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## **Mother's Grief and Loss over Young Adult's Death: An Explorative Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The death of a child is one of life's greatest tragedies especially when it comes to the side of the mothers because they are the ones who conceived the child. This study explored the grieving process of the bereaved mothers—the effects of the loss and the strategies they used to cope with the feelings of grief. The results were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in INA Healing Center. There were four bereaved mothers that served as the participants of the study and the data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis. Losing a child is an undesirable and devastating occurrence in a mother's life. However, the researchers found out that after the mothers had worked through their grief brought by the child's death, they were able to restore their life and become stronger and resilient individuals.*

*Keywords: child's death, grief, loss, mother*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The death of a child is one of the most significant and crucial moments in a parent's life. It is a life-changing event which shudders the state of being a parent (Doka, 2016). Both the parents are affected; however, the mother is mostly affected by these circumstances. Mothers have a higher percentage of an acquired negative effect than those of the father after the death of a child (Youngblut, Brooten, Cantwell, Del Moral & Totapally, 2013). Death can trigger an intense feeling of disturbance, anxiety or stress to the mother. However, the effects are not only evident through the psychological aspect of the person but also physiological manifestations caused by psychological distress are observable (Murphy, Shevlin & Elklit, 2014). The daily routines which a mother used to have comfort with in doing already require too much of her effort after the death. Exhaustion, body pains, breathing problems and loss of appetite are just some of the physical changes that may occur due to grief (Marie Curie, 2014).

Grief is an emotional response often due to a loved one's loss by death and is said to be a usual reaction to it (Rainer, 2013). It is a very subjective process wherein people grieve differently. Every individual has his or her own way of grieving; some may grieve for a long period of time while some may grieve for only a couple of months or a year and some may grieve more intense than others (American Cancer Society, 2016).

There are several types of grief and it can be classified as (1) nonfinite grief or the grief for lost aspiration and plan; (2) ambiguous loss or the grief which is brought by uncertain reason for one's disappearance or death; (3) anticipatory grief or the grief that may occur even before the death or loss of someone; (4) normal grief which is accompanied by emotional or physical response that are normal for grieving individuals; (5) traumatic grief or the grief brought by sudden, unexpected or tragic death of a person; and (6) complicated grief which is a persistent and more extreme kind of grief which limits one from doing certain activities (Michael, 2015).

Normal grief enables one to cope with a healthy manner, grief that deviates from normal behavior, grief that occurs prior to the actual loss like in an illness, or disease, grief after the death of a family member because of substance abuse, and one that hides because the loss is socially unacceptable and grief is caused by natural or man-made circumstances. Yet people cope differently in countless ways that there is no certain pattern to grieving or they may spend different lengths of time in each stage. After the death of a child, some parents may feel nothing at all. It seems that numbness overpowers the immense emotions caused by the situation.

In the Philippines, certain cases of bereaved mothers over the past years have earned its fame and sympathy. One of which is the death of Caitlin Lucas, a 3-year-old kid who died of juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia, which left her parents in the state of bereavement (Bartolome, 2016). In the blog site operated by her parents, Feliz Lucas narrated her heart-wrenching experience and how she had already accepted her child's death (Tan, 2016). Another example of a bereaved mother is Lorelei Go whose three children had died due to liver cancer. In an interview with Jessica Soho, Lorelei wept due to her children's death and stated that it is only the hope that someday they will all be together again which gives her strength (GMA Public affairs, 2017). To help bereaved mothers, some support group have emerged over time. One of which is the foundation of Inang Naulila sa Anak (INA) health center which is operated by the Department of Social Welfare and Development-National Capital Region (DSWD-NCR). It celebrated its 10th year of serving bereaved parents last December 2016 (Department of Social Welfare and Development, 2016); which may be a proof that they have been successful of their advocacy to help those who have lost their loved one.

Death is an occurrence which one cannot stop nor change. It inflicts pain and other emotional responses that might affect an individual in different degrees. The reason why it is important to conduct a study that will explore the grieving process of mothers who lost their child is to find ways or intervention to help them to cope. Many similar studies have been conducted in the western part of the world; however, it is important to conduct a separate study due to the differences in culture and environment these mothers have and the interventions available for them. As mentioned in a study by Poxon (2013), though western cultural traditions have largely influenced different grief theories, several concepts are inapplicable to other culture. Also, different cultures prepare individuals on how to react with the death of someone in a certain way which makes bereavement vary from culture-to-culture. It is also important to note that the role of psychiatrists and/or psychologists in Western countries is more prominent than that of the Philippines. According to a data by Philippine Psychiatric Association in 2013, there are only 450 psychiatrists all over the Philippines. Along with the issue of mental health in the Philippines, it is usual with Filipinos to confide on friends rather than professional therapists if one has a problem, may it be critical or not (Buan, 2013). This minor role of mental health practitioners in the Philippines might also be one factor that may contribute in the way bereaved individuals cope with.

The researchers aimed to explore the grieving process of mothers who lost their children. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers also aimed to identify the effects of the death to the mothers and their coping strategies.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study aimed to explore the mother's grief and loss over young adult's death. Specifically, this study sought to achieve the following:

1. to describe the grieving process the mother had been through
2. to identify the effects of the child's death to the mother
3. to explore the coping mechanism and adjustment process of the mother

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research was conducted through a case study design. Due to the similarities of the respondents in a particular quantifier, the researchers considered the study as multiple-case case study. The study employed a qualitative research design to deeply explore the mother's grief over child's death and other reactions related to it. As indicated by Palinkas (2014), this type of research design enables people to widely share the experiences they have encountered through their own perspective rather than being stuck on specific classifications in quantitative research. It also allows probable changes and emergence of new themes about an issue. The research method used in the study was a semi-structured in-depth interview. According to Jamshed (2014), semi-structured, in-depth interview is a type of interview that is based on interview guides with a list of themes or areas that the researcher will be able to explore during the interview process. The researchers may skip or add questions depending on the flow of the interview process. In gathering the data

relevant to the study, the researchers used interview guide questions as the instrument of the study. The questionnaire included semi-structured questions about the mothers' grieving process that placed emphasis on the effects of the child's death and their coping strategies. The questionnaire was submitted to the research adviser for comments, suggestions, and correction. The questionnaire was checked by experts to ensure the construction and level of sensitivity of the questions asked. After conducting the interview, the researchers transcribed the interview and noted the non-verbal expressions and behaviors of the respondents. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the data. Thematic analysis was applied to identify and organize the data set into themes that created the interpretation of the cause of the phenomena. Thematic analysis was applied to help the researchers find the similarities and differences of the respondents' individual perspective.

