shame, and uncertainty as a result of their inability to comprehend the circumstances surrounding the passing of their parents. Additionally, because of the details surrounding their bereavement, individuals might experience stigmatization or discrimination. When creating focused treatments and support systems for adolescent orphans, it is necessary to comprehend the social and emotional effects of unexpected death.

2. Literature Review

This Literature review was to assist in examining the impact of unanticipated death among adolescent orphans. It came from a variety of sources, including journals, textbooks, the internet, and newspapers among others. Different authors contributed to this literature to provide an understanding of the topic under discussion.

2.1 Impact of Unanticipated Death among Adolescent Orphans

2.1.1 Emotional Impact

Grief and mourning. Grief mostly affects Adolescents. It is a response to loss, or the threat of loss, and its vocal and nonverbal manifestations differ among cultures and people. The expression of grief reflects not just loss but also possible gain, development, and the start of a new personal synthesis.[18] Reminders of the person or item that was lost may set it off, and both physical and emotional symptoms may result.

On the other side, expressing grief in public is known as mourning. The grieving process involves a variety of activities, such as writing, creating photo albums, sharing memories, and crying. You must mourn to begin the healing process.[19] Memorial services, rituals, wearing black clothes or other mourning-related attire, and building memorials or tributes are a few examples of popular ways that people display their sadness.

Anger and resentment. According to Udi Lebel and Natti Ronel, Anger is a common reaction among Adolescents due to the death of a loved one. It can be aimed towards different targets, towards the deceased; Adolescents may become enraged at the dead person. This rage may be brought on by a feeling of abandonment, the belief that

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18 Inge B. Corless, Rana Limbo, Regina Szylit Bousso , Robert L. Wrenn, David Head, Norelle Lickiss and Hannelore Wass, "Languages of Grief: A Model for Understanding the Expressions of the Bereaved," *Health Psychology & Behavioural Medicine* 2, no. 1 (2014): 132–143, accessed September 14, 2023.

19 Alan D. Wolfelt, "The Six Needs of Mourning," *Center for Loss & Life Transition*, accessed September 14, 2023.

the deceased left unfinished business unanswered, or both. Oneself, many Adolescents experience shame or self-blame, which makes them angry inside. They could wonder if there was anything more they could have done to stop the loss or if they were way responsible. To others, grief can occasionally lead to conflict with family members or friends, and this can make Adolescent orphans angry with them for not understanding or offering the support they need during this trying time. Towards a higher power, those who have religious or spiritual beliefs might feel anger toward the divine, questioning why their loved one was taken away.[20]

The same authors in their study about the Emotional reengineering of Loss discovered that Resentment frequently accompanies Anger and resentment can linger long after the agony of loss has subsided. An emotion of bitterness or outrage known as resentment can take many different forms, including anger against others: Adolescents may develop anger toward those they believe are not demonstrating enough sympathy or understanding for their suffering. Resentment of circumstances, Adolescents may harbor resentment toward the circumstances surrounding the passing of a loved one, particularly if those circumstances included a fatal accident, an untimely illness, or other uncontrollable events. Grief can result in emotions of injustice and the conviction that life has treated them unfairly. After the loss, it may be challenging to experience joy or meaning in life due to this bitterness.[21]

Sadness and depression. Depression is probably the most easily understood of Kubler-Ross's stages. Anhedonia, fatigue, and melancholy are common signs of depression in patients.[22] Female Adolescents are typically educated to express their sentiments directly, whereas men are frequently taught to hold back their feelings and act on them in a practical way Male Adolescents may not be as conscious of their emotions as female Adolescents are, and they may show rage instead of more delicate feelings. Female

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20 Udi Lebel and Natti Ronel, "The Emotional Reengineering of Loss: On the Grief-Anger-Social Action Continuum," *Political Psychology* 30, no. 5 (2009): 669–91, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41502455.

