

Adolescents who are Bereft: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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Adolescents who are Bereaved: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Losing a parent as a child or adolescent is difficult. The loss can have a substantial impact on the youth's future. The problem is students who are bereft in public schools in the United States often go unidentified by educators, which can impact academic performance and behaviors. A review of the literature revealed a gap in studies focused on identification systems or programs to facilitate advocacy for students who are bereft. Students who are bereft have unique needs. A child or adolescent who receives no professional help to manage grief has the propensity to quell grief through unhealthy lifestyle choices. There is a need to identify children and adolescents who are bereft as soon as possible to provide nurturing support to avoid short- and long-term consequences of unresolved grief. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators. The theoretical framework of the study was shaped by theory of change and situational leadership theory. The research questions were centered on educators' perceptions of how the death of a parent affects a student's academic performance and behavior. Two data collection tools—semistructured interviews and a focus group—were used to explore the perceptions of educators from different capacities in the public school setting. Findings showed educators unanimously agreed a formal identification system would benefit parentally bereft students' academic performance and behavior. Not knowing of a student who has lost a parent often results in an educator having a negative experience, academically or behaviorally, with a student who is bereft.

Keywords: adolescent/child who is bereft, grief, mental health, psychological distress, situational leadership theory, theory of change

Dedication

To my children - Jacob, Abigail, and Benjamin,
YOU have been my inspiration to be better and do better.
It is my hope you can find a passion so strong in your life,
you too will strive to be the best you can be.

Always move forward.

You are my heart and soul,

XOXO,

-Mom

Acknowledgments

It is invaluable to be surrounded by a community of folks who support your journey and can be your encouragement and strength even when you are feeling spent.

My community is strong: ACE faculty, family and friends, fellow doctoral students, and my principal.

All deserve recognition for keeping me motivated and strong as I navigated my way through this Doctoral journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Losing a parent during childhood or adolescence can have a strong effect on one's future. A child or adolescent who receives no professional help to manage grief has the propensity to quell grief through unhealthy lifestyle choices (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Early issues related to unresolved grief include elevated levels of fatigue, insomnia, and moderate to severe depression (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). The behaviors can perpetuate into adulthood, manifesting as major depression, severe anxiety, or suicide (Zisook & Shear, 2009). Students who are bereft have unique needs. When these needs are met, academic success and development of proper behavior are more likely (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). The needs cannot be met if educators do not know the students who are dealing with the death of a parent.

Experiencing the death of a parent is difficult. Managing the grief associated with the death can be especially arduous when the death occurs in childhood or adolescence (Hollingshaus & Smith, 2015). A lack of grief management can make the grieving process more difficult (American Psychological Association, 2020b). Healing does not happen quickly or on its own. Grief counseling may not occur. An essential step toward healing is awareness. The identification of a child or adolescent who is bereft is not readily available to educators in public schools (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018).

Teachers spend over 1,000 hours a year with students (Sparks, 2019). There is value in knowing who students who are bereft are, regardless of how long ago the death occurred. Identification of children and adolescents who are bereft in the school setting could make available the option for accommodations and targeted grief management. Potential benefits of the study are teachers who are made aware of students who are bereft will be better equipped to support students' needs academically and emotionally (Dyregrov et al., 2015).

The introduction to the phenomenological study of the lived experiences of educators with adolescents who are bereft provides a background of the study. The statement of the problem is how the study may contribute to scholarly literature. A preview of the research design is included in the purpose of the study. The significance of the study follows with a discussion of who may benefit from the study and how. Next, three research questions utilized in the study are identified, followed by an explanation of the theoretical framework supporting the study. Definitions of terms provide authoritative definitions for key concepts utilized in the study. Assumptions of the study are discussed, followed by scope and delimitations to describe the limits of the study and the transferability of the results. Limitations relating to the design of the study are addressed as well as the study's biases, conditions, and dependability that might impact the outcomes. The chapter summary includes a review of the content of this chapter and previews the themes of the next chapter.

Background of the Problem

The background of the problem is, without a reporting system in place, students who are bereft remain unidentified in the school system (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). A gap in empirical studies indicates no evidence of a specific reporting system designed to identify students who are bereft in the public school setting (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). Unresolved grief presents challenges for adolescents in the school setting, both academically and behaviorally. Students who are bereft have unique needs, and when these needs are met, a student is more likely to succeed academically and develop proper behavior (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). Educators cannot meet the needs of students who are bereft if students who are bereft remain unidentified. Two theories informed the study and four themes evolved from the research addressing the background of the problem.

Theory of change and situational leadership are the lenses through which the study was approached. Theory of change is a theory developed by Weiss (1995). The purpose of theory of change is to uplift children, youth, and families through comprehensive intersectoral, community-grounded interventions. Situational leadership, developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1977), is a theory stating the role of the leader dictates the intensity of the task concerning the level of the relationship.

Several themes are presented. Grief is the first theme. Nakajima (2018) defined *grief* as an emotional reaction to the loss of a loved one. Grief left unattended manifests into deeper levels of grief, which could have serious mental and physical ramifications (Nakajima, 2018). The consequences of unresolved grief are the next theme. Grieving the death of a loved one is inevitable. Grief left unattended has the propensity to manifest into a gamut of physiological complications throughout one's life (Burke-Harris, 2018). The third theme that evolved through research the short- and long-term effects of grief, and unresolved grief related to the death of a loved one promotes the need for identifying as early as possible children and adolescents who have lost a parent. Yet, too often, the students remain unidentified (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). The final theme—early intervention, counseling, and grief management—is how such action is beneficial for preventing short- and long-term consequences of unresolved grief. The evolution of themes supports the need for implementing the identification of students who are bereft so the unique needs of these students can be met through accommodations and targeted grief management (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The problem is students who are bereft in public schools in the United States often go unidentified by educators, which can affect academic performance and behaviors. The

importance of exploring the problem is filling a gap between educators' experiences with students who are bereft and initiatives to support children and adolescents who are bereft. The extent of the problem is unresolved grief may have a negative effect on students' mental health and academic achievement.

Students who do not receive counseling to manage grief could suffer devastating effects (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). Unresolved grief often leads to deviant behaviors, such as alcohol or drug abuse, poor academic success, and promiscuity (Paediatric Palliative Care Clinical Network, 2017). Oblivion toward grief can perpetuate into psychological disorders in adulthood (Miller, 2017). Those impacted by the lack of identification of children and adolescents who are bereft are the children and adolescents who are bereft and their families, educators, and society. A gap exists in the research supporting better quality grief management and programs designed specifically for assisting children and adolescents to manage grief (Schoenfelder et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators. The goal of the study was to determine educators' lived experiences with adolescents who are bereft in the classroom. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore educators' experiences with adolescents who are bereft. A focus group session delved for more in-depth and targeted information.

Problems associated with unresolved grief, such as the manifestation of psychological disorders in adulthood, can perpetuate if students who are bereft remain unidentified in the

public school in the northeastern United States (Miller, 2017). The study of the lived experiences of educators with students who are bereft identified problems in relation to unresolved grief in adolescents and all stakeholders in the education community and society, who may have to accommodate a potentially ill-adapted adult.

Significance of the Study

Insight into the effect of unresolved grief on students' academic and mental well-being emerged from the study. Information derived from the study adds to the limited research on the impact of parental loss on an adolescent (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). The results of the qualitative study will be shared and discussed with the school principal, as well as the district superintendent. The goal is for discussions to extend to the district school psychologist, who can help devise a new general education plan to meet the needs of students who are bereft through accommodations and targeted grief management. Early identification may prevent long-term complications for the individual, as well as society (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Psychological disorders in adults encumber society and mental illness is among the most rapidly growing public health problem around the globe (Wongkoblaph et al., 2017). Trautmann et al. (2016) indicated mental illness comprises 10.4% of the global disease burden. Mental illness in the workplace is prevalent, often having serious consequences on businesses (Follmer & Jones, 2017). The effects of mental illness are felt far beyond the individual and the immediate social environment. Effects are experienced across the social fabric, especially via economic costs (Trautmann et al., 2016).

The study may benefit the identified children and adolescents who are bereft by providing accommodations to better manage the grief resulting from the loss of a parent. Benefits may reach far into the productivity and overall well-being of society by quelling the

potential risk for the development of long-term psychological disorders. Long-term afflictions have the propensity to negatively affect quality of life (Anderson & Ozakinci, 2018).

Schoenfelder et al. (2015) determined early intervention efforts benefit students who are bereft. Identification of students who are bereft and intervention have shown lessened mental distress into adulthood (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Research Questions

The qualitative phenomenological study explored the experiences of educators with students who are bereft. The design of the study guided the research to better understand the experiences of educators interacting with students who are bereft. The goal was to understand the effect the death of a parent has on academic achievement and behavior. The following questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: How do educators describe the lived experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 2: What are educators' perceptions of the academic performance and behaviors of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 3: What are educators' perceptions of the importance of identifying students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested beginning the study with a broad, central question, followed by one or two questions designed to narrow the focus yet maintain an open format. Each of the research questions was structured with an open design and utilized in the creation of

data collection instruments for the study. The researcher-created interview and focus group questions used for collecting phenomenological data for the study were direct logical extensions of the research questions. The design of each question allowed for the lived experiences of educators to phenomenologically disclose a need for identifying students who are bereft and implement supports for academic and behavioral support.

Theoretical Framework

Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to the theoretical framework as the lens through which the data and results of the study are viewed. The study was informed by two theories: theory of change and situational leadership theory (SLT). Weiss developed theory of change (Breuer et al., 2016), while Hersey and Blanchard developed SLT (Kruse, 2019).

Children and adolescents enduring the loss of a parent without access to grief management treatment plans can develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, which can evolve into psychological disorders later in life (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Death, specifically the loss of a parent, is the most traumatic event a child can endure (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). Acknowledging and addressing the grief, rather than evading the grief, could prevent the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms and a lifetime of psychological distress. The data from the study could be a call for change in school districts to implement an identification system and accommodations and supports for students who are bereft. Results of changes may aid in the development of healthy coping mechanisms to manage grief. Theory of change was an appropriate theory to explore the study as the theory pertains to improving the quality of life of individuals and, in turn, improve communities. The role educators play in assisting and guiding a student who is bereft connects appropriately to SLT.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of key concepts from the study are intended to succinctly define the terminology used throughout the research process. Some terms may be familiar to educators. The definitions are provided as an aid for understanding the content of this dissertation.

Coping Mechanisms. Coping mechanisms are behaviors and thoughts utilized to manage external and internal stressful situations (Algorani & Gupta, 2020).

Grief. Grief is an emotional reaction related to the loss of a loved one (Nakajima, 2018).

Grief Counseling. Grief counseling is an intervention by counselors with persons who have experienced a death to help facilitate the various stages of mourning (Worden, 2018).

Grief Therapy. Grief therapy involves interventions and techniques made by professionals with persons who are experiencing one of the complications interfering in the mourning process that keeps grief from progressing to a manageable level for the mourner (Worden, 2018).

Intervention. An intervention is a targeted approach to improving the quality of life of a person suffering mental unwellness (Anderson & Ozakinci, 2018).

Mental Illness. Mental illness is a health condition that causes changes in behavior, emotion, or thinking, or any combination of the three. Mental illness is related to difficulty or distress in functioning in family, social, or work activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2020a).

Assumptions

In the assumptions section, assumptions are clarified. Assumptions are the truth of which cannot be demonstrated and describe the necessity or unavoidability of the assumptions.

Assumptions are aspects of the study the researcher cannot control (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 62).