The participants of the study were mothers who lost their children age 18-25 years old. According to Walter and McCoyd (2015), when an emerging adult (ages 18-25) dies, others grieve not only for the decedent but also for the potentials he/she had lost. Purposive sampling technique was used as the biography chosen was based on the age of the child when he/she died. The researchers were able to interview four bereaved mothers with varying experiences of loss. The respondents were mothers accommodated by INA Healing Center and had undergone Grief Recovery Program. The researchers conducted their study in INA Healing Center located in Batasan Hills, Quezon City. INA Healing Center is a foundation that caters and offers psychosocial support for bereaved mothers. It was founded in 2006 and since then they have been accepting cases of bereaved mothers nationwide. Respondents' right to autonomy and principle of respect is protected through informed consent. The participants were reminded that their participation is voluntary and they are given the right to withdraw from the study. The participants were informed about the nature of the study and degree of potential harms.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study, the analysis of the results, and the interpretation of the data gathered based on the objectives of the study: grieving process, effects of loss, and coping strategies of the bereaved mothers due to the death of their young adult children.

Table 1. Data extracts and themes derived from the participant's narratives

THEMES	QUOTATIONS SUPPORTING THEMES
Domain 1: Grieving process	
Questioning self and others	<i>"Bakit hindi na lang ako? Bakit siya pa? Bakit siya nauna bago ako?"</i> (Why was it not me? Why him? Why did he went first before me?)
	<i>"Bakit siya pa? Marami namang masasama dyan eh"</i> (Why he had to be the one? There are a lot of bad people out there).
	<i>"Tapos parang ano...sinisi ko rin si Lord. Nasabi ko ano..."</i> Lord!" <i>sabi ko —bakit naman ganon? Bakit _yung anak ko pa? Bakit ako pa?"</i> ...sabi ko, —naging masunurin naman ako sayo," <i>kasi bata pa ko nag-ano sa simbahan, —ano ba _yung naging pagkukulang ko?"</i> (And then... I also blamed Lord. I told [Him], —Lord" I said, "Why? Why does it have to be my son? Why me?" I said, —I've been obedient to You! because since I am very young, I've always been into churches, —in what things I've become insufficient?)
	<i>"Nung araw, galit ako. Bakit Niya kinuha?"</i> (Back in the days, I was mad. Why did He redeemed him?
	<i>"Yung ipaalala siya sa 'kin. Halimbawa, ahh... meron siyang friend na dumating, ikukwento niya sa'kin 'yung life nila nung anak ko, 'Ma, kung hindi nga po dahil kay Raniel siguro hindi po ako ganito ganyan ganito.' 'Ma, alam niyo po ba na si Raniel</i>

ganito ganon ganyan ganyan. ‘Pagka-kinukwento na nila, parang nafi-feel ko yung andito (points to the chest)

“...yung lahat ng alaala niya makita ko. Lahat, ultimo damit. \*slight pause\*” (...when I see every memory of him. Everything, even his clothes. \*slight pause\*.” *“Napakahirap na isang bagay na makita mo ‘yung lahat ng gamit ng anak mo na nawala, makalkal mo.”* (It’s a difficult thing to see that every belongings of your deceased child, you delved through it).

Recollection  
of memories

“Yung mga ano... mga gamit niya. yung bike niya nanduduon pa din, intact pa rin siya. Everytime na makikita ko don, nakasabit ‘yon dun sa may ano namin... bakod, basta’t napaligon ako doon, parang nakikita ko ‘yung mukha niya– nakaganon siya, nakatingin siya, nakangiti. *“Tapos pag nakikita ko yung mga damit niya... naalala ko lang lalo siya... mga gamit niya”* (His belongings, his bike is still there. It is still intacted. Every time I will see that, it is hanged in our fence, whenever I will face that direction, I can see his face– he is looking, smiling. Whenever I see his clothes... I remember him more... His belongings)

*“Talagang nung una at pangalawang taon talagang pag Pasko o Bagong Taon pagka may ano talagang andun ‘yung pagdadalamhati na talagang hindi ako kumilos, walang... walang dekorasyon ang bahay, hindi kailangan maghanda, hindi kailangan maghanda kasi kulang kami...”* (For the first and second year [of the death] when it’s Christmas or New Year when it’s– the grieving is really there that we did not move at all, there are no decorations inside the house, we do not need to prepare, we do not need to prepare because we are incomplete)

*“Iyak din ako ng iyak nun sa Baguio...sa Baguio kami. Sabi ko dapat kasama nadito ‘yung anak ko”* (I just kept on crying in Baguio... We were in Baguio. I said, he should be here–my son). *“Tapos lalo pagka may mga family occasion, siya lang ‘yung wala, hindi kami kumpleto”* (Especially if there are family occasion, he is the only one who was missing, we are incomplete).

*“Nakakatulong, matalino, malakas ang katawan, may paninindigan. Pag nasabi mo ‘yun, something lang na manghihinayang ba \_ko parang kwestyon pa rin ‘yun sa isip ko eh.”* (He is helpful, clever, had a strong body, had strong principles in life. When you are able to say that, something just– should I be remorseful? It’s still a question in my mind). *“...kase unang-una wala akong itatapon sa anak ko e. Scholar, panlaban ng school, ahh maraming natulungan sa community, walang sakit ang anak ko, kumbaga sa ano. Sa lahat ng na-ano ko nasa good ano yung anak ko e, bigla siyang kinuha sa akin.”* (...because first of all, I do not have anything to throw from my son. Scholar, competent, ahhh he helped a lot in the community, my son does not have any sickness. In all aspect, he is in good condition, then suddenly he was redeemed).

### Imagination

*“Kasi lagi namang nakayakap sa kin gabi-gabi, nakayakap ‘yan eh! Hindi ako iniwan”* (Because he is always embracing me every night, he is embracing me! He is not leaving me alone). *“Basta nararamdaman ko lang na there is something na nakayakap sa akin.”* (I just felt that there is something that embraces me).