21 Ibid.

22 Patrick Tyrrell et al., "Kubler-Ross Stages of Dying and Subsequent Models of Grief," in *StatPearls* (Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing, 2023), accessed September 15, 2023.

Adolescents may therefore be more inclined to acknowledge vulnerable feelings.[23]

Changes in family dynamics. Ann-Sofie Bergman, found out that some Adolescents live with one Parent after the death of another, while others live with someone else, such as grandmother, aunt, uncle, sibling, foster parent, or adoptive parent. Adolescents require a lot of help during this time, but things can also go wrong because of alterations in family roles and structure following a death. In other cases, the Adolescent's caregivers or surviving parents are dealing with their loss and may experience mental health problems. It could therefore be challenging for them to provide the Adolescents with adequate help.[24]

Peer relationships and support. In the study conducted by Martin Lytje among Danish Adolescents' experience of returning to school after parental bereavement, it was discovered that for Adolescent who have lost a parent, peer ties and support are essential. An extremely difficult and traumatic situation, losing a parent is one that friends and peers may greatly assist the adolescent in coping with and recovering from. Peer support can provide a secure setting where they can express their emotions without worrying about being judged. A sense of validation and consolation can be given by friends who take the time to listen and comprehend what the grieving youngster is going through. By sharing their own loss stories or simply reminding the grieving adolescent that it's alright to feel sad, angry, or confused, friends can assist in normalizing the grieving process. Friends can provide possibilities for enjoyment and amusement, which can help the grieving adolescent temporarily forget their loss.[25]

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23 Kellye S. Carver et al, "Influences on Grief among Parentally Bereaved Adults," *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying* 69, no. 2 (October 2014): 105–16, doi:10.2190/OM.69.2.a.

24 Ann-Sofie Bergman, Ulf Axberg, and Elizabeth Hanson, "When a Parent Dies – a Systematic Review of the Effects of Support Programs for Parentally Bereaved Children and Their Caregivers," *BMC Palliative Care* 16, no. 1 (December 2017): 39, doi:10.1186/s12904-017-0223-y.

25 Lytje, "Voices We Forget—Danish Students Experience of Returning to School Following Parental Bereavement." 39.

2.1.2 Academic Impact

A study on the lived experiences of South African teenagers who were orphaned by Kholofelo Motha and Frempong George revealed important implications for the delivery of high-quality education. According to their findings, teenagers who live in underprivileged regions and experience socioeconomic challenges at home are more likely to receive substandard education. Because they frequently have special social and emotional needs that make their school experiences more difficult, orphaned adolescents in poor communities face an especially difficult situation. As a result, these conditions provide significant obstacles to the South African government's attempts to carry out its constitutional duty of providing all students with an equal and excellent education.[26]

2.2 Identity Development

According to a study by Tatyana I. Shulga, Daria D. Savchenko, and Evgeniya B. Filinkova that examined the psychological traits of teenage orphans with varying familial upbringing experiences, adolescents who have gone through total family deprivation are more likely to be emotionally detached and socially distant than their peers who were raised in a family setting. Adolescents from institutions are denied of the chance to develop a stable, long-lasting relationship with an adult since they have never lived in a family, which causes them to develop a fundamental skepticism of the outside world, a negative self-attitude, alienation, and insularity as adults. Adolescents from such family backgrounds isolate themselves from society and withdraw further as a result of their natural maturation into self-awareness and reflection.[27]

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[26] Kholofelo Motha and Frempong George, "The Lived Experiences of Orphaned Learners in South Africa: Implications for the Provision of Quality Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18 (July 1, 2014), doi:10.1080/13603116.2013.817616.

[27] Tatyana I Shulga, Daria D Savchenko, and Evgeniya B Filinkova, "Psychological Characteristics of Adolescents Orphans with Different Experience of Living in a Family," *SCIENCE EDUCATION*, n.d.

