

FACULTY ATTITUDE AND APPROACH TOWARDS GRIEVING STUDENTS

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Abstract

Students often experience the loss of their loved one and caught in a grieving process that can range from one day to many days depending on their culture. This grieving process will definitely have some effect on the learning process of the student, and thus affects their success. Our plan was to conduct an online survey to a random sample of MSU-Mankato full-time instructional faculty, and analyze the following issues: faculty's comfort level discussing death with students, faculty's comfort level referring their students to counseling services? The likelihood that faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students level of empathy is measured among a sample of college faculty, faculty's perceptions of students' likelihood to discuss death with them, the relationship between level of empathy reported among faculty and likelihood faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students. Results from this study indicated that faculty reacted positively toward grieving student.

Literature Review

- At any given time, 22 to 30 percent of college undergraduates are in the first twelve months of grieving the death of a family member or friend (Balk, 2008).
- Research suggests that although traditional-age students may understand some aspects of the bereaved experience, they may less be adept at offering appropriate support (Balk, 1997).
- The more clinicians and educators learn about the college student grief experience, the better able they will be to meet the needs of their clients and students (Mathews & Servaty-Seib, 2006).

Purpose

- The purpose of this study is to explore faculty's attitude and their approach towards grieving students.

Research Questions

1. What is faculty's comfort level discussing death with students?
2. What is faculty's comfort level referring their students to counseling services?
3. What is the likelihood that faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students?
4. What level of empathy is measured among a sample of college faculty?
5. What are faculty's perceptions of students' likelihood to discuss death with them?
6. What are faculty's responses to grieving students?
7. Is there a relationship between level of empathy reported among faculty , and likelihood faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students?

Methods

All full-time, instructional faculty at a Minnesota State University, Mankato were asked to participate in an online study. The study involved completion of two surveys: The Faculty Survey on Grief Issues (FSGI), developed for this study; and the Emotional Empathy for Adolescents and Adults instrument developed by Caruso and Mayer (1998).

Prior to the study, approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Face and content validity for the FSGI was assessed by a panel of faculty (n=9).

The FSGI instrument was given to a sample of faculty (n=13) for reliability analyses for the following grouped items: comfort level discussing death related issues with students; cronbach alpha .93; attitude towards the effects of grief on students .70; and likelihood of providing accommodations to grieving students .844.

All participants received an email detailing the purpose of the study, informing subjects of the risks and benefits of participation, and the Informed Consent. Within the email, a link was provided to the survey.

Data Analysis

- Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze data.
- Descriptive statistics
- Pearson Product Moment Correlation

Results: 1. What is faculty's comfort level discussing death with students?

	Very Uncomfortable n (%)	Uncomfortable n (%)	Somewhat Uncomfortable n (%)	Somewhat Comfortable n (%)	Comfortable n (%)	Very Comfortable n (%)
Discussing death with students in class (n = 125).	5 (4%)	13 (10.4%)	15 (12%)	24 (19.2%)	36 (28.8%)	32 (25.6%)
Discussing death with a student individually outside of class (n = 126).	1 (.8%)	2 (1.6%)	10 (7.9%)	20 (15.9%)	47 (37.3%)	46 (36.5%)
Discussing the death of a student with students in class (n = 123).	5 (4.1%)	12 (9.8%)	14 (11.4%)	24 (19.5%)	39 (31.7%)	29 (23.6%)
Allowing class time for students to express sorrow and discuss a fellow student's death (n = 123).	5 (4.1%)	3 (2.4%)	17 (13.8%)	21 (17.1%)	43 (35%)	34 (27.6%)
Discussing the death of a student's loved one with a student (n = 124).	1 (.8%)	6 (4.8%)	10 (8.1%)	27 (21.8%)	44 (35.5%)	36 (29%)
Discussing afterlife with students in class (n = 121).	25 (20.7%)	21 (17.4%)	19 (15.7%)	26 (21.5%)	17 (14%)	13 (10.7%)
Discussing afterlife with a student individually outside of class (n = 123).	11 (8.9%)	18 (14.6%)	17 (13.8%)	23 (18.7%)	25 (20.3%)	29 (23.6%)

2. What is faculty's comfort level referring their students to counseling services?

Over 79% (n = 100) of faculty reported being "comfortable" or "very comfortable" referring a student to campus counseling services or other psychological services.