One assumption was participants would answer interview and focus group questions honestly and truthfully. For this reason, a sample population representative of the total population affected was chosen. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were preserved, and full disclosure was provided regarding voluntary participation and the right to withdraw from the study without ramifications, which may have been enough to ensure truthfulness in responses. Furthermore, assumptions allayed by research provided insight for participants to fully grasp the heart of the research problem and bring validity to the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

A second assumption was educators would share honest accounts of their experiences with students who are bereft. Densen et al. (2012) acknowledged educators lack the training to support a student who is bereft. Educators reported having no training about how to recognize or support students who are bereft.

Scope and Delimitations

Scope and delimitations are the boundaries of the study by which identifying factors can be controlled (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Phenomenology suited the study because of the benefit of helping researchers learn from others’ lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The scope of the study was limited to educators of students in grades 7–12 from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States who have experience with students who are bereft. Educators included professionals from various aspects of the public school setting. The study consisted of two researcher-created qualitative assessment tools—semistructured interviews and a focus group—that aligned with the study’s research questions. Interviews and

the focus group took place in person and virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was comprised of educators' lived experiences with students who are bereft.

The public school of the study is situated in a community plagued by high crime, poverty, and single-parent households (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). Each of these determinants is a contributing factor to a general decline in mental health. The determinants, coupled with a child or adolescent navigating the death of a parent, warrant early identification and intervention geared toward better managing the environmental and societal factors contributing to youths' failing mental well-being.

Delimitations of the study explicate how the results of the study could be generalizable to other educators in other educational arenas (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Transferability of findings refers to the ability of qualitative research to be projected in other contexts or settings with different respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The rich data obtained in the study are meaningful to other educators in other educational settings who seek to understand the effects of parental death on students' academic performance and behaviors.

Limitations

The limitations section is a discussion of design-related limitations specific to the dependability and transferability of qualitative research. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) explained limitations as potential weaknesses in a study that cannot be controlled. A well-structured qualitative study with a transparent research process, easily understood by readers, can overcome limitations associated with the qualitative method (Queirós et al., 2017). Reliability and validity can be established through research authenticity, confirmability, credibility, dependability, objectivity, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study is achieved through data collection (Kallio et al.,

2016). Semistructured interviews and a focus group were the research instruments for the study. Jamshed (2014) advocated for the use of interviewing as a method for discovering an extensive and in-depth understanding of complex realities.

Dependability is achieved by producing a study that can be reconstructed and obtain the same or similar results (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide created for the semistructured interviews and focus group could be utilized in future studies. Use of the same instruments and data collection tools in future studies could achieve dependability through the reproduction of the study.

The setting of the study was unique as there are no other public school situations exactly like the one in the northeastern United States. Demographics, population, and geography are factors that cannot be exclusively duplicated. Regardless, most educators would be familiar with the need to best serve all students academically and behaviorally. Transferability of the study's results was safeguarded through the rich data rooted in behavior, context, and experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Validity was ensured by recording each interview and taking notes. The variation of participants—educators at different capacities in the public school—and the use of both semistructured interviews and a focus group ensured credibility and validity. The multimethod approach created triangulation, which promotes credibility and validity by explaining the complexity of human behavior from multiple perspectives (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Losing a parent at any age is difficult. Losing a parent as a child or adolescent is particularly difficult. Statistical information regarding the number of children and adolescents who lose a parent in the United States each year is minimal and vague. The statistics that do exist

are outdated. One out of 20 children, or 1.5 million, 15 years old or younger, may lose a parent annually in the United States (Owens, 2008; Townsend, 2018). Reporting in the school setting is ambiguous. A child or adolescent who receives no professional help to manage grief has the propensity to quell grief through unhealthy lifestyle choices. Early issues related to unresolved grief include elevated levels of fatigue, insomnia, and moderate to severe depression (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). The behaviors can perpetuate into adulthood, manifesting as schizophrenia, major depression, or suicide (Zisook & Shear, 2009). There is a need to identify students who are bereft as early as possible to provide nurturing support to avoid short- and long-term consequences of unresolved grief (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018).

Chapter 1 introduced the background of the problem. The statement of the problem previewed the target population, phenomenon, and general location for the study and summarized what is known and not known about the topic. The purpose of the study aligned the problem statement to the related phenomenon and developed the rationale for the research. The significance of the study was explored. Research questions were created to align with the data collection instruments. The theoretical framework identified the pertinent theories underlying the research. Definitions were provided for key terms and concepts used throughout the study. Assumptions were clarified, and the scope and delimitations identified the boundaries of the study. Limitations addressed transferability and dependability as well as conditions, factors, and features that could impact results. The next chapter is an analysis and review of scholarly literature related to children and adolescents who are bereft, identifies students who have lost a parent, addresses how lack of awareness of children and adolescents who are bereft breeds unhealthy coping mechanisms, and illustrates the benefits of a grief management plan to help students who are bereft cope with grief.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Losing a parent during childhood or adolescence can have a strong effect on one's future. A child or adolescent who receives no professional help to manage grief has the propensity to quell grief through unhealthy lifestyle choices (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Early issues related to unresolved grief include elevated levels of fatigue, insomnia, and moderate to severe depression (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). The behaviors can perpetuate into adulthood, manifesting as major depression, severe anxiety, or suicide (Zisook & Shear, 2009). The background of the problem is, without a reporting system in place, students who are bereft remain unidentified in the school system (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). Students who are bereft have unique needs. Academic success and development of appropriate behavior are more likely when these needs are met (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). The needs cannot be met if educators do not know which students are dealing with the death of a parent. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators.

Experiencing the death of a parent is difficult. Managing the grief associated with the death can be especially arduous when the death occurs in childhood or adolescence (Hollingshaus & Smith, 2015). A lack of grief management can make the grieving process more difficult (American Psychological Association, 2020b). Healing does not happen quickly or on its own. Grief counseling does not always occur, yet an essential step toward healing is awareness. The identification of a child or adolescent who is bereft is not readily available to educators in public schools (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018).

Teachers spend over 1,000 hours a year with students (Sparks, 2019). Having access to

who the students who are bereft are, regardless of how long ago the death occurred, is of value. Identification of children and adolescents who are bereft in the school setting could make available the option for targeted grief management. Teachers who are aware of students who are bereft are better equipped to support students' needs academically and emotionally (Dyregrov et al., 2015). A gap exists in the research regarding the identification of adolescents who are bereft and the benefits of quality grief management programs (Schoenfelder et al., 2015).

The chapter includes a review of the scholarly literature relating to adolescents who are bereft, identifying students who have lost a parent, how lack of awareness of adolescents who are bereft breeds unhealthy coping mechanisms, and benefits of a grief management plan to help students who are bereft cope with grief. Four major themes evolved from the research: (a) grief; (b) consequences of unresolved grief; (c) identifying students who have lost a parent; and (d) early intervention, counseling, and grief management. The theoretical framework for the study was based on the theory of change and SLT. Strategies utilized to search for relevant literature are detailed first, followed by the theoretical framework for the study. An extensive review of the literature follows with descriptions and analysis of approaches, views, studies, and concepts. The chapter concludes with a summary and review of how the study fits within and extends the existing body of knowledge.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy section provides the strategies and tools utilized to search for, find, and document articles relevant to the study of adolescents who are bereft and the associated academic performance and behaviors. Search engines and databases used in the study are identified. A list of keywords employed in the literature search is provided in this section.

Relevant articles for the study were located through American College of Education's

MyAthens access to the EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS) database. The EDS platform has nearly 3 billion references, allowing seamless searching for empirical and theoretical articles for the study (Meirose & Lian, 2019). Additionally, peer-reviewed and scholarly articles were located using Google Scholar. Google Scholar is easy to use and provides extensive coverage and quick indexing beneficial for carrying out a literature search (Halevi et al., 2017). Google Scholar proved most valuable when full texts were not available through EDS. Search engines, such as EDS and Google Scholar helped provide the means to locate articles, while keyword searching shaped the study.

Translating a study's research questions into keywords is the cornerstone for effective searching (Grewal et al., 2016). Keyword searches for the study were specific to two principal areas covered throughout the literature review: the theoretical framework and the research literature review. The theoretical framework required searches using the following keywords: *adolescent/child who is bereft, grief, psychological distress, Situational Leadership Theory, and Theory of Change*. The broad concepts were combined with other keywords to hone searches: *academic performance, behavior, coping mechanisms, grief management, and mental health*. Many keywords and combinations of keywords were used to gather information for the research literature review, including *adolescent/child grief, students who are bereft, counseling, Complicated Grief, education withdrawal, grief counseling, intervention, phenomenological, qualitative, parent loss, Persistent Complete Bereavement Disorder, Prolonged Grief Disorder, and Substance Abuse Disorder*.

Theoretical Framework

The study was informed by two theories: theory of change and SLT. Weiss developed theory of change (Breuer et al., 2016), while Hersey and Blanchard developed SLT (Kruse,

2019). The purpose of the theoretical framework is to support the analysis and meaning of the research data (Kivunja, 2018). Connecting data to theory “enables us to explain the meaning, nature, relationships, and challenges asserted . . . so that an application of those attributes of the theory enables us to understand the phenomenon and to act more appropriately” (Kivunja, 2018, p. 45). Children and adolescents enduring the loss of a parent without access to grief management treatment plans can develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that can evolve into psychological disorders later in life (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). Death, specifically the loss of a parent, is the most traumatic event a child can endure (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Acknowledging and addressing the grief, rather than evading the grief, could prevent the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms and a lifetime of psychological distress. The assumed data of the study have the potential to avoid the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms and, instead, instill healthy coping mechanisms to manage grief. The findings from the study were related appropriately to the theory of change. The role educators play in assisting and guiding a student who is bereft connects appropriately to SLT.

Theory of Change

Weiss (1995) introduced theory of change to evaluate comprehensive intersectoral, community-grounded interventions intended to improve communities by uplifting children, youth, and families. An application of theory of change is to focus on improving the quality of life of individuals. Individuals in satisfactory situations in their lives are more productive, thus a benefit to society. Unidentified students who are bereft in public schools illustrate a need-area for improvement of mental well-being by providing greater support within the school setting. Eliminating inappropriate coping mechanisms before they develop may allow a child or adolescent who is bereft to stave off potential long-term mental health consequences. The benefit

to the community is a more stable young adult, better equipped to manage daily life (Weiss, 1995).

Theory of change describes how and why the desired change is to happen in a specific context and creates a plan for the future state (Ash & Lorenzi, 2018). The change needed in public schools is an evolution from having no system in place for identifying children and adolescents who are bereft to having a clear and targeted identification system and plan for maintenance for children and adolescents who are bereft. Change is necessary because children and adolescents, left to self-heal, may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms. Such devices lead to a decline in academic potential and/or manifestation of deviant behaviors (Berg et al., 2016).

Long-term goals, indicative of theory of change, would create a pathway to follow a child or adolescent who is bereft from the identification of loss through high school graduation (Connell & Klem, 2000). Such a plan might be similar to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a student with an emotional or learning disability. The necessary component, and the first step of theory of change, is a process designed to identify adolescents who are bereft. Educational leaders should take the first step.