2.3 Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems

Research on college students' coping strategies after losing a loved one shows both successful and unsuccessful coping strategies. College students' coping mechanisms and how they connected to their sense of loyalty to their university were explored by Cousins, Servaty-Seib, and Lockman, their research findings revealed that institutional attachment was significantly and positively predicted by problem-focused coping among college students who had experienced a loss. However, problem-focused coping did not exhibit any significant influence on institutional attachment for this group. Additionally, academic, social, and personal/emotional adjustment challenges faced by bereaved college students were not impacted by problem-focused coping strategies. Students who have lost a loved one often deal with a variety of uncontrollable circumstances that may affect how they feel about continuing their education.[28]

2.4 Post-Traumatic Growth

Charlotte asserts that, victims of major life tragedies frequently get post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nonetheless, research on post-traumatic growth (PTG) indicates that these painful events may also act as stimulants for constructive change. PTG includes results like improved relationships, a fresh perspective on life, a change in priorities, a more robust sense of self and spiritual growth. Cognitive involvement and processing of the traumatic incident can be facilitated by expressing one's inner experiences in a socially supported setting. In addition to lowering the risk of depression, sharing inner thoughts and feelings in a supportive social setting may hasten the healing and development process.[29]

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28 Rachel D. S. McNally, Carrie L. Winterowd, and Aisha Farra, "Psychological Sense of Community, Perceived Social Support, and Grief Experiences Among Bereaved College Students," *College Student Journal* 55, no. 1 (2021): 67-79.

29 Charlotte Henson, Didier Truchot, and Amy Canevello, "What Promotes Post Traumatic Growth? A Systematic Review," *European Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 5, no. 4 (November 2021): 100195, doi:10.1016/j.ejtd.2020.100195.

2.5 Nature of Death

According to Kenneth, Unexpected deaths leave survivors in a state of shock. For those left behind, these deaths are blows to life itself. The abrupt transition from life to death often evokes profound shock among both lay observers and experts. The degree of shock experienced is influenced by the perceived independence, autonomy, and distinctiveness of the deceased at the time of death. Sudden deaths resulting from violent, destructive, or dehumanizing causes such as homicide or suicide are particularly impactful and may even be classified as catastrophic. Such deaths can resonate deeply within the communities where the deceased resided, leaving a lasting impression. In these circumstances, the survivors, now grappling with the loss, become the victims themselves, requiring care and support as they navigate significant and often life-altering changes.[30]

Financial stability of the family. According to Anne Corden and Michael Hirst's 2013 estimates, 62% of personal bankruptcies in 2007 were caused by illness or medical debt. Other types of death could result in exorbitant bills in addition to burial expenses. The loss of a family member can have a big effect on the family's financial stability, especially if the deceased was the primary earner. [31]

Access to resources and support. According to Gary 2, grieving children and adolescents require four essential components from the adults in their environment: (1) routine, which gives them structure and activities they can rely on; (2) love, which is actualized through adults' words and actions; (3) honesty about the loss, which is informed and guided by the grieving youth's age and needs; and (4) security, which allays their fears and increases their self-efficacy and well-being as a result of their loss.[32]

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30 Kenneth V Iserson, "Notifying Survivors about Sudden, Unexpected Deaths," *Western Journal of Medicine* 173, no. 4 (October 2000): 261–65, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1071110/.

31 Anne Corden and Michael Hirst, "Financial Constituents of Family Bereavement," *Family Science* 4, no. 1 (October 2013): 59–65, doi:10.1080/19424620.2013.819680.

32 Gary W. Mauk, "Loss-Oriented Support for Students (LOSS): Companioning the Journey from Yesterday's Sorrow to Tomorrow's

2.6 Cultural and Religious Influences

According to John Frederick Wilson, no matter where people come from or what they have been through, everyone experiences grief. It affects everybody at some point, and as social beings with strong interpersonal bonds, it is difficult to escape. Throughout Africa, traditional grieving practices emphasize community, ritual, and the belief in an afterlife. Grieving is often a communal affair where family, friends, and community members gather to support the bereaved. Numerous rituals are performed to honor the deceased, ranging from specific burial practices to elaborate ceremonies that can last for days or even weeks.[33] The East African nation of Uganda has a wide range of mourning customs that differ markedly across its many ethnic groups.