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Visualization

*“Parang nandyan sya na lagi niya kong inaantabayanan na wag mapaaway.”* (It’s like he is always there, he always watches over me. For me not to fight somebody).

Communicating with the deceased

*“Nafi-feel ko ‘yung presence ng anak ko dun sa mga kausap ko as if malapit siya roon eh.”* (I felt my son’s presence to those who talk to me as if he is nearby).

*“Tas tinatawag ko lang lagi ‘yung pangalan nya na ano “Anak” sabi ko “Uh...Ikaw ‘yung guardian angel namin, lagi mo kaming babantayan.”* (Then I am always calling out his name, “Anak” I said, “Uhhh. You are our guardian angel, always watch us over)...”*“Nak, patawarin mo ‘ko ‘yon nga lagi—paulit-ulit kong sina—kahit ngayon sinasabi ko sa kanya ‘yon, —kung ano man ‘yung naging pagkukulang ko, kung ano man ‘yung naging kasalanan ko sa ‘yo...Isabi kong ganon —patawarin mo ako”. Kasi talagang alam ko nagkulang ako sa kanya.”* (“Nak, forgive me, that is what I’m saying, all over again— until now I am telling that to him, —no matter what my inadequacies were, what are my sins to you...” I said, “Forgive me” Because I know that I lacked so much to him).

Higher being’s plan

*“May plano si God... kung bakit siya ang nauna. Kasi hiram nga lang natin siya.”* (God has plan... why did he go first. Because he’s just borrowed)... *“Sumasagi naman sa isip ko na siguro may purpose si God kung bakit siya kinuha agad”* (It comes to mind that maybe God has purpose why He redeemed him that instant).

Acceptance  
and fate

*“Siya may gawa eh, di ba? Siya rin ang kukuha.”* (He’s the one who created us, right? He’ll also be the one who will be redeeming us)... *“Manghinayang man ako sa anak ko, wala naman akong magagawa eh kundi i-offer na lang siya kay Lord.”* (Even I felt regretful for my son, I can’t do anything but to offer him to the Lord).

*“Masasabi ko lang ano... ‘yung bale ngayon naniniwala ako doon sa mga ‘yung...sinabi na ‘yung mga mababait, kinukuha agad. Kasi para nga hindi na naliligaw ng landas yung mga ganong bata... tsaka talagang plano talaga ni Lord.”* (What I can say is that... Now, I believed in... the saying that the good ones, will be taken first. For those children not to be strayed in their path... and it is really the plan of the Lord)

Perception towards death

*“Lahat naman tayo papunta dyan eh, hiram lang talaga ‘tong buhay na ‘to. May kanya-kanya nga lang tayong oras para bumalik sa Kanya.”* (We will all go there, our lives are just borrowed. We have our own time to return to Him)... *“Natanggap ko na lahat naman tayo papunta dun sa mamamatay tayong lahat.”* (I already accepted that all of us will come to a point where all of us will die).

*“Meron tayong hangganan para tayong kandila. Hindi naman tayo pwedeng tumagal nang ganun katas, di ba?”* (We have our ends, we are like a candle. We can’t afford to be this tall, right?)

Acceptance

*“Kaya accepted ko po ‘yung pagkawala niya kasi wala naman po akong magagawa di ko naman po siya mabubuhay eh.”* (So, I accepted the death of my son because I can’t do anything, I won’t be able to revive him).

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*“Nung time na sinabi nila na wala na si JR, alam ko na hindi na siya babalik, alam ko na wala na siya.”* (That time when they told me that JR was gone, I know that he won’t be coming back, I knew it already that he’s gone). . . . *“Alam mo na hindi mo na siya makikita, alam mo na hindi mo na siya makakausap.”* (You knew that you won’t be seeing him, you knew that you won’t be able to talk to him).

*“Mula inakay ako dito sa INA Healing, tanggap ko nang wala na talaga sya sa buhay ko.”* (Since I’ve been brought here in INA Healing, I already accepted that he’s gone from my life). . . . *“Marami akong natutunan dito kaya sabi ko nga sayo natanggap ko na sya na wala—nandoon na sya sa itaas.”* (I’ve been learning so much here, that is why I’ve been saying to you that I already accepted that he is gone— he is already there above).

Domain 2: Effects of child’s death

Non-familial relationship

*“Siguro mga 10 months hindi ako nakikipagkwentuhan. Makipag-usap man ako andun nalang ako sa bintana, hindi ako lalabas.”* (Maybe I haven’t socially communicated for 10 months. If I did, I am just at the window, not going out).

*“Nakikihalubilo [ako] sa kapwa. ‘Yung nakikishare ka sa kanila.”* ([I] mingle with others. I get to share with them).

*“‘Yung kabaitan na. Dati salbahe ako, ngayon mabait na ako.”* (The kindness. Years ago I was bad-mannered, now I’m kind).

Social effects Familial relationship

*“Mas masyado akong protective sa kanila.”* (I become more protective to them).

*“‘Yung mga bagay na ginagawa bilang mag-asawa, ayaw ko na. Ayaw ko ng tatabi. Yung sex life namin, hindi na naging maganda.”* (I don’t want to do the things that married couples do anymore. I don’t want to sleep beside him. Our sex life didn’t go well anymore).

*“No dull moment. Hindi nila pinaramdam sa ‘kin na wala na ‘yung anak ko.”* (No dull moment. They didn’t make me feel that my son was gone).

Emotions brought by the child’s death

*“Unang-una kong ano na nagalit ako non... sa sarili ko.”* (First of all, I got angry...to myself).

*“Syempre, wala kong nagawa sabi ko gusto kong pumasok! Gusto kong pumasok, gusto kong makita anak ko.”* (Of course, I wasn’t able to do anything I said, I want to go inside! I want to go inside; I want to see my son).

Psychological effects Reaction to losing a child

*“Doon na ko talagang bumuhos na ‘yung nagsisisigaw na ‘ko.”* (That is where I poured—I already screamed)”

*“Hangga’t maaari nga ayokong umalis ng sementeryo. Tapos para kong ano noon, lumalabas ako ng bahay, sumisigaw, hinahanap ‘yung anak ko.”* (If it’s even possible, I don’t want to leave the cemetery. Back then I was like—I go out of the house, screaming, looking for my son).