Situational Leadership Theory

Hersey and Blanchard (1977) renamed the life cycle theory of leadership to situational leadership theory (SLT) in the 1970s. Situational leadership theory is composed of two main variables: relationship behavior and task behavior. The intensity of the task concerning the level of the relationship determines the role of a leader (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). The foundation of SLT indicates there is no best style of leadership. Instead, an effective leader is flexible to meet the demands of various relationships and tasks. Adaptation and flexibility are predominant characteristics of a situational leader (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Various levels of leaders exist within the education arena. Teachers are the leaders in the classroom. Teachers have the greatest level of interaction with students. Guidance counselors, principals, and school nurses play an important role in students' academic experience and behavior management. Each leader has developed a personal leadership style that allows each to support the academic achievement and behavioral expectations of students (Hunzicker, 2017). An individual who has assumed the characteristics of a situational leader was a good fit for the study because a situational leader is adaptable to the unique needs of each student and utilizes the most appropriate means to reach academic achievement and behavior for each student. Situational leadership is guided by the principle that different situations require different styles of leadership (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Framework

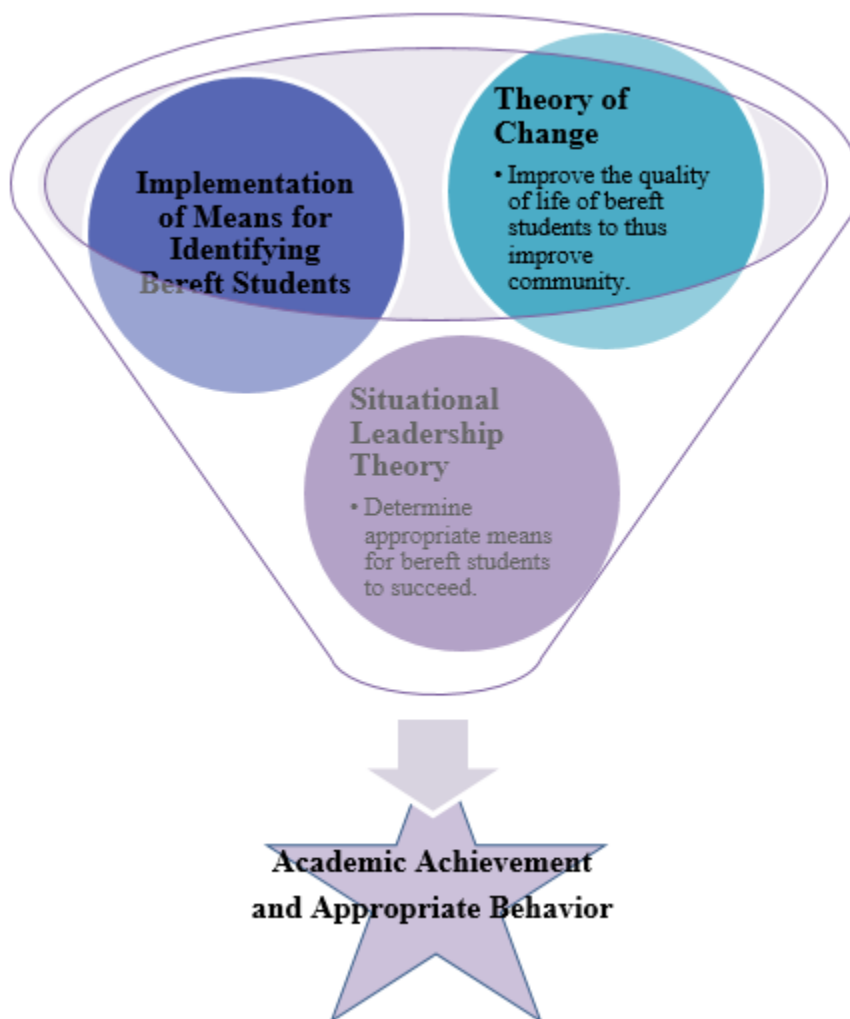
Theory of change and SLT focus on the educator's role in identifying the unique needs and appropriate interventions required to support students who are bereft (Meier, 2016). Theory of change is beneficial for addressing the stages required to make the change, while SLT is useful for overseeing the transformation (Grover & Walker, 2018). In the classroom, bereft students' academic performance and behavior are contingent upon teacher-supported learning methods created to overcome personal limitations (Zaretsky, 2016). A situational leader should adapt to accommodate the unique needs of an identified student who is bereft. On the organizational level, SLT is appropriate for approving the change required to institute an identification system for students who are bereft—the change necessary to promote academic success and positive behavior (Grover & Walker, 2018).

Figure 1 is an illustration of the decisive effect a situational leader can have on a student who is bereft. Positive change in a bereft student's course of academic performance and behavior

may occur if schools devise a program for identifying students who are bereft. Applying the two theories to the needs of students who are bereft may result in academic achievement and development of appropriate behavior.

Figure 1

Blending of Situational Leadership Theory and Theory of Change Benefits Students who are Bereft



Research Literature Review

Literature in the field of education on students who are bereft and academic performance and behavior suggests students who are bereft require a support system to thrive in the school environment (Sasser et al., 2019). Educators may not fully understand the effect the loss of a parent has on a child or adolescent and do not have the training required to support a student who is bereft (Densen et al., 2012). Children and adolescents who do not have a support system in place to help manage grief may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that have the potential to evolve into long-term mental and physical health consequences (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015). The identification of students who are bereft in the United States is lacking compared to other countries (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). Intervention can help a child or adolescent cope better with grief (Hirschson et al., 2018). The literature review narrows from the broad topic of grief to the loss of a parent during childhood or adolescence to provide a complete picture of the research on adolescents who are bereft and academic performance and behavior in school. Topics include the consequences of unresolved grief on mental and physical health and the impact unresolved grief can have on school experiences. The review concludes with the gains of early identification and intervention to better support a student who is bereft.

Grief

Grief is the process of overcoming the emotions affiliated with the breaking of ties with one who has passed away and adjusting to a life without the deceased (Hamilton, 2016). Grief is an emotional reaction related to the loss of one who was loved (Nakajima, 2018). Grief is an isolating experience often obstructed by societal ignorance (New York Life, 2017). Stages of grief, as proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969), include shock and denial, followed by anger, resentment, and guilt, then depression, and finally acceptance. Grief left unattended can manifest

into deeper levels of grief, including complicated grief (CG) and prolonged grief disorder (PGD; Nakajima, 2018).

Complicated Grief/Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

Unresolved grief accompanied by acute symptoms interfering in daily living was termed *complicated grief* in the 1990s (Nakajima, 2018). A mental challenge that interferes in daily life qualifies as a mental disorder (Kaite et al., 2016). CG, also referred to as *persistent complex bereavement disorder*, was deemed a mental disorder in 2013 when it was added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (Center for Complicated Grief, 2018). CG has four key factors similar to the stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross: (a) disbelief the death occurred, (b) anger due to the death, (c) intense longing for the deceased coupled with recurring painful emotions, and (d) an inability to clear one's head of memories of the deceased resulting in distressing ideas surrounding the death (Hamilton, 2016). CG impairs daily activities (Miller, 2017). Children who are bereft often suffer separation anxiety from the surviving parent in the wake of parental loss (Cait, 2012). Factors contributing to grief and evolving into CG include the survivor's ability to cope with the death, the survivor's relationship to the deceased, and whether the survivor experienced multiple adverse life events prior to the death (Hamilton, 2016). The persistence of CG has the propensity to evolve into PGD (Maciejewski et al., 2016).

Prolonged Grief Disorder

Researchers agree PGD is a distinct mental health disorder deserving of diagnosis and treatment (Maciejewski et al., 2016). In 2018, the World Health Organization added PGD to the International Classification of Disease-11 (Killikelly & Maercker, 2017). PGD is a disturbance brought about after the loss of a close relative or friend and is associated with stress-related disorders. Characteristics include intense emotional pain that persists for an abnormal period,

typically longer than 6 months. PGD can cause serious impairment in educational, family, occupational, personal, or social areas of one's life (Killikelly & Maercker, 2017). Twenty percent of people receiving treatment for mental disorders suffer from undiagnosed PGD (Center for Complicated Grief, 2018). Unrecognized or untreated grief in a child or adolescent can evolve into CG or PGD. If left unrecognized or untreated, the consequences could be life altering (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018).

Grief as a Child or Adolescent

Enduring the death of a parent is said to be the most traumatic event in a child's life (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Children and adolescents enduring the loss of a parent without access to grief management treatment plans can develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, which can evolve into psychological disorders later in life (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). According to Melhem et al. (2011), children and adolescents who are parentally bereft may develop functional and psychiatric symptoms. A child who is bereft may develop PGD within 3 years of the parent's death and is likely to suffer greater functional impairment beyond psychopathology. Similarly, children and adolescents with PGD are at greater risk for early-onset depression (Melhem et al., 2011).

Melhem et al. (2011) were the first to conduct a population-based study to determine what impact sudden parental death has on a child. The longitudinal study used the largest sample of children who were victims of a parent's sudden death. Findings showed the profile of children who participated in the study experienced problematic grief. Melhem et al.'s (2011) findings coincided with Andriessen, Mowll, et al.'s (2018) evaluation of mental distress linked to unresolved grief. Children who developed PGD showed greater functional impairment earlier in the grieving process: within the first year. Support from the surviving parent played a significant

role in the child who is bereft's well-being. The child was at greater risk for the development of psychological issues even up to 3 years post-death if the surviving parent struggled to manage their grief. Findings from the longitudinal study support the need for an identification system of children and adolescents who are bereft to promote the relief of grief (Melhem et al., 2011).

Consequences of Unresolved Grief

Individuals commonly experience the death of loved ones throughout their lives. Cait (2012), Miller (2017), and Schoenfelder et al. (2015) agreed the death of a parent in childhood or adolescence causes distress. Grieving the death is inevitable. Some suffer severe psychological implications resulting from an inability to manage the grief (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Others' lives are profoundly changed in response to the death (Nakajima, 2018). Bowlby (1982, as cited in Nakajima, 2018) described the hollowness of grief as the most intense pain one would endure.

The cause of the death, natural/expected or sudden/violent, is a determinant for the development of pathological grief (Nakajima, 2018). Sudden and unexpected deaths, such as those the result of an accident, homicide, or suicide, are more likely to have a traumatic effect on survivors (Griese et al., 2018). Evidence shows strong trauma reactions from children even if the death was anticipated (Griese et al., 2018). A child or adolescent left to manage the loss of a parent without intervention or support can develop damaging coping mechanisms that have the propensity to develop into life-altering mental health implications (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Even in instances of intervention, children who are bereft expressed using avoidant coping as a method to reduce the emotional pain resulting from the death of a parent (Kaplow et al., 2018). Unresolved grief can manifest into physiological complications later in life (Burke-Harris, 2018).

Initial Consequences

Initially, the child or adolescent might withdraw from family and/or peers, attempting to continue with life as if the death never occurred (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015). In time, a child may become more reliant on the living parent. Separation anxiety is a common, but not highly effective, defense mechanism (Cait, 2012). A child can unknowingly develop separation anxiety to cope with the fear of abandonment (Miller, 2017). Some adolescents who are bereft engage in dangerous or reckless behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse and/or promiscuity (Miller, 2017). Academic decline is not an uncommon result of unresolved grief (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). Insomnia is often a by-product of unresolved grief (Hardison et al., 2005).

Mental Health

Adolescence is a precarious age. Biological changes trigger psychological changes as an adolescent transitions into the early adulthood stage (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). The loss of a parent can impact the natural course of development, causing a multitude of issues. Lasting psychological disorders are a risk if grief continues unresolved. Within the first 2 years of the parent's death, a child or adolescent is at risk for internalizing problems. Ten percent of children who are bereft showed symptoms of PGD 3 years after parental death (Melhem et al., 2011). Mental health issues are likely to emerge by age 19 in a child or adolescent who has lost a parent (Stikkelbroek et al., 2016). One in five children who have experienced the death of a parent will develop a psychiatric disorder (Dowdney, 2003). The bereft's relationship to the deceased is a key positive predictor for the development of mental health issues (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). Bylund-Grenklo et al. (2016) and Cait (2012) cited diagnoses of anxiety, major depression, and suicidal ideation. In a survey of 148 adults with serious mental illness, 22% reported suffering the loss of a close family member at an early age (Macias et al., 2004).