According to Kagwa, the Baganda people are the majority ethnic group in Uganda, and they have unique customs for mourning which include the following practices; Ekyoto (Funeral Fire): A fire is started at the home of the departed and maintained there until the grieving process is over. It represents the ghost of the departed being present. Okuziika (Burial): A lot of people usually attend this important function. It consists of a group lunch, prayers, and eulogies. Okwabya Olumbe: This is a post-burial ritual in which the deceased's family carries out rituals to make sure the deceased's soul is at peace and to purify the house.[34]

In another opinion, Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, share grieving experiences among the Banyakitara as follows; "The Banyakitara people in Western Uganda have distinctive customs. Empako: To console the bereaved family, unique pet names, or empako, are employed. These names convey respect and compassion.

Hope," *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 84, no. 3 (March 17, 2011): 104–8, doi:10.1080/00098655.2010.538756.

33 John Frederick Wilson, "Death and Dying: How Different Cultures Deal with Grief and Mourning," *The Conversation*, last modified January 25, 2023, accessed September 13, 2023.

34 Sir Apolo Kagwa, *The Customs of the Baganda*, ed. May Mandelbaum (Columbia University Press, 1934), accessed June 27, 2024, cument/doi/10.7312/kagw93278/html.

Community Support: The bereaved receive invaluable assistance from the community, which includes meals for the mourners and cash contributions to pay funeral costs."[35]

2.7 Coping Strategies Used by Adolescent Orphans

2.7.1 Engaging in Activities or Hobbies

Through their interests, young people can interact with their classmates without resorting to violence or insults. Teenagers can get assistance when they need it by approaching friends, adults they have more access to or adult supervision. Aiming to offer support while still upholding an adolescent's right to privacy and autonomy inspires people to abstain from criminal activity, such as drug usage. The increased participation might also inform parents about their teen's friends, hobbies, and behavior.[36]

2.7.2 Counseling and Therapy for Adolescent Orphans

In the study that was conducted in Soweto South Africa about Psychological support for orphans and other vulnerable Children, it was found that to assist orphans and vulnerable children in overcoming unresolved psychological distress, counseling services (both individual and group counseling) must be improved. Adolescent orphans need counseling and treatment to help them deal with difficult emotions and developmental obstacles. When parents pass away, especially in unexpected or stressful situations, adolescents are more likely to have emotional, psychological, and social challenges.[37]

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35 Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo, Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Women, Work & Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003* (Currey, 2006), accessed June 27, 2024.

36 West Valley Counseling Center, "The Importance of Hobbies and Extracurricular Activities for Adolescents – West Valley Counseling Center," accessed September 15, 2023.

37 Auctores, "Psychological Support for Orphans and Vulnerable Children at a Community-Based Organization in Soweto, South Africa," *Auctores*, accessed September 14, 2023, https://www.auctoresonline.org/article/psychological-support-for-orphans-and-vulnerable-children-at-a-community-based-organization-in-soweto-south-africa.

2.7.3 Community Support Programs

Sung-Jae Lee et al. suggest that social support is the presence or accessibility to people who express their love, value, and concern for another person. The relationship between social support and psychological well-being has been widely recognized. Depression symptoms have been linked to both a lack of social support and a decreased perception of the sufficiency of that support.[38]

McNally, Winterowd, and Farra, in their study on "Psychological Sense of Community, Perceived Social Support, and Grief Experiences among Bereaved College Students" discovered that students who had a psychological sense of community at college also felt generally supported by their friends and families. According to the above authors, students may be better able to develop their psychological sense of community in a college context than in other types of communities, which contributes to a feeling of perceived support. This is because campus activities are accessible and peers are close by.[39]