Negative feelings

*“‘Yun ‘yung pinakamasakit talaga na...ano...na time na ‘yon—nagkasakit sya hanggang sa namatay siya, ‘yun ‘yung pinakamasakit talaga.”* (That’s the most painful time—when he got sick until he died, that’s really the most painful part)

*“May times talaga na sa tagal kong pag aano, pag nirecall mo pala ulet, sumasabog pa din pala ‘yung sakit.”* (There are really times that when you recall it again, the pain still bursts out).

*“Siyempre, napakasakit. Kasi sabi nga ng iba na mas masakit ‘yun dahil galing sa ‘yo.”* (Of course, it’s painful. Because as others say, it is more painful because they came from you).

Effect on eating pattern

*“Noong una siyang mawala hindi ako kumakain talaga... hindi ako makakain.”* (The first part since he was gone I really do not eat... I cannot eat).

Effect on task performance

Physical  
effects

*“...kase andun lang ako sa loob ng bahay. Hindi ako lumalabas. \_Pag kailangan magluto, magluluto. After magluto, tatanga. Or... hindi ako nanonood ng TV.”* (...because I’m just inside the house, I never go outside. If I need to cook, I will. After cooking, I do not do anything at all. Or... I do not watch TV).... *“Basta andun lang ako sa loob ng bahay, anduduon ako sa loob ng kwarto.”* (I’m just inside the house, I’m just inside my room).

*“The same routine ako eh, wala akong changes.”* (I did the same routine, I do not have any changes)”

*“Andun ‘yung pagdadalamhati na talagang hindi ako kumilos.”* (The grief was there that I didn’t really move (do tasks)

Domain 3: Coping mechanism

Redirection of attention

*“Yung dalawa kong apo. Kaya kapag nalulungkot ako at medyo naaalala ko ‘yung tatay nila, papakuha ko sa asawa ko.”* (My two grandchildren. So, whenever I feel sad and I kinda remember their father, I’ll make my husband get them).

*“Naging dahilan ‘yung dalawa kong apo. Inisip ko na... silang dalawa ang kapalit nung nawala.”* (My grandchildren became the reason. I think that... the two were the replacement)... *“Hindi man ako mag-isa eh! Dahil umalis sya nandyan na \_yung dalawa niyang pamangkin eh!”* (I’m not alone! Because when he left, his niece and nephew are there).

Unintentional  
way of  
coping

*“Wag mo isipin na iisa lang ‘yang anak mo. May kapatid pa ‘yan, o kung mag-isa man siya., may matutulungan ka pang mas nangangailangan sa ‘yo”* (Don’t think that your son is the only one. He still have siblings, or if ever he’s an only child, there will be someone who will be needing more of your help)

*“Ang tagal po talaga—kung siguro kung wala lang ako talaga \_yung mga alagang pamangkin sa bahay, baka hindi ko din kinaya. Parang dun na naano ‘yung... ‘yung pagkawala—syempre may bata, ‘yun ‘yung umaano sa lungkot mo tapos kahit paano.”* (It’s been a long process— if I didn’t have a nephew that I didn’t take care of, maybe I cannot survive. It’s there, the loss— of course there’s a child, that’s the one who ...)—*Kaya ngayon ‘yun ‘yung ginagawa ko ngayon sa pamangkin kong lalaki—10 years old—yung hindi ko nagawa dun sa anak ko.”* (That is why the things I’ve been

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doing to my nephew today– 10 years old– are the things I never did for my deceased son).

Seeing the child in other people

*“Natuwa naman ako kasi parang nakita ko sa kanila ‘yung anak ko.”* (I’m delighted because it is like I’m seeing my child in them [friends of her son]...—*Parang pumalit ‘yung sister niya. Siya naman ngayon gumagawa ng ginagawa ng kuya niya*” (It is like his sister is the one who replaced him. She is the one who is doing what his older brother did)”

*“Hm...naging pagbabago lang sa ‘kin nun na ano—syempre may pamangkin din ako na mga lalaki, nung time na wala na sya, hinahanap ko—‘yun ‘yung pagbabago. Hinahanap ko sya dun sa mga pinsan nya.”* (Hm... the changes for me is when– of course I have nephews, when he’s gone, I’m searching– that’s the change. I am searching him in his cousins.)

Finding hope from the living

*“Paano naman ‘yung naiwan? Papaano ‘yung dalawa pa? Papaano ‘yung mga anak ko?”* (How about the ones left? How about the two of them? How about my children?)

*“Mas pina-priority ko na ‘yung nandito.”* (I prioritized more on who’s here).

*“Ang kaligayahan talaga nasa kanilang buhay, wala doon sa namatay.”* (Happiness is really with the living, not with those who departed)... *“Wala basta ang iniisip ko na lang wala na siya, itong dalawa na lang ang iintindihin ko pero alam ko naman na nakaagapay sya sa amin.”* (Nothing, I am just thinking he’s gone, I should be thinking about these two but I know that he is watching over us).

Defense mechanism

*“Mas mabuti pa pala ‘yung sa akin, kasi pagpalagay mo ng sabihin kong accident... nanghinayang man ako sa anak ko, wala naman akong magagawa e kundi i-offer nalang siya kay Lord. ‘Yun napasama ako dito, nakihalubilo ako sa mga ibang tao, naexplain ko sa kanila, tapos sila kapag nagkwento na sa akin, buti na lang ‘yung anak ko ganon.”*

*“Ngingiti ka. Mawawala na ang lahat. ‘Yun lang, smile”* (You will smile. Everything will just be gone. That’s it, smile).

Solace

*“Tapos ang nakakapagpalubag sa ‘kin...uh—yon, hihingi ako ng tawad.”* (What consoles me is...uh—that, I’ll ask for forgiveness).

*“Makakapagpalubag sa akin? May isang bagay akong kinukuha sa maleta ko...litrato nya.”* (What consoles me? I have one thing that I get from my suitcase...his picture).