Stikkelbroek et al. (2016) tracked the propensity for mental health issues to arise in bereft preadolescents through adulthood. The longitudinal study, conducted in the Netherlands, tracked mental health changes following the death of a parent or parents. Findings revealed 25% of adolescents affected by the death of a parent struggled with mental health issues (Stikkelbroek et al., 2016). Another study had similar findings; a qualitative systematic review study determined an apposite relationship between CG and long-term substance abuse (Parisi et al., 2019).

Cait (2012) recalled an encounter, and a later subject of a case study, with “Stephen.” “Stephen” was 14 years old when he was hospitalized for major depression and anxiety. His psychological diagnoses were linked to the loss of his father when he was 9, evolving into separation anxiety due to an older brother moving away soon after the father’s death and the death of his grandfather when he was 13. “Stephen” never received or asked for counseling after the deaths (Cait, 2012). Parisi et al. (2019) affirmed the benefits of grief counseling.

Children and adolescents who do not receive intervention, support, or another form of grief management may develop psychological disorders in adulthood. A child’s development trajectory can be altered as well as the child’s physiological development (Burke-Harris, 2018). Disorders can range from mild to severe and include anxiety, insomnia, major depression, and/or suicidal ideation (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Posttraumatic stress disorder is an enduring side effect of grief (Bergman et al., 2017). Substance abuse disorder is another commonly diagnosed psychological disorder linked to unresolved grief stemming from childhood loss (Masferrer et al., 2017). Likewise, Parisi et al. (2019) reported a connection between substance abuse and CG.

Academic Performance. A student’s mental well-being is a key component for attention and focus (Grøtan et al., 2019). A student struggling with challenges to their mental health is likely to have trouble focusing on or completing academic tasks or grasping concepts presented

in school lessons (Dodd et al., 2017). A student's academic ability tends to decline after the death of a parent. The bereft's relationship to the deceased is a key positive predictor for the development of academic difficulties (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). A link has been identified between parent death and education withdrawal (Schoenfelder et al., 2015).

Disruptions in a student's daily life resulting from the death of a parent impact academic progress (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). Schoolwork becomes pointless or puzzling to a grieving student (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). "The students' academic decline is not due to their lack of resources but is a temporary setback due to the loss" (Dyregrov et al., 2015, p. 1). The decline in academic progress results in a tendency toward increased school dropout (Schoenfelder et al., 2015).

A study by Grøtan et al. (2019) indicated students who are bereft challenged by mental health problems were 4 times as likely to experience low academic self-efficacy. Teacher accounts of traumatized students suggested classroom-wide psychological distress (Green et al., 2016). Anxiety in response to the death of a parent potentially contributed to the bereft student's inability to actively engage in the learning process. Losses experienced academically tended to affect behavior (Grøtan et al., 2019).

A longitudinal study by Feigelman et al. (2016) aligned with the findings from the Grøtan et al. (2019) study. Students who are bereft were more likely to drop out of school. The result was diminished academic progress and long-lasting economic disparity (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Behavior. Mental well-being affects behavior. Adolescents enduring the death of a parent often internalize concerns and emotions, fueling the development of behavioral problems (Stikkelbroek et al., 2016). Surviving parents reported nonspecific behavioral and emotional difficulties (Dowdney, 2003). Evidence indicated behavioral issues fade over time (Feigelman et

al., 2016). Worry and an exaggerated fear of not accomplishing academic achievement caused students who are bereft to further withdraw, resulting in procrastination and avoidant behavior (Grøtan et al., 2019). The bereft's relationship to the deceased is a key positive predictor for the decline in peer relationships (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). A student who is bereft often expresses a sense of loss in school and may appear more irritable and upset (Grøtan et al., 2019). Irritability is an indirect characteristic of lack/loss of sleep commonly connected to the grieving process (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Unhealthy coping mechanisms are likely to develop if grief is not acknowledged and properly managed. Burrell et al. (2020) reported a high incidence of deliberate self-harm requiring hospitalization as a response to suppress the emotional pain experienced from the death of a parent. Drug or alcohol abuse and promiscuity were reported as means to quell the pain of the death of a parent (Miller, 2017). Students who are bereft afflicted with CG were likely to develop a smoking habit (Parisi et al., 2019).

Physical Health

Mental health implications are not the only side effect of grief. Physical complications resulting from bereavement are likely to occur as well (Grøtan et al., 2019). The physical impact on health resulting from the death of a loved one may surface soon after the loss. Physical consequences may fester over time and not appear until later in life as far more serious ailments (Burke-Harris, 2018).

Short-Term Physical Health. In the days, weeks, and months following the death of a loved one, bereft individuals commonly experience physical ailments in response to the death (Stroebe et al., 2007). Stroebe et al. (2007) suggested activity-limiting pain, chest pains, decreased concentration, digestive issues, headaches, and sleep issues are associated with bereavement. The compromised immune system is more apt to fall ill with the flu or other

illnesses the body would normally fight easily (Nakajima, 2018). Quality of life can decline in the wake of the loss of a loved one (Nakajima, 2018).

Long-Term Physical Health. Childhood adversity, including enduring the loss of a parent, can alter a person's body for decades (Burke-Harris, 2018). The stress of the loss can cause chronic inflammation. The loss can disable the proper balancing of hormones. Both, over time, can alter cell replication and place one at high risk for Alzheimer's, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke (Burke-Harris, 2018). Nakajima (2018) confirmed Burke-Harris's (2018) findings regarding long-term physical health concerns related to adversity, such as cancer, heart disease, and high blood pressure. CG puts bereft individuals at high risk for long-term physical impairments, including suicidal ideation (Nakajima, 2018).

Long-Term Consequences

Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study consisting of 39 participants aged 12–18. Participants were interviewed to determine if there were long-term consequences related to unresolved grief. Findings suggested the participants had evidence of lasting grief and mental health ramifications. Counseling can benefit one processing the death of a loved one (Bergman et al., 2017). Findings showed even late intervention had positive outcomes for overcoming grief-related mental health issues (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018).

Masferrer et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative study through a systematic review of empirical findings to determine if CG occurs more frequently among drug abusers. In total, 196 bereaved substance use disorder patients' records were reviewed. Findings supported the theme by indicating a relationship between substance use disorder and unresolved grief. The study's credibility is in the use of a control group consisting of 100 non-substance use disorder

participants (Masferrer et al., 2017).

Identifying Students Who Have Lost a Parent

Students who are bereft can only be served by educators if identified. Systems for identifying children and adolescents who are bereft around the globe vary. A system in the United States for the identification of children and adolescents who are bereft has not been identified. Theory of change fits this study because change needs to occur in the school system to implement a sustainable identification system for children and adolescents who are bereft. On the public school level, students coping with the death of a parent are most often unknown to educators (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Proper identification of students who have lost a parent prompts educators to create a more nurturing environment and offer support to assist the grieving process (Dyregrov et al., 2015).

United States

Little information is available in the United States regarding the number of children and adolescents who have lost a parent. A dated estimate showed 1 in 20 children or adolescents suffers the loss of a parent annually (Owens, 2008). The estimate was the same as from 1998 (Owens, 2008). No updates were made over the decade from 1998 to 2008 (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). Nearly half of U.S. adolescents endure the loss of a close family member or friend in a year (Rheingold et al., 2004), but there are no statistics specific to children and adolescents whose parent died (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Grøtan et al. (2019) pointed out a lack of empirical studies in the United States covering the topic of children and adolescents who are parentally bereft.

In 2014, the Survey of Income and Program Participation added questions regarding whether respondents' parents were alive or dead. The researcher uses this survey to collect data

and measure change on topics such as assets, childcare, economic well-being, education, family dynamics, food security, and health insurance (Scherer, 2019). Despite efforts to identify parental bereavement, the questionnaire is aimed at adult respondents, not children.

Other Countries

In other countries, such information is more readily available. In Sweden and the United Kingdom, 4%–5% of the child population loses a parent before the age of 18 (Berg et al., 2016). In the United Kingdom, data are compiled from Census information and mortality statistics. Parental death in 2015 occurred at an alarming rate of one every 22 minutes. This rate equated to 23,600 fathers and mothers who died in 2015, leaving 41,000 children who are bereft, ranging in age from infant to 17 (Child Bereavement Network, 2020). Over 6,000 children and adolescents lose either one or both parents every year in the Netherlands (Van Gaalen, 2013).

Public Schools

The identification of students who are bereft in schools is minimal (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). In 2012, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the New York Life Federation administered a groundbreaking survey of 1,253 AFT members (Densen et al., 2012). AFT is the second largest teachers union in the United States. More than half of the educators surveyed stated their district had no protocol for responding to a student who lost a loved one. Ninety-three percent of participants reported having never received training about students who are bereft. Educators' desire to learn the skills to better serve students who are bereft was high. Teachers are the most important figures for identifying and supporting students who are bereft (Green et al., 2016). The relationship between teacher and student is critical to a student's success (Sparks, 2019). Situational leadership theory illustrates the point because teachers, as classroom leaders, should determine the most appropriate accommodations for

students who are bereft (Meier, 2016). Having the proper training and tools seems most beneficial (Sciarra & Chambliss, 2016). The gap is the lack of identification systems and programs to facilitate advocacy for students who are bereft (Densen et al., 2012). The application of theory of change may foster increased awareness and assist in closing the gap.

Early Intervention, Counseling, and Grief Management

Evidence indicates intervention, counseling, or grief management is beneficial to prevent both short-term and long-term implications of unresolved grief (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018; Hirschson et al., 2018). Theory of change applies because of the need to change public schools' methods of identifying and assisting students who are bereft. Researchers agree on the need for assisting and supporting children suffering from CG (Dodd et al., 2017). Not all children and adolescents who lose a parent have an opportunity to manage and understand grief. Opposing opinions exist as to whether grief counseling is effective. Neimeyer and Currier (2009) addressed the opposing opinion by determining a lack of studies either supporting or negating grief counseling's effectiveness. For this reason, there is value in understanding the barriers to intervention, counseling, or grief management before discussing the benefits.

Barriers to Intervention, Counseling, and Grief Management

Not all people struggling to overcome grief get the help they need. There are barriers to intervention, counseling, and grief management. Barriers include lack of awareness of the death, cost of care, the stigma of asking for help, and the well-being of the surviving parent (Chen & Panebianco, 2018; Dyregrov et al., 2015; Kaite et al., 2016; Truscott, 2016). Understanding each of the barriers is a step toward breaking down the barriers.

Lack of Awareness. Teachers should be aware of students in the classrooms who have lost a parent. Awareness will allow teachers to better support these students' unique needs

(Dyregrov et al., 2015). Support for students who are bereft in the public school system is lacking (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). In many instances, the student's loss is unknown, help is passive at best, or more commonly, unavailable. Teachers reported insufficient resources for students who are bereft in the school and few available outside the school (Densen et al., 2012). One student was advised to just get over the death and move on (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Many students were met with hostility when they approached an educator for help. Students felt punished, not supported (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018).

Cost. The cost of intervention, counseling, and grief management, especially in poverty-stricken urban areas, is a barrier. Socioeconomic status is connected to the accessibility of health-care services (Truscott, 2016). Health insurance may only cover partial payments or allow only a set number of visits (Newhook, 2017). On average, a typical 45- to 55-minute therapy session costs between \$200 and \$300 (Babakian, 2019). Truscott (2016) conducted a phenomenological study of income, mental health, and race. Findings showed income directly impacted access to mental health treatment (Truscott, 2016).

