2014

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INTRODUCTION

Sex differences in distress variables are common, but recent research auditing examination of these differences in conservative Christian environments due to gender roles and beliefs. Few studies have measured distress by relationship to deceased, and fewer still have considered both effects of relationships and whether the death was traumatic. Incorporation of coping tasks may assist in resilience and transformation following these types of losses. College students do not like to admit struggling or ask for help, so health variables may be better indicators of bereavement-related distress than self-report measures of dealing with grief. This study compares effects of sex, loss type, relationship to deceased, and coping on distress of students in a Christian Evangelical university.

Research Questions

1. How does distress and coping differ by sex?
2. How does distress differ among loss types and relationships to the deceased?
3. How does coping interact with sex, loss type, and relationship to deceased on variables of distress?

METHODS

Participants

Sex: 362 (n = 42) males; 649 (n = 75) female
Race/Ethnicity: 69% White, 12% Hispanic; 12 African American; 3 Asian American; 4 Puerto Rican; 9% "Other".
Religious Preference: 110 (94 %) Protestant Christian

INSTRUMENTS

See References for more information

1. Demographic Questionnaire: (a) gender, (b) loss in the last 24 months, (c) the relationship, and (d) how the person died (traumatic/non-traumatic).
2. TAT stories coded for coping themes (yes/no).
3. Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)
4. SCL-90-R indices of depression, anxiety, positive symptom distress, and global symptom
5. General Health Questionnaire (GHQ)
6. Impact of Event Scale (IES-Rey) indices of intrusiveness, avoidance, and hyper-arousal

RESULTS

Sex and Distress (Figure 1) - Females reported significantly higher mental health distress than males, t(114)=2.8, p<.006, and mental health stress differences were meaningful, t(114)=1.95, p<.05.

Sex, Loss Type and Relationship to Deceased (Figure 3) - 1. No difference by loss type or relationship for males. 2. Females with both losses had significantly more mental health distress, F(3,71)=6.05, p<.001, and event distress, F(3,71)=3.22, p<.019, than none or family losses; event distress for friend-only losses did not differ from the others, but it did differ from none on mental health distress (p<.034); loss type had little effect.

Coping by Relationship (Figure 2) - 1. There was a significant interaction between coping and relationship on mental health distress, F(3,108)=2.87, p=.04, and on event distress, F(3,108)=3.50, p=.018. Most coping both measures of distress were higher when experiencing both losses than any of the other 3 conditions. When students were coping, there was no difference.
2. Those who did not include coping themes in their TAT stories had significantly higher mental health stress, F(1,108)=.94, p<.053, and event stress, F(2,108)=.99, p>.048, than those who did.
3. Those with both losses had a higher mental health distress, F(3,108)=.69, p>.001, than those with the other 3 conditions and (b) higher event distress, F(3,108)=.48, p>.005, than those with family or no losses, but not than friend loss.

Coping by Loss Type

1. There was a significant interaction between coping and loss type on mental health distress, F(2,109)=4.12, p=.019; students not coping had higher stress, F(3,108)=2.87, p<.018; when not coping both losses, F(3,108)=1.38, p>.018. Masculinity and distress in men are more related, p<.005, than those with a Christian Evangelical university.

CONCLUSIONS

The strangely contentious responses from men suggest that men are hesitant and uncomfortable with bereavement related distress. It is possible that the hyper-masculinized environment discourages acknowledgement of struggle.

Relationship appears a slightly better indicator of distress than is loss type particularly for females and/or those experiencing compound losses.

Implications/Limitations

1. More research on hyper-masculinity and distress in Christian environments and on friend death is needed.
2. Religious denominational preference would have allowed investigation of cultural fit on distress. Further measures of religiosity would have better informed the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was made possible by US-CHYR grant (RO1DA18959-25) awarded to David E. balk.