Students' perceptions of stress when experiencing loss and the support from academia that is needed.

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Has a student in your world recently experienced a loss? Students report the loss of someone close through death is the #1 stressor that they experience.

Purpose
Death of someone close was the highest ranked stressor of college/university students at frequency of 20-30% (Balk, Walker, & Baker, 2010; Boynton Health Service, 2013). Secondary ramifications of loss include changes in familial roles, need to address financial and household details, travel, and emotional upheaval. Impact of loss can be physical, emotional, cognitive, interpersonal, behavioral, and spiritual.

Theories of Grief
- Elizabeth Kübler-Ross identified five states of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance after observing dying patients rather than research on bereaved individuals.
- Worden’s (2008) four task model: (a) to accept the reality of loss; (b) to process the pain of grief; (c) to adjust to a world without the deceased; and (d) to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life.
- Bonanno’s (2009) research notes three common trajectories, chronic grief, gradual recovery, and resilience.
- Dual Process Model (DPM) is a dynamic process of confrontation and avoidance (oscillation) involving loss-orientation and restoration-orientation (Stroebe and Schut, 2010).

Research Method
Mixed methodology including survey, interviews, and artifact review. Survey respondents that experienced loss of someone close-N134, 65% Caucasian, 35% multicultural. Interviews of seven students -5 females, 2 males, 3/7 multicultural.

Findings/Results
Survey results:
- 78% had the same or increasing stress levels
- 37% of respondents lost more than one person
- 35% experienced loss of grandmother and 30% loss a friend
- 1 request for assistance was a place to go for privacy on campus
- 79% did not discuss their recent loss(s) with anyone at the college
- Students who discussed loss spoke with classmate and instructor as first and second survey responses
- Few students who spoke with campus personnel had enrollment options discussed with them
- Stressors ranked as feelings, difficulty studying, getting through school, keeping up with class, finding emotional relief

Interview results:
- All seven students had health challenges in the form of accidents, physical illness and/or increase in psychological symptoms
- Academic studies created structure to lives and students often continued in school as a commitment to the deceased
- A decrease in closeness with family noted by 6/7
- A stress management course was taken by 3/7
- Stress management techniques: relaxation phone apps, children, cooking, coloring, pets, journaling, drinking, group support, exercise, and friends

Recommendations
- Increase comfort for conversation on loss across campus and provide materials on normal grieving
- Increase visibility of support, including peer support, and provide information on academic leave
- Offer information on stress relief practices and explore a stress reduction course
- Develop a bereavement policy that encourages flexibility and offers incomplete grade options

Conclusions
- The topic is not well researched
- Interview participants described stress as exhausting, a tiring ongoing process, a physical thing, seeing a wall, a pressure cooker building, a distraction, decreasing the ability to sleep and handle oneself
- College provided a structure, purpose, and was labeled as a safe place to go
- Students took minimum time off from school and few disclosed their loss at school; those who left college due to grief and loss would not have been identified
- Students were vulnerable to physical illnesses, accidents, and an increase in psychological symptoms during the grief process
- There were no requests for students for a quick fix, or to take the pain away, but there was a willingness to talk to a concerned individual
- Further research needed on the therapeutic nature of qualitative interviews

References
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