Stigma. Another barrier to intervention, counseling, and grief management could be stigma. Often, society imposes a stigma on counseling services, whether the services are for mental wellness or managing grief (Gulliver et al., 2010). Cait (2012) identified a potential societal denial of death and acknowledged if treatment were sought, the treatment would be hurried along to return the bereft to one's normal day-to-day activities. People inflicted by mental health disorders, such as CG or PGD, often encounter ignorance or shaming when seeking help (Kaite et al., 2016). Often, counseling is not sought because perceived stigma prevents a person in need from reaching out to a counselor, which, in the case of young children especially, reiterates the need for early intervention (Lannin et al., 2016).

Surviving Parent. The death of one's parent affects persons beyond the child (Kasahara-Kiritani et al., 2017). The surviving parent may or may not be able to recognize the spiraling effects of the child's or adolescent's grief. The well-being of the surviving parent is the most consistently reported predictor of a child who is bereft's well-being (Melhem et al., 2011). Chen and Panebianco (2018) supported the surviving parent as an intricate agent to escort children who are bereft through the grieving process. Cait (2012) and Schoenfelder et al. (2015) agreed the surviving parent should first acknowledge their loss to be able to support the children. Acknowledging the loss does not occur in all instances. The expectation is for the surviving parent to recognize unhealthy grief management in the child and help to find calm in a world now turned upside down (Feigelman et al., 2016). Often, the surviving parent has not successfully managed his or her loss and is incapable of consoling the child (Cait, 2012). The combination of CG in the surviving caregiver and the child makes for a potent predictor of depression in the child who is bereft even 3 years following the death (Melhem et al., 2011).

A qualitative study was conducted to explore the stability of 10 widowers raising 22 children aged 2–16 (McClatchey, 2018). The widowers had exaggerated concerns regarding being left the primary caregiver. Findings showed the coping style of the surviving fathers influenced the emotional well-being of the surviving children. Credibility of the study was established using two researchers to conduct the research and a third colleague to consult throughout (McClatchey, 2018).

Benefits of Intervention, Counseling, and Grief Management

Proper action can be positive. Andriessen, Mowll, et al. (2018) reported only a few teachers, the ones who knew of the death, understood what the student was going through. A teacher guided by SLT may understand the need to make accommodations to meet the needs of a

student who is bereft (Shonhiwa, 2016). Children and adolescents who receive grief counseling form stronger relationships (Hirschson et al., 2018). Processing grief in a healthy way and in a nurturing environment can be a catalyst for positive mental health (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). Worth noting, despite the benefits of intervention, one study of mental health professionals a great need for better training in CG (Dodd et al., 2017).

Nolan (2018) conducted a study of the long-term effects of childhood parental bereavement. Findings showed those having stronger social supports suffered less psychological consequences in the years following the parent's death. Participants lacking social support had greater incidences of anxiety and depression (Nolan, 2018). A study by Stikkelbroek et al. (2016) agreed. Educators should be made aware of the risk for students to develop mental health issues due to the death of a parent (Dodd et al., 2017).

Schoenfelder et al. (2015) studied the effects of the Family Bereavement Program (FBP), a theory-based program designed to institute resilience in children who have experienced the death of a parent. The program offers separate yet coinciding bereavement management for children and the surviving parent (Ayers et al., 2013). The researcher of the study randomized 244 children and adolescents who are bereft and their caregivers. Some participants were to take part in a longevity study incorporating the FBP, while other participants were the control group and received only literature about bereavement. Throughout the 6-year study, those receiving FBP participated in group sessions strategizing healthy coping mechanisms to manage grief. Assessments were administered periodically. The goal was to monitor academic achievement and stimulate educational expectations. The findings from the study indicated a nonsignificant effect on academic outcomes and employment aspirations for older students but improved grade point averages for younger participants and improved academic progress for students who had

few behavior problems at the onset of the study. In addition to monitoring student progress, parents were provided with education for improving parenting. Students who showed improvement were found to be the children of the parents who actively engaged in effective parenting lessons.

Intervention and prevention efforts such as FBP are beneficial for helping students who are bereft succeed in school (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). Providing educators with grief training showed marked improvement in bereft students' academic progress and behavior (Densen et al., 2012). There are instances of full recovery from academic, behavioral, and mental distress into adulthood (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Effect of Intervention, Counseling, and Grief Management

Intervention, counseling, and grief management may not be enough to stave off long-term mental and physical health implications resulting from grief. More research is needed to determine the effect of parental death on students (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). The findings from the Schoenfelder et al. (2015) study were initially positive. The follow-up of the participants could not determine enduring academic success once the study concluded. The results of Cait's (2012) study suggested grief management was necessary for the development of constructive coping mechanisms. Part of the process required validation of the bereft's need to secure the deceased parent's memory through continued conversations and acknowledgment of the parent who died. What Cait witnessed for treatment was instead a social culture hurrying grief recovery, disallowing full closure and healing for the child who is bereft. Improvement is needed in the existing intervention, counseling, and grief management programs (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). The need for improvement is based in part on the limited amount of empirical evidence supporting positive intervention (Chen & Panebianco, 2018).

Gap in the Literature

A gap exists in the literature in empirical studies reporting systems of identification of students who are bereft in the public school system (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). In addition, resources for students who are bereft in the school setting are few (Densen et al., 2012). Evidence indicated identified students who are bereft are better supported by educators and are more likely to succeed academically and develop proper behavior (Dyregrov et al., 2015). Unidentified students who are bereft felt punished due to lack of academic achievement or improper behavior (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Yet educators report almost nonexistent support or training to understand the needs of students who are bereft (Densen et al., 2012). Research should be conducted to close the gap by creating an identification system to support the unique needs of students who are bereft. The study was an attempt to close the gap.

Chapter Summary

According to researchers, the death of a parent is the most traumatic life event a child or adolescent could endure (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Management of the loss and the surge of emotions the death creates is important for overcoming grief. Grief, when not acknowledged, managed, or recognized, can manifest as unhealthy coping mechanisms (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Early issues common in adolescents include depression, fatigue, sleeplessness, and withdrawal (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Grief left unattended festers into adulthood, manifesting as major depression, schizophrenia, or suicidal ideation (Zisook & Shear, 2009).

Identification of a child or adolescent who has experienced the death of a parent is an essential step toward healing. Andriessen, Lobb, et al. (2018) acknowledged public schools deliberately do not identify students who are bereft, leaving educators unaware of and unable to

accommodate the bereft student's unique needs. There is value for an educator to know of a student whose parent has died, even years after the death (Feigelman et al., 2016). A survey of adults who lost a parent as a child agreed years passed before the loss was less painful (Densen et al., 2012). Educators who embrace SLT are better able to support bereft students' needs both academically and behaviorally (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Public schools have a gamut of responsibilities, and educators have to fulfill multiple roles to ensure students' overall well-being. The education system is responsible for the preparation, support, and training of educators who encounter students facing challenges to their well-being. Surviving the death of a parent is devastating and challenges a student's well-being (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Teachers and other educators are ill equipped to meet the needs of these students (Dyregrov et al., 2015). Guidance counselors, principals, school nurses, school psychologists, and teachers ought to provide a unified support system for students who are bereft (Green et al., 2016; Sciarra & Chambliss, 2016).

A review of scholarly literature relating to adolescents who are bereft, lack of identification of students whose parent has died, how lack of identification of students who are bereft breeds unhealthy coping mechanisms, and the benefits of proper grief management was presented in this chapter. Themes identified include grief; consequences of unresolved grief; identifying students who have lost a parent; and early intervention, counseling, and grief management. A discussion of the levels of grief was provided to establish an understanding of how unresolved grief can impact one for a lifetime. Theory of change and SLT present strategies beneficial for initiating positive change in a bereft student's academic performance and behavior (Weiss, 1995). Change can occur if schools devise a program for identifying students who are bereft and adapting to bereft students' unique needs. The review of literature provided the

background information and analyzed and described approaches of other studies, building a case for the content, and chosen methodology of the present study. Chapter 3 is the specific methodological approach applied to understand the phenomenon of educators' lived experiences with students enduring the death of a parent.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Losing a parent during childhood or adolescence can have a strong effect on one's future. A child or adolescent who receives no professional help to manage grief has the propensity to quell grief through unhealthy lifestyle choices. Early issues related to unresolved grief include elevated levels of fatigue, insomnia, and moderate to severe depression (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). The behaviors can perpetuate into adulthood, manifesting as major depression, severe anxiety, or suicide (Zisook & Shear, 2009). The background of the problem is, without a reporting system in place, students who are bereft remain unidentified in the school system (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018).

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators. A qualitative phenomenological study guided the research to better understand the lived experiences of educators and students who are bereft. The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: How do educators describe the lived experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 2: What are educators' perceptions of the academic performance and behaviors of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 3: What are educators' perceptions of the importance of identifying students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the

northeastern United States?

The research design and rationale explain why qualitative research and phenomenological methods were best suited for the study. The role of the researcher section explores how experiences and relationships may affect outcomes. Research procedures encompass population, instrumentation, data collection, and data preparation to study the phenomenon. Data analysis includes the components used to address the research questions with the data collected. Reliability and validity describe procedures used to establish each in a qualitative study. Confirming reliability and validity in qualitative research is achieved by establishing research authenticity, confirmability, credibility, dependability, objectivity, and transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical procedures detail plans for protecting human participants.

Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative study of educators' perceptions of lived experiences with students who have lost a parent was conducted using phenomenological design. Phenomenology was the appropriate methodology because of the benefit of helping researchers learn from others' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Educators from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States participated in two qualitative data gathering sessions to derive thematic concepts evolving from educators' experiences with students who are bereft.

Qualitative research methods are beneficial for providing an understanding of how people make sense of lived experiences (Queirós et al., 2017). Educators from a semiurban junior / senior high school participated in semistructured interviews and a focus group to gain real-world insight into the effect losing a parent as a child or adolescent has on students' academic performance and behavior. The educators have direct knowledge of the academic performance and behavior of students who are bereft, which makes for an ideal group to study.

Phenomenology is a research method well suited to align one's philosophy to the specific research questions (Neubauer et al., 2019). Fifteen to 20 educators were anticipated to participate in the phenomenological study. Triangulation enhances confidence in data by explaining the complexity of human behavior studied through multiple perspectives (Noble & Heale, 2019). The analyzed data will be useful to determine whether students who are bereft are at a deficit academically and/or behaviorally. Findings may suggest a need to identify students who are bereft to improve academic performance and behavior. An identification system may allow educators to better accommodate the unique needs of students who are bereft.

A phenomenological design was better suited for the study over other designs, such as a case study, for various reasons. Typically, case studies focus on a single event, incident, or individual, while phenomenology allows a broader investigation of multiple stakeholders' lived experiences (Hasa, 2017). The primary subjects, children and adolescents who are bereft, were unable to be observed due to institutional constraints. Observation is a preferred method of data gathering for case studies. Phenomenological research depends heavily on the interviewing skills of the researcher. A deficit in interviewing skills could be a constraint of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher, by design, is the primary medium for collecting data in a study (Queirós et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers are interested in engaging in the research process to create meaning and understanding obtained through lived experiences of participants (Queirós et al., 2017). My professional experience with the setting and circumstances informed the study's components. The setting for the study was of interest because I have professional experience with students who are bereft in the school district and learned firsthand how greatly such trauma

effects students' academic performance and behavior. I am a coworker of the participants but hold no power over the educators participating and have no authority or means to grant favors or provide incentives for participation. Although still employed by the school district, I was not eligible as a participant to reduce bias and ethical concerns such as conflict of interest. Avoiding conflict of interest as a researcher due to its potential to contaminate the integrity of sound research is important (Mecca et al., 2015). Member checking was used to maintain reliability and validity (Birt et al., 2016).