*“‘Yung dalawa kong apo.”* (My two grandchildren)

Intentional  
way of  
coping

Belief in higher power

*“Kung wala ang Diyos sa buhay ko, wala akong magagawa sa buhay ko.”* (If God is not in my life, I cannot do anything with my life)”

*“Kasi sa dasal ko na lang inaano ‘yung lahat eh. Wala namang ibang ano talaga, nagdadasal lang ako.”* (Because I just offer it all to prayers. There are no other things, I just pray)

*“Oo! Hindi lang nga sandal ‘nak eh. Inaakap ko na nga Sya eh! Para gabayan Niya ako ‘nak, ituro Niya sa akin kung papaano ko matanggap ang lahat.”* (Yes! I don’t just lean, I even embrace Him! So that He will guide me, teach me how to accept everything)



#### Emotional help

*"Damayan na lang kami."* (We're just there for each other).

*'Yung asawa ko lagi niyang sinasabi sa'kin 'pag umiiyak ako hayaan niyo lang umiyak 'yung mommy ninyo para mailabas. Hayaan nyo lang siyang mailabas nya \_yung sakit.. Tapos 'yung anak ko nga, 'yung panganay, lagi 'yung—'yun napakabait talaga 'yon hanggang ngayon. Yon, yagakapin ako tapos ganyan [pats her head] Mommy, sabi nya, tanggapin mo na"* (My husband always tells me when I'm crying, just let your mommy cry so she could release. Just let her release that pain. Then, my eldest daughter always—that's so kind until now. She will hug me then [pats her head] Mommy, she said, just accept it).

*"Oo, 'yun lang dalawa kong apo. Sila ang ...ginagabayan na lang nila ako na \_wag na akong mag-isip sa tito nila... pabaya ko na lang 'yon tutal nandyan naman sila... 'yun lang."* (Yes, my two grandchildren. They are...they guide me so that I won't think of their uncle anymore...just let him go, besides, they are there... That's all).

#### Help of IHC

*"Maraming training na na ano na dito sa INA. Marami kaming trainings tapos 'yung spiritual namin tapos 'yung pagiging PSM, pagiging mentor. Kumbaga malaking tulong \_yun kasi pinagaralan namin doon kung papano i-handle din 'yung katulad namin kahit na nagaaral kami ng kung papano i-handle 'yung katulad namin, sa sarili namin naiaapply namin 'yun."* (There are a lot of trainings here in INA. We have a lot of trainings then our spiritual then is being a PSM, being a mentor. It is a big help because we studied there how to handle bereaved mothers like us and because we study how to handle those who are like us, we apply it to ourselves as well).

Child's death  
as a  
bittersweet  
experience

*"Talagang... maligayang-maligaya na ako. Talagang tanggap ko--tanggap na talaga."* (I am really very happy. I have really accepted—accepted it already).

*"Masakit, masarap. Kasi kaya ko nasabing masarap, nandoon na sya."* (It's painful yet pleasant(?). I said it is pleasant because I know he's already there [referring to Heaven]).

*"Matatag na ako. Matatag na ako sa buhay—sa lahat ng problema"* (I am resilient now. I am resilient with life—with all the problems).

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### Grieving process

This comprises the process of the bereaved mothers due to the death of their children and is divided into three parts: (a) questioning self and others, (b) recollection of memories, (c) visualizations, and (d) fate.

#### **Questioning self and others**

The researchers discovered that several questions of the bereaved mothers to themselves and others have emerged after the death of their children. People live in the world where the parents should outlive their children but when the children outlive their parents, the parents begin to question themselves, Some of the respondents also questioned the Higher Being for the loss of the child.

Questioning the Higher Being for the loss of a loved one was mentioned in the study of Burke et al. (2014) which argued that negative thoughts in relation to the Higher Being may have arise in the form of confusion or anger. Most people look for someone to blame and this be redirected to other people like medical professionals, spouse, or even the Higher Being for causing the loss to happen. This is necessary for the grieving process, the more the bereaved feel angry towards other people, the more they will release the pain they are feeling and in some ways, will gradually heal over time (Gregory, 2018).

### **Recollection of memories**

One of the hardest things in losing a child is remembering the memories the deceased left for the living family especially when they see their personal belongings. Even the child was not there anymore, the mothers still cherish the possessions of their children. The researchers thought that this is because the things left are what reminded the living of the departed ones.

Another difficult part in losing a child is knowing that the child will not be there anymore. In occasions like New Year and Christmas, and in family gatherings like reunions, the child will be missed not only by the immediate family but also by other family members. The mothers feel incomplete during these special occasions. An excerpt was taken into the account of Mommy Arni who misses her child during vacations and family gatherings.

According to Dr. Webster (n.d.), special occasions like gatherings, birthdays, or anniversaries can trigger the pain for the bereaved as these are the days where they find the presence of the deceased and realize that they will not be there to join the celebrations.

From the memories and remembrances left by the deceased children, the mothers cannot help but feel remorse to the potential lost and the what-could-have-beens of their children, especially when the child showed good attitude and values when he/she was alive. These maybes have been realized because they start acknowledging the absence of their child and they began to think what if their child is still alive, what could have been the case? In a study conducted by Denhup (2014), it argues that the same moment the child departed from this world, it is the same moment that the bereaved parents' dreams and hopes for their child also dies. They grieved for their deceased child's potentials and how it will not flourish anymore. The parents' dream of that they had for themselves also dies, the moments they will be missing and the memories they have shared feels like it is never enough.

### **Visualizations**

One belief that some people believed is that the living can see and talk to the departed, especially when it is a loved one. Talking to the deceased became quite common for some. One of the recurring sub themes from the data gathered presents bereaved mothers' visualizations of their children. This may be a way of reducing the pain of accepting the fact their children is not physically around anymore.

#### *Imagination*

The respondents reported that they sometimes feel that someone is embracing them. In Mommy Corni's case, she expressed that her son is still around as if he is still alive. She recounted that she thinks she is seeing her son on their staircase watching over them. The researchers thought that visualizing her son is a way to comfort her whenever she feels lonely. It might be also an indirect way to change herself especially in terms of arguments with other people, as she told the researchers that she was hot-headed before.

#### *Communicating with the deceased*

Mommy Raquel described one moment when she is beginning to forget the face of her son. She told her son that she is forgetting what he looks like, and that night, she told the respondents that her son showed in her dreams and she woke up with a smile.