3. What is the likelihood that faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students?

	Very Unlikely n (%)	Unlikely n (%)	Somewhat Unlikely n (%)	Somewhat Likely n (%)	Likely n (%)	Very Likely n (%)
Excuse absence for attending funeral only when documentation is provided (n=123).	38 (30.9%)	6 (4.9%)	13 (10.6%)	7 (5.7%)	10 (8.1%)	49 (39.8)
Excuse a student's absence for attending funeral of immediate family member (n=125).	0	0	2 (1.6%)	3 (2.4%)	10 (8%)	110 (88%)
Excuse a student's absence for attending the funeral service of any family member (n=125).	1 (.8%)	0	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.2%)	21 (16.8%)	92 (73.6%)
Excuse a student's absence for attending the funeral services for a non-family member (n=125).	2 (1.6%)	1 (.8%)	3 (2.4%)	20 (16%)	39 (31.2%)	60 (48%)
For grieving student, extend deadline of assignment that was due during the week of the death (n=126).	0	0	1 (.8%)	12 (9.5%)	23 (18.3%)	90 (71.4%)
For grieving student, extend deadline of assignment that was due during the month of the death (n=125).	1 (.8%)	8 (6.4%)	17 (13.6%)	18 (14.4%)	40 (32%)	41 (32.8%)
For grieving student, extend deadline of assignment that was due during the semester of the death (n=124).	7 (5.6%)	12 (9.7%)	21 (16.9%)	30 (24.2%)	26 (21%)	28 (22.6%)
For grieving student, reschedule exam originally scheduled during the week of the death (n=125).	1 (.8%)	0	1 (.8%)	6 (4.8%)	16 (12.8%)	101 (80.8%)
For grieving student, reschedule exam originally scheduled during the month of the death (n=126).	1 (.8%)	10 (7.9%)	18 (14.3%)	30 (23.8%)	31 (24.6%)	36 (28.6%)
For grieving student, reschedule exam originally scheduled during the semester of the death (n=126).	15 (11.9%)	15 (11.9%)	21 (16.7%)	28 (22.2%)	22 (17.5%)	25 (19.8%)

4. What level of empathy is measured among a sample of college faculty?

The mean score for overall empathy as reported by faculty was 3.76, scores ranged from 2.07 to 5.0. (SD .45) (n=120)
Empathy was measured using Caruso and Mayer's (1998) Measure of Emotional Empathy for Adolescents and Adults

5. What are faculty's perceptions of students' likelihood to discuss death with them?

	Very Unlikely n (%)	Unlikely n (%)	Somewhat Unlikely n (%)	Somewhat Likely n (%)	Likely n (%)	Very Likely n (%)
Inform you, as professor, of the recent loss of a close loved one (n=124).	0	0	1 (.8%)	17 (13.7%)	55 (44.4%)	51 (41.1%)
Inform you, as professor, of difficulty coping with the recent death of a close loved one (n=126).	2 (1.6%)	5 (4%)	20 (15.9%)	55 (43.7%)	31 (24.6%)	13 (10.3%)
Dishonestly use "death in the family" as a reason to miss class (n=126).	26 (20.6%)	40 (31.7%)	23 (18.3%)	22 (17.5%)	11 (8.7%)	4 (3.2%)
Dishonestly use "death in the family" as a reason for missing deadlines (n=126).	25 (19.8%)	39 (31%)	27 (21.4%)	19 (15.1%)	11 (8.7%)	5 (4%)
In the event of a death in the family, request additional time for assignment completion (n=125).	0	7 (5.6%)	8 (6.4%)	36 (28.8%)	53 (42.4%)	21 (16.8%)

6. What are faculty's responses to grieving students?

Eighty percent (n=100) of respondents indicated they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” in approaching a student about an abrupt decrease in academic performance.

When asked how comfortable faculty were in referring students to campus counseling services or other psychological services, the response was similar with 100 respondents indicating they were comfortable making referrals.

Faculty was asked about their comfort level in verbally expressing sympathy to a grieving student. Only 5 respondents (4%) indicated such expression would cause personal discomfort.

The majority of faculty reported being comfortable in providing follow-up to a student after the death of a close loved one, with 77% reporting being ‘comfortable’ or ‘very comfortable’ in doing so.

7. Is there a relationship between level of empathy reported among faculty , and likelihood faculty will provide accommodations to grieving students?

- Preliminary analyses suggest no significant relationship.
- Follow up studies plan to subcategorize types of empathy to further study this question.

Discussion

- 53.8 percent of faculty reported they were uncomfortable to discuss afterlife with students in class.
- 62.6 percent of faculty reported they were comfortable to discuss afterlife individually outside of class.
- 70.6 percent reported they didn't think students dishonestly use "death in the family" as a reason to miss a class.
- Eighty percent (n=100) of respondents indicated they were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" in approaching a student about an abrupt decrease in academic performance.
- When asked how comfortable faculty were in referring students to campus counseling services or other psychological services, the response was similar with 100 respondents indicating they were comfortable making referrals.
- The mean score for overall empathy as reported by faculty was 3.76, scores ranged from 2.07 to 5.0. (SD .45) (n=120)
- Would students response to same but modified questions be different?

References

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