Research Procedures

The qualitative study of educators' lived experiences with students who are bereft and the effect the loss of a parent has on academic performance and behavior was conducted using phenomenological methods. Phenomenology was ideal for the study because of the benefit of helping researchers learn from others' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Selected educators participated in two qualitative assessments—semistructured interviews and a focus group—to conceptualize themes of lived experiences with students who are bereft.

Population and Sample Selection

The target population was 64 educators of Grade 7–12 students in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Educators included 58 teachers, 3 guidance counselors, 1 school nurse, and 2 principals. The sample population was selected from the population of 64 educators through a process of purposive sampling and consisted of 16 participants. Purposive sampling is recommended for selection of a sample population consisting of participants meeting specific criteria to best assist with the research (Etikan et al., 2016).

The target population was contacted via email with an invitation to participate (see Appendix A). There were two criteria for inclusion to participate in the study: an educator at the

junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States and those who have interacted with a student who is bereft on an academic or behavioral level. Participation was voluntary. Voluntary participation augments research reliability and validity (Kiliç & Firat, 2017). Educators who met the study criteria and volunteered to participate were required to sign an informed consent (see Appendix B). Informed consent forms were presented to participants, in person, several weeks before data collection. Informed consent forms were distributed in a Google Form requiring an electronic signature. Participants were given 1 week to review the form prior to agreeing to participate.

Site permission was requested from the superintendent of schools. The request for permission was sent via email (see Appendix C). Site permission was granted from the superintendent of schools in a signed letter (see Appendix D).

Semistructured interviews were scheduled once the sample population was established. Interviews were conducted in person or virtually, using Zoom. Qualitative semistructured interviews contribute to research results' trustworthiness (Kallio et al., 2016). A focus group was conducted electronically using Zoom. Validity was ensured by recording each interview and focus group session and taking notes for comparison. The informed consent disclosed videotaping of interview meetings and focus group meetings.

Instrumentation

Instruments were researcher-created because no preexisting tools were found for researching the topic. Semistructured interviews were conducted to determine educators' experiences with students who are bereft both academically and behaviorally. Interview and focus group questions were designed to align with the research questions. Semistructured interviews present a set of predesigned questions but allow freedom to explore questions in

greater depth (Queirós et al., 2017). The focus groups resulted in emergent codes to categorize and classify data. Focus groups are beneficial for obtaining detailed information and present an opportunity to clarify responses (Queirós et al., 2017). Collecting data via various methods, referred to as *triangulation*, increases credibility and validity (Noble & Heale, 2019). Semistructured interviews and the focus group conducted for the study directly aligned the research questions to the data collection.

Triangulation enhances confidence in data by explaining more fully the complexity of human behavior studied through multiple perspectives (Noble & Heale, 2019). Data triangulation uses different sources of information. Data collected from various stakeholders within a group establish triangulation (Fusch et al., 2018). A school nurse, guidance counselors, principals, and teachers were asked the same interview questions to acquire related data, enhancing the validity of the study. Semistructured interviews and a focus group acquired data from stakeholders in varied settings, enhancing the validity of the study.

Kallio et al. (2016) offered a five-step process to guide the creation of a semistructured interview. Step 1 required the researcher to recognize areas of the phenomenon based on previous experiences before the interviews. Step 2 utilized previous experiences to gain a holistic understanding of the topic being studied. Prior experiences provided the premise for the interview. Extensive investigation of prior experience through empirical evidence was presented in the literature review.

During the third step, an interview guide was developed consisting of interview questions formulated from previous experience (see Appendix E). The interview guide provided direction for conversations. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit the richest possible data from participants. The strength of the guide determined the strength of data collected (Kallio et al.,

2016).

A field test of the semistructured interview guide occurred in the fourth step. The field test was presented to five subject matter experts (SMEs) and allowed for informed adjustments of the interview questions. Four of the five SMEs provided feedback (see Appendix F). A field test strengthens research integrity (Kallio et al., 2016).

Subject matter experts were chosen to review the interview questions for validation. Zamanzadeh et al. (2015) recommended utilizing three to five individuals to have sufficient control over chance of agreement. Subject matter experts were contacted through email correspondence (see Appendix F). Subject matter experts were selected through a careful and deliberate vetting process. Subject matter experts received a draft of the questions and provided feedback related to readability and likeliness to gather valid data. Five to 10 questions were used in the semistructured interviews, as well as three to five follow-up questions in a post-interview focus group. Questions were revised based on feedback, and the SMEs were asked to review the final draft. Additional edits were made as necessary until a sound interview guide was designed for the study. The final step was the presentation of the questions in a semistructured interview to the participants. Individual sessions were recorded. In-person sessions were recording utilizing a phone app and virtual sessions were recorded in Zoom. Notes were taken to back up unforeseen electronic recording malfunctions.

A focus group was conducted following the collection of data from the semistructured interviews. Focus groups are beneficial for increasing validity by measuring what is designed to be measured (Walsh, 2019). Participants for the focus group were randomly selected from the 16 educators who participated in the semistructured interviews. Questions previously approved by the SMEs were open-ended, intended to support the predetermined codes of bereft students'

academic performance and behavior, as well as to define emergent codes (see Appendix G). The focus group was recorded. The focus group was conducted via Zoom and was recorded on this platform. Notes were taken to back up unforeseen electronic recording malfunctions.

Data Collection

Quality and trustworthiness in a qualitative study are achieved through a deliberate data collection method (Kallio et al., 2016). Data collection for the study commenced in December 2020 and was anticipated to last 4–6 weeks. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and a focus group with educators of Grade 7–12 students from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Educators included professionals from various positions in the education field, presenting a well-rounded view of educators' lived experiences with students who are bereft. Virtual meetings were conducted utilizing the online conferencing tool Zoom. All data are stored safely and confidentially on a PIN-encrypted laptop. Data will be deleted after 3 years.

Initial emails were sent to participants to explain the purpose of the study, how data would be utilized, and how gathered information would be secured. In addition, the email contained a link to the informed consent. A Google Form was created to collect electronic signatures. Participants were given 1 week to review the informed consent. Participants agreeing to participate signed the informed consent before the semistructured interviews and focus group sessions (Arifin, 2018). Once the study ended, participants were given an opportunity to validate findings through a process of member checking. Exit procedures included all participants receiving a summary of final data results as well as a message of gratitude for participating. Neither follow-up interviews nor additional contact with participants were necessary.

Data were prepared for analysis by scrutinizing themes to further the comprehension of

the phenomenon studied. Two predetermined themes for analysis were bereft students' academic performance and behavior. Emergent themes were revealed upon data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data collected in the qualitative phenomenological study included the opinions, thoughts, and values of educators regarding students who are bereft. Reducing qualitative data to numbers is difficult because the nature of qualitative data is lived experiences expressed in the words of participants. Reality cannot be quantified (Queirós et al., 2017).

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested the following six steps for comprehensive data analysis. The first step of data analysis involved a process for organizing and preparing data. Notes were taken at each of the interviews as well as the focus group session in the study. In addition, all meetings were recorded. In-person sessions were recording utilizing a phone app and virtual sessions were recorded in Zoom. The second step was transcribing notes and recordings of the interviews and focus group. There is value in reviewing data and reflecting on overall meaning after all notes and recordings have been transcribed. The transcribed interviews and focus group responses were transferred into a digital document to commence the coding of data, which was Step 3. Categorization and coding of data were done utilizing the digital tool NVivo (Hilal & Alabri, 2013).

Step 4 was summarizing portions of data. Connections between the study's themes were deduced based on the coding. Step 5 animated the themes through representation in figures and tables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo qualitative data analysis software organized, analyzed, and developed insights in the qualitative data gathered from semistructured interviews and the focus group (McNiff, 2016). Using software to develop thematic analysis enabled efficient work of complex coding schemes with large amounts of text, facilitating rich and sophisticated themes

(Nowell et al., 2017). Finally, an interpretation of data distinguished what was learned and whether what was learned confirmed or diverged from past information. Opportunities for future research emerged.

Reliability and Validity

Upholding reliability and validity is of high priority in ethical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, validity is confirmed through credibility. Validity was achieved by gathering data from stakeholders with varying backgrounds in the education discipline. Two means of gathering data—semistructured interviews and a focus group—further ensured credibility. Focus groups enhance the validity of the study by measuring what was intended to be measured (Walsh, 2019). Data triangulation aimed to produce similar data, providing validity of outcomes (Noble & Heale, 2019). Note taking and recording during interview sessions and the focus group session ensured accurate transcription of the information discovered during sessions, enhancing credibility (Kallio et al., 2016).

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of a study based on believability (Noble & Heale, 2019). Credibility was furthered through participant validation, referred to as member checking. Participant validation is a process of returning research results to participants to allow participants to check findings for accuracy. Ideally, findings will resonate with participants' lived experiences (Birt et al., 2016).

Reliability in qualitative research is confirmed through the research's dependability and transferability. Dependability is the ability to reproduce the study and obtain the same or near the same results given the same conditions (Kallio et al., 2016). Presentation of the interview guide and data collection tools will allow other researchers to replicate the study. Stakeholders' responses to the interview questions and focus group discussion produced rich data rooted in

behavior, context, and experience. Such findings may become meaningful to others and ensure transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research, by nature, is an in-depth process of study (Arifin, 2018). A qualitative researcher will take steps to balance maintaining ethical procedures against the benefits of research (Arifin, 2018). *The Belmont Report* specified respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as the three principles required for the ethical conduct of research with humans (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2018).

Selection of participants was done equitably and fairly. *Justice* in research refers to including participants who are potentially related to the problem (NIH, 2018). Purposive sampling of participants who meet specific criteria will align participants to a problem and produce truer data (Etikan et al., 2016).

Respect for persons refers to treating individuals as autonomous agents (NIH, 2018). A well-designed and obtained informed consent agreement ensured respect for persons. The informed consent agreement provided a thorough description of the research benefits, design, objectives, and procedure. Additionally, the informed consent clearly stated participant rights. Each participant signed the informed consent form before data collection.

The informed consent agreement contained language to ensure the protection of human participants from harm before, during, and after the study, as prescribed by the beneficence principle (NIH, 2018). If at any time a participant did not wish to respond to a particular question, the participant could have declined to respond. If at any time a participant no longer wanted to participate in the study, the participant could have exited without consequence. The Institutional Review Board is charged with the responsibility of approving research projects

involving human participants (NIH, 2018).

Participant confidentiality and privacy were safeguarded through the assignment of fictitious names on all research documents. Each participant was identified with a P and a number coinciding with the order in which each responded to the participation request (P1, P2, etc.). A nondisclosure policy was adopted regarding any information shared throughout the research data collection. All data collected are secured on a PIN-encrypted laptop accessible only by the researcher and will be retained for 3 years post-study.

Chapter Summary

The methodology chapter consisted of detailed information regarding the research design, data collection procedures, and analysis approaches for a qualitative study of students who are bereft and the lived experiences of educators who interact with students who are bereft. The purpose and problem of the study were explained. Why qualitative research and phenomenological methods were best suited for the study was explained in the research design and rationale. The role of the researcher section explored ways in which lived experiences and relationships may affect outcomes. Research procedures encompassed population, instrumentation, data collection, and data preparation used to study the phenomenon described in the problem statement. Data analysis included the components used to address the research questions with the data collected. The reliability and validity section described procedures used to establish each in the qualitative study. Ethical procedures detailed the protection of human participants. Chapter 4 includes the results of the research study.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

Students who are bereft go unidentified in the school system without an identification system in place (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Unresolved grief presents challenges for adolescents in the school setting, both academically and behaviorally. Students who are bereft have unique needs, and when these needs are met, the students are more likely to succeed academically and develop proper behavior (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). Educators cannot meet the needs of students who are bereft if students who are bereft remain unidentified.