On the other hand, from the excerpt of Mommy Arni, she demonstrated that she keeps on communicating with her son by talking to him, asking for forgiveness for all the inadequacies she

manifested when he was still alive. Being able to keep an interactive communication with the deceased can help the bereaved to heal. From the initial grieving process where one mourns for them to simply thinking that they are just somewhere far and they might just be coming back with smiles on their faces (Medhus, 2015). Denhup (2014) also reported that conversing with the deceased out loud reduces the feeling of grief and also builds up the bond and connection the parents feel with their deceased child.

#### *Acceptance and fate*

The expected final stage of the grieving process of the bereaved is the acceptance that the deceased will no longer be here and one will be able to live through feeling of grief and pain. People know that one cannot run from death and many have believed that if it is the time, it will be. Many also believed that death is inevitable, one cannot stop nor avoid it, and one cannot do anything about it. Some believed that it is master plan of a Higher Being.

#### *Higher being's plan*

Most people are convinced in the spiritual belief that when someone died, he/she will go to heaven. Most of the respondents also believed that the life given to their children was redeemed because lives were just borrowed from the Higher Being. As a part of accepting the loss, people tend to associate and incorporate the death as something done by a supernatural force. For the researchers, in order to make sense of the loss, people think that there is a purpose why the Higher Being redeemed their departed loved ones.

In Mommy Arni's transcriptions, she started on believing that the good people are the ones who will be taken first for them not to be strayed from their path. From that, she started accepting the fate of her son. At first, she expressed questioning God on why did it happen, but now, she believes that what happened is God's plan.

Contrary to these statements are from the article of Pecinpah (2016), where she states that she used to believe that everything happens for a reason, but in a situation like losing a child, it is the other way around. The reason comes after the incident. It will be the point of change, for the bereaved to make sense out of their loss. From this, things will change in their grieving process.

#### *Perception towards death*

In accepting the loss, the respondents have formed a perception that death is a natural phenomenon. Mommy Raquel, for instance, compared life to a candle. A candle cannot stay at the same height as it was when one lights it, right? Death, for her, is the same thing as to Mommy Norma, people will all come to a point where it is already in the finish line. From that, people cannot redo because in life, if it is over, it is. Death is focal point of life, everyone dies and people cannot avoid this to happen (Brown, 2017).

#### *Acceptance*

Did the bereaved mothers already accept the death of their children? For all the respondents, INA Healing Center played a big role in their grieving process especially in gradually accepting the fact that their child is now gone. "Accepting" is not the word used by Denhup (2014) but instead she used "healing" as the term where the grieving parents lifelong journey will always be associated with the loss of their child but they learn to live through the pain brought by it. Acceptance does not mean that things are okay now. It means that the bereaved enters a new life where the child is not present anymore. Realizing that in spite all the challenges brought by the loss of the child, the world does not end there. The bereaved will start to realize that their child will not be replaced by anyone but will also start to grow into their new life (Pecinpah, 2016; Gregory, 2018).

### **Effects of child's death**

This theme encompasses the effects of the death to the mother. It is divided into three categories namely: (a) social effects, (b) psychological effects and (c) physical effects.

### **Social effects**

#### *Non familial relationship*

The death of a child has brought both positive and negative impact to the mother's socialization. Mommy Norma stated as well that she does not want to talk to anybody and that she refrains from hanging outside their house. Through this, it can be implied that the death of her child has brought negative impact to her non-familial relationship.

On the other hand, some of the participants noted how their child's death resulted to a positive impact on their non-familial relationship. Contrast to Mommy Norma, these two mothers had positive changes in a way that their socialization was positively reformed after what happened.

The researchers believe that the child was the motivation behind the mother's drive for more active socialization. Supported by the statements, it is as if they are fulfilling the things that the child would want to do or would want them to do if he or she still lives.

These acts were quiet similar with what Lenn (2016) had stated in an article. She indicated there that some parents become advocates and some privileged put up foundations in dedication to their child. It is believed that these acts are their ways of keeping the connection they have with the deceased child and at the same time provides them as well a sense of purpose (The Compassionate Friends, 2017).

#### *Familial relationship*

Aside from their relationship with other people, the respondents also stated changes with their familial relationship. Mommy Norma mentioned the changes with how she treats her living children after the death. She stated how her supervision over her surviving children increased even more after the death and that she became more concerned of their health. In one of her statements, she said how painful it is to lose a child that now she would willingly burn all her money out and bury herself to debts just so she would not lose another child again. This coincides with the study of Cohen-Mansfield et al. (2013) wherein they stated that bereaved becomes more attentive of their surviving children and develop a fear of having another loved one die.

The statements of the participants likewise show that the marital relationship can be affected in two different ways, either positively or negatively. In Mommy Raquel's case, it can be implied that they have gone through the grief altogether and as a whole family. Her husband served as her support system who comforted her when she was grieving for the death of her child. According to Cacciatore (2012), partners who support each other through the process of grieving stated that they became more united, intimate and satisfied regardless of the grief they are experiencing. However, in Mommy Norma's case, it was negatively affected, affecting their intimate relationship together. This coincides with an article from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (2015) wherein it was stated that grief may affect one's sexual desire, either be decreased or increased, that might also affect their relationship with their life partners.

### **Psychological effects**

#### *Emotions brought by the child's death*

Relative to Ross' Stages of Grief, anger is one of the stages that the bereaved go through in connection to the grief they are feeling. For Mommy Arni she had developed anger directed to herself. Based on the statements of Mommy Arni, the anger she felt for herself is due to her belief that she was not able to monitor her child and that she was not cautious enough of the complications to her son's health. In Mommy Arni's case, anger is felt if someone appears to be at fault in a certain situation and thus the anger

is directed to that person. However, if literature would explain it, anger is caused by the sudden life changes and abandonment caused by the death of their loved ones (HFA, 2012).

Mommy Arni also felt guilty of her son's death. This guilt feeling, according to Mommy Arni, arise for not having the chance to talk to her son before he is gone and not being beside him when he needs her the most. This cause for the guilt is almost the same with that of Denhup (2014) wherein she stated that guilt is conveyed to themselves for the belief that they were not able to save their child from death.