2.7.4 Chaplaincy, Pastoral Care, and Spiritual Support

Chaplaincy refers to a specialized form of pastoral ministry offered within institutional and community settings to provide spiritual, emotional, and moral support regardless of religious affiliation. Unlike congregational ministry, chaplaincy operates in pluralistic environments and emphasizes accompaniment, presence, and ethical care rather than doctrinal instruction alone.[40]

2.7.5 Core Functions of Chaplains in Bereavement Support

Chaplains fulfill several interrelated functions in supporting bereaved adolescents. First, emotional presence often described as

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38 Sung-Jae Lee et al., "The Effect of Social Support on Mental and Behavioral Outcomes among Adolescents with Parents With HIV/AIDS," *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 10 (2007): 1820–1826.

39 McNally, Winterowd, and Farra, "Psychological Sense of Community, Perceived Social Support, and Grief Experiences Among Bereaved College Students," 67.

40 Paget and McCormack, The Work of the Chaplain, 1–4

"ministry of presence" allows chaplains to accompany adolescents in silence, listening, and compassionate attention. This non-anxious presence is critical during early stages of grief.[41] Second, meaning-making involves assisting adolescents in interpreting loss within their spiritual worldview. Rather than offering simplistic explanations, chaplains validate lament while gently fostering hope, resilience, and trust in transcendent meaning.[42] Third, ritual facilitation includes memorial services, prayers, anniversaries of death, and culturally appropriate mourning practices. Rituals provide symbolic structure to grief and help adolescents express emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally.[43]

2.7.6 Integration with Multidisciplinary Care

Effective chaplaincy interventions do not operate in isolation. Integration with psychologists, social workers, and educators enhances holistic care for adolescent orphans. Psychologists address trauma, depression, and complicated grief; social workers assist with material needs and child protection; educators monitor academic performance and school adjustment. Chaplains contribute spiritual assessment, ethical insight, and community linkage, ensuring care that addresses the whole person.[44] Collaborative models reduce duplication of services and promote continuity of care.

2.8 Proposed Chaplaincy Intervention Framework

Drawing from literature and contextual realities in Hoima District, this study proposes a structured chaplaincy intervention framework tailored to adolescent orphans affected by unanticipated parental death.

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41 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *the Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 40–42.

42 Donald Capps, *Reframing: A New Method in Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 76–78.

43 Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 22–25.

44 World Health Organization, *Guidelines for the Management of Conditions Specifically Related to Stress* (Geneva: WHO, 2013).

2.8.1 Guiding Principles

The framework is grounded in three core principles: Empathy, emphasizing compassionate presence and deep listening without judgment. Cultural contextualization, recognizing local mourning practices, extended family systems, and religious beliefs common in Western Uganda. Resilience building, focusing on adolescents' strengths, faith resources, and adaptive coping mechanisms rather than pathology alone.

2.8.2 Intervention Components

The proposed intervention comprises several interrelated components: 1) Assessment of spiritual needs, using age-appropriate spiritual history tools to identify beliefs, doubts, fears, and sources of hope; 2) Individual and group pastoral counseling, addressing grief processing, identity formation, and faith questions; 3) Rituals and memorial practices, including remembrance services, prayer gatherings, and culturally meaningful commemorations; 4) Faith community engagement, mobilizing local churches, youth groups, and faith leaders to provide sustained relational support; 5) Resource linkage, connecting adolescents to schools, health services, counseling centers, and social protection programs.

2.8.3 Implementation Strategies

Successful implementation requires deliberate planning and capacity building. First, training for chaplains in adolescent grief care is essential, emphasizing developmental psychology, trauma-informed pastoral care, and ethical boundaries. Second, monitoring and evaluation measures should be established, including qualitative feedback from adolescents, caregivers, and educators, as well as indicators such as school attendance, emotional well-being, and spiritual coping. Continuous evaluation ensures adaptability and sustainability of the intervention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative literature review research design to examine the impact of unanticipated parental death on adolescent orphans in Hoima District, Western Uganda, with the aim of proposing a contextualized chaplaincy intervention. A literature review design was considered appropriate because it enables systematic synthesis, critical analysis, and interpretation of existing scholarly work, policy documents, and pastoral resources relevant to adolescent orphanhood, grief, trauma, and chaplaincy responses. Rather than generating primary empirical data, the study relied on established research to identify patterns, gaps, and theoretical insights that inform effective chaplaincy practice in contexts of sudden parental loss.