The problem is students who are bereft in public schools in the United States often go unidentified by educators, which can affect academic performance and behaviors. (Andriessen, Mowll, et al., 2018). Filling a gap between educators' experiences with children and adolescents who are bereft and initiatives to support children and adolescents who are bereft could prevent academic decline and behavior issues. The extent of the problem is unresolved grief may harm students' mental health and academic achievement, which could result in long-term consequences.

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators. The goal of the study was to determine educators' lived experiences with adolescents who are bereft in the classroom. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore data related to educators' experiences with adolescents who are bereft. A focus group session provided more in-depth and targeted information. The following research questions steered the study:

Research Question 1: How do educators describe the lived experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 2: What are educators' perceptions of the academic performance and behaviors of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

Research Question 3: What are educators' perceptions of the importance of identifying students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States?

The following sections describe the qualitative study designed to understand educators' lived experiences with adolescents who are bereft. Phenomenological research methods allow the experiences and expertise of participants to develop (Conaill, 2017). The first section is a description of the details of participant selection, including obtaining informed consent, the time frame of the study, duration, and the location of data collection for the semistructured questions and focus group. Data analysis is a report of the processes for data coding, preparation, security, and other analytical procedures used for analyzing participant responses. Next, the results section, which addresses each of the three research questions and identifies established and emergent themes. Reliability and validity sections explain how threats to each were controlled and eliminated. Finally, the research findings and data analysis are summarized.

Data Collection

The research took place in December 2020. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, which were conducted in person and virtually using Zoom, and a virtual focus group using Zoom. Zoom is a virtual audio and videoconferencing application (Gray et al., 2020). The

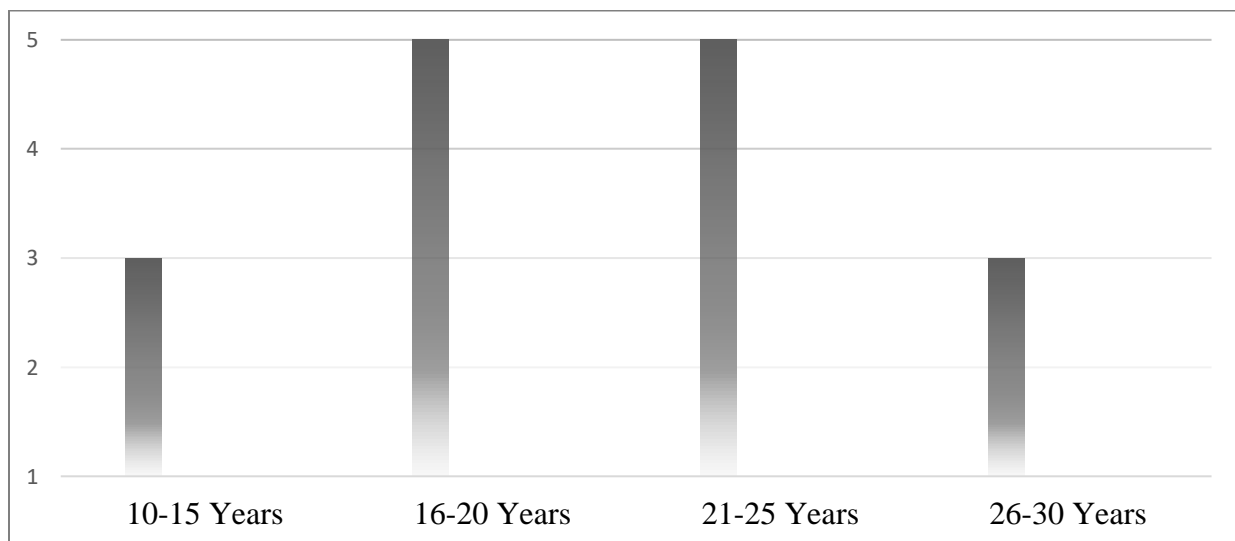
average time for each of the 16 interviews was 20 minutes. The focus group met for 50 minutes. Zoom meetings were necessary due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Zoom is a convenient and cost-effective alternative when in-person interviews are not possible (Gray et al., 2020). The setting for the study was a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Participants were educators who had experience working with students who are bereft, specifically, students who had a parent who died.

Participants

The participants for the study were educators of Grade 7–12 students from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Purposive sampling was used, which is recommended for the selection of a sample pool meeting specific criteria to best assist with the research (Etikan et al., 2016). Participation was voluntary. The number of years participants worked as educators are represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Participants' Years of Experience in Education



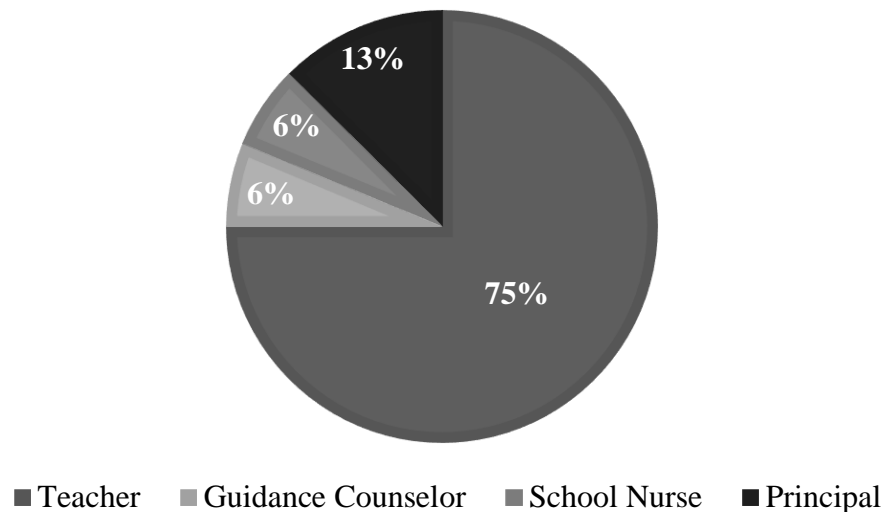
A total of 64 educators—3 guidance counselors, 2 principals, 1 school nurse, and 58 teachers—were contacted through district email. Including participants from various aspects of education fosters triangulation, which supports credibility and validity in research by explaining the nuances of human behavior through multiple perspectives (Noble & Heale, 2019). The email contained a link to a Google Form, which introduced the study, including participation criteria and potential utilization of the data. Educators who met the criteria were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. Purposive sampling based on criteria aligns participants to a problem and will produce richer, truer data (Etikan et al., 2016).

Educators who did not meet the criteria or did not volunteer to participate opted out and were exited from the Google Form. Educators who chose to participate in the study were directed to the informed consent section of the Google Form (see Appendix B). Affirmation of desire to participate was requested after potential participants thoroughly reviewed the informed consent. Demographic information was gathered from those who committed to participate through the Google Form. Twenty-one educators responded to the survey. Sixteen of the 21 responders returned informed consents within 5 days of the original request to participate. The 16 completed responses represent a 4% response rate of return. Five of the 21 educators did not meet the criteria for the study and declined to participate. Figure 3 depicts participants' positions in education.

A coded ID was assigned to each participant to maintain anonymity. Securing participant confidentiality is a challenge to overcome when presenting detailed and rich accounts of lived experiences of participants (Roth & Von Unger, 2018). Participants' coded IDs were shared through email sent from a PIN-encrypted laptop.

Figure 3

Participants' Positions in Education



Collection Process

Semistructured interviews were scheduled over 2 weeks once the electronically signed informed consents were collected from all 16 participants. Semistructured interviews offer a flexible framework (Queirós et al., 2017). An interview schedule was created and shared with participants.

Seven educators—1 guidance counselor, 1 principal, 1 school nurse, and 4 teachers—were chosen from the 16 original participants to participate in the focus group. A focus group further develops emergent codes and is beneficial for collecting information in greater detail (Queirós et al., 2017). The focus group participants were deliberately selected to represent various perspectives from education, promoting triangulation (Noble & Heale, 2019).

The data collection process encountered no deviations from the original data collection

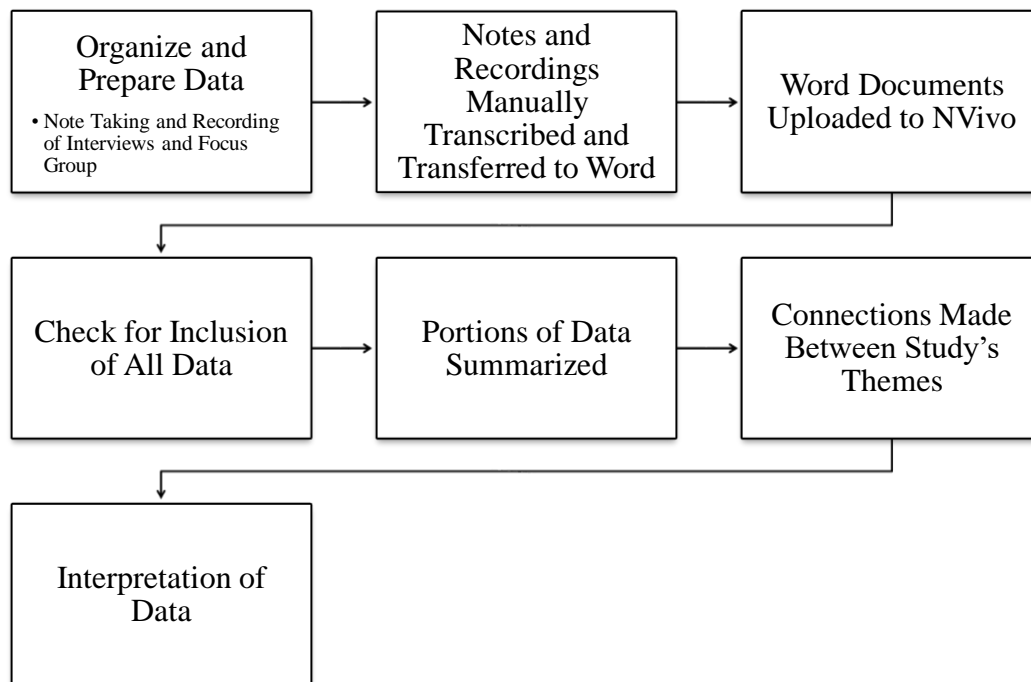
plan and required no additional time or procedures. The COVID-19 pandemic disallowed most in-person meetings. Zoom meetings were used when in-person meetings for the interviews and focus group were not possible. The use of an alternative meeting method was anticipated in the original data collection plan.

Data Analysis

Comprehensive data analysis in a qualitative phenomenological study is the process of making sense of participants' opinions, thoughts, and values. Steps were taken to represent these lived experiences fairly. Creswell and Poth (2018) provided a guide for effective data analysis. The first step of data analysis in the study was to organize and prepare the data. The process was achieved by taking notes at each interview and during the focus group. All in-person and virtual meetings were recorded. In-person sessions were recording utilizing a phone app and virtual sessions were recorded in Zoom. All notes and recordings were manually transcribed once all interviews and the focus group were complete. For transcription, the recorded meetings were listened to from start to finish, as well as a thorough read-through of the meeting notes. A draft was created and proofread against the recordings and notes. A final transcript was created and transferred to a digital Word document. All documents were uploaded into NVivo. NVivo software assisted in the development of thematic analysis, which enabled efficient work of complex coding schemes and facilitated rich and sophisticated themes (Nowell et al., 2017). A check was done to ensure all data were included in the transfer. Portions of data were summarized. Connections between themes were deduced upon completion of coding. Interpretation of data, presented in the results section, distinguishes what was learned and how what was learned confirms and diverges from past information. Figure 4 depicts the data analysis process.