#### *Reaction to losing a child*

Losing a child is an excruciatingly painful experience which can literally make someone shout. Based on the statements made by the participants, it seems that shouting is their form of releasing the tension or feeling that they feel towards the death of their child. In an account by Mommy Raquel, she stated to have screamed when she got into the hospital and when she knew about the condition of her son. She said that she shouted just to release the pain inside. This coincides with an article released by True Stress Management (2016), wherein it is stated that screaming helps individuals breathe out the stress that they feel inside them and could made them feel relieved.

Another reaction that arise from the interview of these mothers is blame. This reaction is only evident with Mommy Norma wherein she kept to herself the blame she had for her husband, hoping that he would realize what he had done wrong. Blame could be seen as an effect of anger. Because losing a significant person in one's life make them experience anger, they look for someone to blame for the pain they are feeling.

#### *Feelings brought by the child's death*

The mothers who lost their child undeniably share the same sentiments they have encountered when their beloved child died. All of the four participants reported to have experience a painful journey when they lost their child. The participants presented diverse rationale as to where and why the experience was painful. However, it all boils down to the truth that just the mere fact of losing a child is enough to explain why the occurrence is painful. Mommy Norma stated that because the child is always treasured in the mother's heart and mind, the grief will still be there however, the mother would just know how to handle that grief brought by the death.

This agrees to a statement by Tronetti (2015) in an article wherein she said that a mother's grief never stops because the agony brought by the child's death never disappears. Eventually, people would be used to living their life with the grief and the life without the beloved child. Martinčková and Klatt (2017), proved how grief comes in a spiral character wherein they stated that even with the bereaved mother's awareness of the reality of loss, the grief still remains. It becomes a part of the mother's existence but time comes that the grief reappears.

#### **Physical effects**

Bereaved mothers are affected vastly by the child's death that even the normal things they have been doing regularly are affected. According to Mommy Arni, her inability to eat rose because of her memories with her son who used to eat with them. It can be inferred that this lack of motivation to eat is brought by the grief and longing that the mothers are feeling. According to many literatures, loss of appetite is a usual reaction when grieving, though some may indulge themselves with food to find comfort (Marie Curie, 2014).

The researchers also thought that after the loss, one would be demotivated to do her daily tasks. In the case of Mommy Norma, after the death of her son, JR, she now spends her day inside their house. Contrary to these, two of the bereaved mothers, Mommy Arni and Mommy Raquel, responded that nothing much changed in their daily routine after the death. The experience of Mommy Norma agrees to Cohen-Mansfield, Shmotkin, Malkinson, Bartur, and Hazan (2013) which indicated that parents who lost their children cannot perform their regular physical function than parents who have not lost their children.



## **Coping mechanism**

This theme encompasses the coping mechanism and strategies utilized by the mothers who lost their child. Three themes have emerged under this objective namely: (a) unintentional way of coping, (b) intentional way of coping and (c) child's death as a bittersweet experience.

### *Unintentional way of coping*

This theme exhibits the strategies the mothers used to cope with the grief to protect them from the pain caused by the loss. Sometimes, what one feels is not aligned with what he/she thinks about. Most often than not, people unconsciously do things to cope with what they feel and it helps them to somewhat ease the feelings of grief.

### *Redirection of attention*

People compensate what they have lost to what they have right now. The mothers compensate the deceased children by redirecting their attention to other people— relatives or living children. In the case of Mommy Raquel, she gave a positive insight in coping with the grief by thinking that there are still those with her, living. She shared that no matter what, even when one lost her child, there are still people out there who might be needing what the mother possesses that she thinks that nobody needs anymore.

### *Redirection of focus*

Not every time, people can have someone who they can redirect their focus with. When it comes to bereaved mothers, they avert their attention not just with other people but also to their day to day activities. It is a recurring idea mostly in the transcripts of Mommy Raquel. According to her transcripts, she became busier with her daily activities especially when her son died. She got a loaded daily schedule that there are activities she was not able to attend to or accomplish. Because of that, she goes home every day and sleep. Whenever she wakes up, she just have to do the same thing every day and she never got the time to think about her son. It can be noted that with the redirection of focus, they cannot have time to process their feelings.

### *Seeing the child in other people*

When people lose someone, at some point they cannot help but see their departed loved ones to the ones living— may it be someone close to their children or ones who resemble them. This is the case for the majority of the respondents.

In the case of Mommy Raquel, she sees her son in his friends because as she narrated, her son taught his friends a lot of things including good morals like respecting women and elderly, and they inherited the attitude of helping other people. His son has a younger sister which as Mommy Raquel recounts, the one who replaced his older brother. She is the one who cooks, and does the things his older brother used to be doing in their household.

### *Finding hope from the living*

As the grieving process continues and they came to the point of accepting the loss, they gradually realize the importance of the people left. Mommy Norma stated that there were times when she was alone in her room and she just cried her heart out because of the overwhelming feeling, but today she recounted that there may be pain whenever she remembers her son but she can now handle the emotions brought by it. She also stated that she thought whenever her emotions engulfed her that there are still people left here, living.

Similarly, Mommy Corni expressed that happiness is with people who are alive. Knowing that the deceased was watching over them, she tried to focus more on the living.

### *Defense mechanism*

This subtheme emerged when the researchers noticed that this can be compared to Sigmund Freud's defense mechanism wherein this surfaced because people protect themselves unconsciously from the anxiety they are feeling. One defense mechanism is rationalization, a defense mechanism where people make acceptable reasons in order to cover what they are really feeling. This is evident with Mommy Raquel wherein she compares her experiences with other people.

Mommy Arni similarly states that what her son experienced is better than those who were taken away by natural disasters. Rationalization, as a defense mechanism in this study, is finding reasonable justification for the death of children by comparing their situation to other people's experiences.

Another defense mechanism the researchers found in this study is reaction formation demonstrated by Mommy Raquel. Based on the interviews with the participants, it was found out that in order to cope with what they are feeling, they tend to joke around. They also stated that a way to cope with the loss is smiling and everything just fades away. The less something is talked about with other people freely, the more it became scarier to face (Brown, 2017).