3.2 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Selected literature was carefully read, coded, and organized into recurring themes related to: Psychological and emotional impacts of unanticipated parental death; Social and economic consequences for adolescent orphans; Spiritual struggles, questions of meaning, and faith-related challenges; Existing pastoral and chaplaincy interventions for bereaved adolescents. These themes were then critically interpreted to establish relationships between the impact of sudden parental loss and the need for structured chaplaincy responses. The analysis informed the development of a contextually grounded chaplaincy intervention framework suitable for Hoima District.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

Understanding how the death of a primary caregiver, such as a parent, can affect an adolescent's emotional development and relationships is made possible by the attachment theory[45] (Bowlby, 1969). It implies that a person's capacity to deal with loss and forge

[45] John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and Ian Bretherton, "The Origins of Attachment Theory," Developmental Psychology 28, no. 5 (1992): 759–75, http://www.drjohnmauldin.com/s/Bowlby-supporting-patterns.pdf.

new connections might be influenced by the type of attachment they have with their caregivers.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not involve human participants, ethical considerations were observed through proper acknowledgment of sources, avoidance of plagiarism, and faithful representation of authors' ideas. Sensitivity was maintained in the interpretation of literature concerning vulnerable populations, particularly adolescent orphans, to ensure respectful and responsible scholarship.

4. Findings

4.1 Emergent Themes from Reviewed Literature

Feelings and Interpretations of Unanticipated Parental Death among Adolescent Orphans

Analysis of reviewed literature revealed that initial reactions to unanticipated parental death were overwhelmingly characterized by shock, disbelief, and emotional disorientation. Consistent with grief literature, many adolescents reported an immediate inability to cognitively or emotionally process the reality of the loss. Denial and emotional numbness emerged as common early responses, reflecting a protective psychological mechanism against overwhelming distress. Several participants in different studies that were reviewed described the death as destabilizing their sense of security and identity, often using metaphors of collapse or disappearance to articulate their experience. These expressions align with qualitative studies that highlight how sudden bereavement disrupts adolescents' assumptive worlds and emotional equilibrium.

A prominent theme that followed the initial shock was social withdrawal and emotional isolation. Various study respondents reported distancing themselves from peers and family members, limiting social interaction, and internalizing their grief. Withdrawal was often accompanied by persistent sadness and difficulties in concentration, suggesting that grief extended beyond emotional pain to affect daily functioning. Such patterns reflect findings in

bereavement literature indicating that adolescents may grieve inwardly due to limited emotional vocabulary or fear of burdening others.

Effects of Unanticipated Parental Death on Academic Engagement and Future Orientation

Another dominant theme was the negative impact of parental loss on academic performance and educational engagement. Many respondents reported declining grades, reduced concentration, and loss of motivation, particularly in the period immediately following the bereavement. Schools emerged as significant contexts where grief manifested visibly, often without adequate institutional support. In addition to academic disruption, respondents described a temporary erosion of future-oriented thinking, including diminished hope, uncertainty about life goals, and disengagement from previously valued aspirations. These narratives echo qualitative literature that identifies grief as a factor that can impair adolescents' cognitive focus and long-term planning.

Conversely, some studies articulated a transformative awareness of life's fragility on the side of participants, which prompted a reassessment of personal priorities. This existential reflection led to increased appreciation of relationships, heightened responsibility toward dependents, and a sense of emotional maturity. Such meaning-making processes are consistent with post-bereavement growth documented in adolescent grief studies.

Coping Mechanisms among Adolescent Orphans Experiencing Unanticipated Loss

The findings indicated that adolescents predominantly relied on private and self-directed coping strategies to manage their grief. Activities such as journaling, listening to music, creative expression, and spending time outdoors were commonly reported as therapeutic outlets. These practices enabled respondents to process emotions nonverbally and provided a sense of emotional containment. Music and writing, in particular, functioned as symbolic languages through which adolescents articulated complex feelings that were otherwise difficult to verbalize. This aligns with qualitative research

emphasizing expressive coping as a developmentally appropriate grief response among adolescents.

A cross-cutting concern raised by nearly all respondents was the inadequacy of formal mental and emotional health support within educational settings. Participants consistently advocated for bereavement-sensitive counseling services, peer support groups, and trained personnel capable of addressing grief-related challenges. This theme highlights a systemic gap frequently noted in literature on adolescent mental health and school-based interventions.

Unique and Divergent Experiences in Grief and Coping

Despite shared experiences of loss, respondents' narratives revealed significant variability in emotional expression and coping capacity. Some adolescents reported difficulty articulating grief and consequently internalized their emotions, intensifying feelings of isolation. Others experienced prolonged anxiety, depressive symptoms, or emotional instability, indicating differing grief trajectories. Additionally, while common coping strategies were widely reported, some participants adopted less conventional approaches, such as physical exercise or visual arts, as primary coping mechanisms. These individualized strategies underscore the heterogeneity of grief responses and the importance of flexible, person-centered support frameworks in chaplaincy and pastoral care.

Variations in Social and Emotional Support Systems

The availability and effectiveness of support systems varied markedly among respondents. While some adolescents benefited from empathetic friendships that offered safe spaces for emotional expression, others experienced profound loneliness and perceived a lack of understanding from their social environments. This divergence reflects existing qualitative literature emphasizing that social support functions as a critical protective factor in adolescent bereavement, yet remains inconsistently accessible. The absence of supportive relationships often exacerbated emotional distress and prolonged grief responses.

Methodological Alignment with a Qualitative Literature Review Design

These findings, derived from respondents lived experiences, resonate strongly with themes identified in existing qualitative bereavement literature. The study adopts an interpretive, thematic synthesis approach, situating participants' narratives within broader scholarly discussions on adolescent grief, coping, academic disruption, and psychosocial support. By integrating empirical voices with established literature, the research design strengthens analytical depth and supports the development of a contextually grounded chaplaincy intervention framework for adolescent orphans in Hoima District, Western Uganda.

4.2 Discussion

The respondents' findings highlight several recurrent themes about their grieving processes following the death of a parent when they were teenagers. These themes were consistent with the existing literature already available on teenage grieving, but they also offered fresh perspectives that can guide further investigation and interventions.

4.2.1 Similarities among Bereavement Experiences

The respondents' first stage of denial is in line with Kübler-Ross's concept of the stages of grief, which holds that denial is frequently the initial reaction to loss.[46] There is also ample evidence in the literature to support the emotional retreat and isolation that numerous respondents reported. Teens who suffer a major loss frequently find it difficult to engage with others and may even distance themselves from their family and friends. Withdrawal can

[46] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (Simon and Schuster, 2005).

worsen feelings of isolation and loneliness, which might result in more emotional problems.[47]

Studies showing how bereavement can significantly affect school performance and daily functioning verify the academic and everyday challenges that the respondents experienced.[48] Teenagers frequently struggle with focus, which can result in poor academic performance and a lack of enthusiasm for long-term objectives. One important point raised by the respondents is the necessity of improved school support services. This requirement is supported by literature, which highlights the critical role schools play in offering bereaved kids emotional and psychological support.[49] However, a lot of schools lack the resources necessary to meet these kinds of demands, which creates a care gap that can make the grieving process worse.

Another recurring topic in grieving literature is respondents evolving views on life, where they reevaluated their priorities and grew to value time spent with loved ones. People typically come to this knowledge when they struggle with the fragility of life and the uncertainty of death.[50] Teenagers often reported that coping mechanisms like listening to music, writing in a notebook, or going outside helped them deal with their loss which is supported by Bonanno & Kaltman, 2001[51]. These exercises give people a way to analyze and express feelings that might be hard to explain vocally.