Losing someone is one of the greatest turning points in one's life, bereaved may not want to accept and cope with the reality that their loved one is gone. But one should be able to let people back in his/her life again, to be able to realize that there are people who are waiting for him/her to face truth that the loved one is gone physically but he/she will always be in his/her heart. In William Worden's 4 Tasks of Mourning, the last task for the bereaved is "to find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking a new life." One should be able to live today while bringing the sorrow of the past. Some may not experience a linear pattern for their grieving process, but one should be able to come to final stage of the grieving— living a new life carrying the departed souls in their heart.

### **Intentional way of coping**

#### *Solace*

Solace encompasses the things that the bereaved mothers seek or do in order to find comfort or relief. Mommy Armi, for instance, talks to her son and asking forgiveness to him soothes the guilt feelings in her. Whereas, in the case of Mommy Corni, her grandson helps soothe the burden she feels.

For Mommy Corni, the memories of her son that she can still hold in the present are what console her. For Mommy Corni and Mommy Norma, it is their grandchildren that bring comfort to them during the times when they are reminded of the pain they feel about the death of their child. It is important to note that these grandchildren of them are the living memories that their deceased child had left.

Overall, the researchers found out that the participants have common ways in coping: asking forgiveness, looking at the picture and being with the grandchildren which give the sense of connection with the lost child. This connection is what really gives solace to the mother. According to the study of Humbeeck, Dillen, Piers, Grypdonck and Noortgate (2016), even the simple stuff like clothes the child wore are treasured by the bereaved mothers. According to the participants, through these things that they can still hold despite the child's absence, they are able to feel the connection they had with their deceased child.

#### *Belief in Higher Power*

When an individual faces a problem, it is usual to confide to God or to believe that someone with higher power would help him/her surpass the trial. This belief in Higher Power is evident with the four participants of the study. These beliefs show their faith to the Higher Power and show that they surrender everything to Him. These statements from the participants imply their belief to the Higher Power's control over the things they are experiencing. According to a study by Denhup (2014), faith to God gives the parents hope. It is through faith that these parents are able to withstand the grief they have at the moment. Others cling to their faith and by clinging to God, they feel less alone and think that God is with them at the situation.

#### *Emotional help*

Emotional help encompasses the support system the bereaved mothers had during the process. Some of the participants identified their family as their support system. Family members are powerful tools for coping. They are the primary support system from which one will not be afraid to open up her feelings.

Most of the participants mentioned their family who exerted emotional support to them while they are on the process of grieving. It can be said that family is where someone can comfortably disclose one's feelings without the fear of being misconstrued of what they feel. It is also their family who experienced the loss they are grieving for and thus the ones who might be able to understand them the most.

#### *Help of IHC*

IHC aided the recovery of the mothers. According to most of the participants, they started to recover when they have joined the trainings and seminars the institution is offering. According to Mommy Raquel, the center relived her feelings of grief and made her process it so that she could survive and become stronger than before. Aside from the programs and trainings, testimonies from the mothers revealed that meeting co-bereaved mothers helped them process their grief.

This was supported by the study of Denhup (2014) wherein it is stated that support groups help in way that they get the chance to socialize with someone who had a similar experience that they had. It made them feel less isolated and freer to express what they feel about losing their child.

#### *Child's death as a bittersweet experience*

The participants described their current life positively. Mommy Corni supported the statement of Mommy Raquel who stated that she is happy at the moment. Mommy Norma, on the other hand, gave a quite different answer wherein even though she did not stated how happy she is, she still gave a positive description of her life today

Based on the statements given by the participants, it can be implied that given the experience they had, these mothers were able to restore their life and progress to a stronger, more positive individual. Since these mothers were able to cope with their child's death, they think that they will be able to surpass the challenges that are about to come. It is the mothers' ability to survive and progress from the situation that made them feel that way. The participants were able to cope and restore their life through the utilization of meaning-making. Some were also able to grow after the death wherein according to a study by Ross, Kølves, Kunde and De Leo (2018), after the death, these mothers are engaged in sense-making and meaning-making phase wherein making meaning from the death results to posttraumatic growth of the mother.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The researchers conclude that a mother's grief is a phenomenon that strengthens her being. After the child's death, the mothers go through a tedious journey wherein the existence of pain, longing, sadness, guilt and anger is felt. Throughout the process of grieving, it is proved that the grief never really leaves and that there are times that it is intensified even more, more so if the memories of the child were recalled by the mother. The researchers discovered that even though there are quite a lot of theories about one's grieving process, that there stages or tasks to be done, there is no linear pattern that needs to be followed in grieving because grieving varies from people. It was also found that the denial stage of Ross' stages of grief is not experienced by any of the participants. Results also show that the mothers really grieve and regret that their adult child had missed. The death of a child leaves an indelible mark on the mother's being. It is a bittersweet experience that has effects which are beyond what one can handle. The researchers found that this occurrence negatively affects the mother's physical, psychological and social state. However, posttraumatic growth such as betterment of socialization and attainment of resiliency and happiness is a positive effect of the death. Processing the grief and being with people who had the same experience helped the mothers the most in coping. Another factor that helped them cope is their belief to the Higher Power. These religious beliefs

are assumed to be a medium from which the mothers can derive meaning from. It is also proved that meaning-making also aid the coping of mothers wherein they give sense and meaning of the traumatic event that has happened. The researchers also found that not anything in specific, like a specific thing, individual or action, is what brings comfort and solace to the mother; instead, it is the feeling of “still being connected with the child” that gives them a sense of relief whenever they feel the grief brought by the child’s death.

#### Recommendation

In accordance with the findings, the researchers suggest the following recommendations. The study’s limitation is that it is too broad to fully scrutinize mother’s grief. The researchers recommend to **future researchers** that if they are going to pursue this topic, it is suggested to further study about the existing theories about grieving process. It is also suggested to find respondents that have not gone through any interventions yet. They may also compare and contrast those mothers who joined support groups than those who are not as well as the modes and intensity of death in order to discuss the topic extensively. Little is known about organizations that accommodate bereaved mothers, some may not be able to join these organizations or support groups, the researchers wanted to advice the **organizations and government officials** to implement more programs and trainings for bereaved mothers that will gradually and properly process them through their grief with the supervision of registered professionals. The result of the study showed that being in a support group or organization that caters bereaved mothers actually helps them to handle their feelings well. **To the families**, it is difficult to lose someone. A family might eventually learn to live through the pain. However, it is important for the family members to support each other through the process of grieving.

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