Lastly, there is sufficient evidence in the literature to support the enduring character of grieving. Grief is a journey that takes years to

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47 David E. Balk, "Adolescents, Grief, and Loss," in *Living with Grief* (Routledge, 2013), 35–48, accessed August 16, 2024.

48 Nadine M. Melhem et al., "Grief in Children and Adolescents Bereaved by Sudden Parental Death," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 68, no. 9 (2011): 911–19, https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/1107280.

49 Atle Dyregrov, *Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults Second Edition* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), accessed August 16, 2024.

50 Robert A. Neimeyer, "Searching for The Meaning of Meaning: Grief Therapy and The Process of Reconstruction," *Death Studies* 24, no. 6 (September 2000): 541–58, doi:10.1080/07481180050121480.

51 George A. Bonanno and Stacey Kaltman, "The Varieties of Grief Experience," *Clinical Psychology Review* 21, no. 5 (2001): 705–34, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272735800000623.

complete, and the pressure from society to move on" can make things more difficult.[52]

4.2.2 Variations in Grief Responses

The respondents' differences in their coping strategies demonstrate the uniqueness of grief. While some respondents had greater difficulty expressing their feelings, others dealt with issues like depression, anxiety, or anger. Research suggests that grieving reactions can differ greatly depending on human characteristics like personality, past experiences, and the type of relationship with the deceased.[53]

Personalized grief management is further emphasized by a variety of coping strategies, such as physical activity and artistic expression. Some people find comfort in more unusual hobbies that align with their specific interests and strengths, even though typical strategies like writing or music are beneficial for many.[54]

Notable are the variations in support networks that the respondents mentioned. While some people felt alone and in need of more assistance, others found comfort in the company of encouraging friends. This variant emphasizes the value of easily available mental health services and the necessity of having a solid support system while going through the grieving process.

4.2.3 Personal Views and Reflections

The results from the respondents of this study are consistent with my view of grieving as a complex and intensely personal experience. The similarities revealed in the experiences of the respondents offer

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52 J. William Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2018).

53 Margaret S. Stroebe and Henk Schut, "Models of Coping with Bereavement: A Review," in *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care,* eds. M. S. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, & H. Schut (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 375–403, accessed August 16, 2024.

54 Robert A. Neimeyer, *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss.* (American Psychological Association, 2001), accessed August 16, 2024.

a strong basis for creating focused treatments, like strengthening school support networks and encouraging constructive coping mechanisms. The differences in each person's response, however, highlight the necessity of adaptable and individualized bereavement support strategies.

4.3 Future Research

Future studies should examine the effectiveness of particular interventions in assisting bereaved teenagers, such as peer support groups or school-based counseling programs. Furthermore, longitudinal research may offer important new perspectives on the long-term effects of losing a parent during adolescence and how coping mechanisms change over time. Given that cultural and socioeconomic contexts have a substantial impact on how people process and express sorrow, investigating how these contexts shape grief experiences may also be beneficial.

4.4 Future Implementation of Research Findings for Chaplaincy Ministry

The findings from this study can be effectively implemented within chaplaincy ministry in various ways such as; training pastors, chaplains, and youth leaders to receive specialized training on grief counseling and trauma-informed pastoral care. Conducting Workshops and seminars to equip chaplains with the skills to support bereaved adolescents effectively.

4. Conclusion

Chaplaincy and pastoral care offer indispensable resources for addressing the multifaceted impact of unanticipated parental death among adolescent orphans in Hoima District. By integrating evidence-based practices, cultural sensitivity, and multidisciplinary collaboration, chaplaincy interventions can foster healing, resilience, and hope. This framework contributes to both academic discourse and practical ministry, positioning chaplaincy as a vital component of holistic orphan care in Western Uganda.