Figure 4

Data Analysis Process



Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process and ongoing in nature (Neale, 2016). A review of the responses and the benefits of using NVivo provided a generous number of codes. Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to data compiled in a study (Elliott, 2018). Codes are the primary level compressed to form the secondary level, or themes, of the study (Elliott, 2018). Upon completion of the interview and focus group process, transcripts were coded by phenomena and themes. The use of Creswell and Poth's (2018) clustering of statements grouped participants' textual descriptions. Careful analysis of the dialogue produced in the interviews and the focus group revealed commonalities in educator experiences and perceptions. The commonalities became the codes related to established and emergent themes, which represented

the collective experiences and perceptions of the educators who participated.

Established Themes

Several themes were established before the coding process based on clear and focused research questions. The established themes resulted from the research presented in the literature review, which shaped the research questions for the study. Interview questions targeted the themes related to each research question.

Obtaining educators' perceptions of bereft students' academics and behavior was among the established themes. Coyne and Beckman (2012) suggested the death of a parent during childhood or adolescence may have a significant negative effect on bereft students' academic development. Berg et al. (2019) determined a link between childhood or adolescent parental death and adverse effects on educational, health, and social outcomes. Students who are parentally bereft were at risk of committing violent crimes from 15 to 30 years old (Berg et al., 2019).

Data about the identification of students who are bereft for educators were sought and developed an established theme of the study. Formal identification of students who are parentally bereft in the United States, specifically in public schools, is lacking (Coyne & Beckman, 2012). Educators' perceptions of bereft students academics and behavior specific to the anniversary of parental death relate to educators' perceptions of students' who are bereft academics and behavior. An earlier study found a greater number of adolescent suicides take place at a time near the anniversary of the parent's death (Bunch & Barraclough, 1971).

Emergent Themes

Emergent themes develop from the data (Elliott, 2018). Several themes related to educators' lived experiences with students who are bereft emerged during the analysis process.

The emergent themes resulted from a clearer understanding of educators' knowledge of and relationships with students who are bereft.

Accommodations and the effects of accommodations on bereft students' academics and behavior and educators' being ill-equipped to help students who are bereft emerged from the data. Home situation after parent death and how educators are informed of a student whose parent died were among the emergent themes based on data analysis. Themes were related to the research questions for clarity and conciseness, creating a hierarchy of lived experiences, as depicted in Table 1. The established themes and emergent themes and the relationships to the research questions are discussed in the results section.

Table 1

Hierarchy of Themes in Relation to Research Questions

Research question	Established themes	Emergent themes
Experiences of educators with students who are parentally bereft		Accommodations Effects of accommodations— Educators are ill-equipped to accommodate students who are bereft
Educators' perceptions of students who are bereft	Academics and behavior— After death and at/near anniversary of death	Situation after parent death
Perceptions of educators regarding importance of identifying students who are bereft	Formal identification of parent death	How educators typically learn of parent death

Results

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research requires much time for gathering high-yield verbal text leading to a depth of comprehension and richness of experience and perception unmatched in other forms of research. The nature of qualitative research requires finding meaning from textual responses of participants to produce comprehensible and purposeful results (Bernard et al., 2017). The following results of the study are organized by research question and the established and emergent themes resulting from participant responses to each research question. Comments obtained during the research process from participants were meticulously analyzed.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 addressed the lived experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Understanding educators' insight regarding students who are bereft was an important piece of the study. Direct references to educators' experiences with students who are parentally bereft were coded 21 times across 15 of 17 files. Files account for 16 interviews and one focus group. The frequency of codes is not meant to present quantitative analysis but rather to provide awareness of the repeated occurrence of ideas throughout the data review. According to the coding of data relevant to Research Question 1 and premised on sentiment, either positive or negative, nearly all of the participants' experiences with students who are paternally bereft were negative. One account recalled how monumental events such as Senior Tea or prom are grim reminders of the loss. P16 reported one student who is parentally bereft would go to the nurse's office repeatedly complaining of stomachache or headache but had no definitive physical issues. P16 referred to the ailments as symptomatic responses to grief. General experiences recalled a drop in

attendance. An account of discrepant data was noted. Only one educator recalled no change in the student after the parent's death. P4 remembered, "Unless someone told me, I would not have known. Student stayed connected and positive."

Accommodations intended to help students who are parentally bereft was an emergent theme connected to Research Question 1. The effects of the accommodations academically and behaviorally as well as the realization educators are ill equipped to help students who are bereft are categories related to the emergent theme of accommodations. Categories, similar to a code, are higher order and ranked at a secondary level similar to themes (Elliott, 2018).

Accommodations

Educational accommodations are more commonly linked to students with diagnosed behavioral or learning disabilities. State and federal laws mandate special services for students with disabilities (Florell & Strait, 2020). No such provisions exist to accommodate grieving students. Self-created educator accommodations intended to help students who are parentally bereft were evidenced in the data 28 times in 11 of 17 files. Table 2 presents the accommodations created by educators.

Table 2

Educator Accommodations Intended to Help Students who are Parentally Bereft

Source	Accommodations
Accommodations derived from semistructured interviews	Allow time extension for missed assignments
	Bank graduation degree for student to fulfill vocational certification
	Be a person to listen because such a person not at home
	Extend compassion
	Make sure comments and stories are sensitive to parent references
	Provide one-on-one time in remediation; reteaching
	Provide safe spot (guidance, nurse...) for student to go to if needed
	Share common experiences when and where appropriate
Accommodations derived from focus group	Administrators curb disciplinary approach—avoid saying, “Call Mom” or “Call Dad”
	Avoid saying something that would make student uncomfortable—would not bring up mom or dad in casual conversation
	Bring support services, grief specialists into school facility regularly—in-house professionals for grief management
	Extended time for assignments—especially during trigger times (anniversary, birthday, holiday...)
	Have access to more appropriate services within community
	Know anniversary of death

Table 2 Cont.

Source	Accommodations
Accommodations derived from focus group	<p>Provide time for student to reach out to educator to talk about situation either through email, in person, or virtually</p> <p>School needs direct lines to counseling services, specifically grief management</p> <p>School team dedicated to help students who are bereft consistently—revisit student throughout academic career</p>

Academic and Behavioral Accommodations Emphasize Educators Are Ill Equipped to Help Students who are Bereft

Knowing whether the accommodations attempted were effective was not a measurement addressed in the study. Responses from participants indicated even minor accommodations can positively improve students' who are parentally bereft academics and behavior. P2 stated, "If not given extra time and patience, student's grade definitely would have fallen. Would have had a considerably lower average." P11 recalled, "The altered approach made academic performance improve, but it took time." Academics and behavior in the classroom with the teacher who provided accommodations tended to be appropriate and effective, but it was not possible to measure whether the effects carried into other classrooms/situations. "Contributed in class" and "increased attendance" were noted by participants.

Participants, through discussion of accommodations, are ill equipped and not trained to assist the grieving process of a student who is parentally bereft. P6 emphatically stated, "They never teach this in college—how to deal with students' grief or how to deal with grief yourself. You go through it as if these kids are your own kids." Not knowing that a student has lost a

parent creates the opportunity for an educator to “put your foot in your mouth” because “teachers are not psychologists” and “educators are not trained enough to deal with grief.” Focus group participants resoundingly agreed there is a need for grief training onsite for educators. P3 offered, “Absolutely, I would want it myself. It is not part of our background.” Educators called for “meaningful small-group training where they are free to sit and talk and ask questions” that is “ongoing, to refresh and train old and new teachers.”

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 probed for educators’ perceptions of the academic performance and behaviors of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. Direct references to educators’ experiences with students who are parentally bereft were coded 26 times across 12 of 17 files. Table 3 presents the codes that reflect the themes related to Research Question 2. Educators’ perceptions reflected concern and empathy for students who had a parent who died. P16 perceived, “Students who lose a parent have a difficult time moving forward, developmentally, and emotionally and later on in life, it could also teach them to suppress their feelings—become numb.” P11 remarked, “I teach at a prison. Many adolescents who are in jail lost a parent. Connection? Can’t say definitively.”

Table 3

Coding Related to Research Question 2

Theme	Code
Academics and behavior	Affects academically and socially
	Always an impact—even as an adult
	Anger and animosity
	Anger or guilt
	As an adult, can have suppressed emotions
	Become numb
	Dramatically affect academics and behavior
	Expected death affects student differently than unexpected/traumatic death
	External reminders
	Lack of work ethic
	Looking to educator to validate work
	Something missing
	Strong reaction
	Suppress feelings
	Very angry for a long time
	Very sad
	Void in their lives

Table 3 Cont.

Theme	Code
Situation after parent death	Boys sometimes need a father figure
	Broken families and the effect of the death may not be so intense
	Can't measure
	Consistency of the faculty
	Different for part-time parent
	Difficult time moving forward
	Faculty are comfort
	Family would be back together
	Lack of trust in authority figures
	Look to parent for support and guidance—reminder parent is not there
	Lose unconditional love and protection
	Loss of security
	Many adolescents who are in jail lost a parent
	Meet parental role
	Negative and positive situation
	Relationship with parent
	Some educators care and some don't
	Support system

According to the coding of data relevant to Research Question 2 and premised on sentiment either positive or negative, three-fourths of participants' perceptions of bereft students'

academics and behavior were negative. P5 observed, “Some are very angry for a long time— affecting them academically and socially. Some are very sad—affecting them academically and socially.”

Academics and Behavior

There is reason for concern regarding the effect of the death of a parent on a student’s academics. A couple of exceptions were noted in the data related to students who are bereft not falling behind academically. P12 remarked, “I feel like I have seen both sides. Some get motivated to do better to carry on parent’s legacy. But also, the opposite—so lost in emotions, academics don’t matter.” One other positive academic scenario referenced a student who lost both her mother and a sister and yet remained “diligent about grades.” Otherwise, participants reported a decline in academics. “Huge impact on academics. Adolescent brain does not stop developing until older, so such a loss is a big hit,” observed P13. P16 offered, “Students’ academic performance suffers. Withdrawn with loss of parent—become emotional, which affects academics because loss of a parent is hard to handle emotionally and negatively affects schoolwork. Academic decline puts student at risk for failure.”

Participants’ sentiments concurred with the literature that suggested a link between parent death and education withdrawal (Schoenfelder et al., 2015). Grøtan et al. (2019) described the level of anxiety incurred in response to the death of a parent as a contributing factor in a bereft student’s inability to actively engage in the learning process. The decline in academics, left unremedied, puts a student at risk of school dropout and, ultimately, long-lasting economic disparity (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Death of a parent negatively affects students’ behavior. Students become “more shut in. Acted as if he didn’t want to be in school.” Students tend to become “shy and quiet to shut out

the death and not acknowledge the death happened.” P8 recalled one student in particular:

Prior to the death, she was a good student, quiet, with normal catty girl issues. After the death, she became more quiet than usual. She was absent more frequently, came in late, smelling like marijuana. I didn’t know of the death until sometime later, so managed her with discipline consequences. Generally speaking, [the loss] seems to make students more prone to risky behavior—drugs, alcohol, promiscuity.

General behavior perceptions noted by participants were students who “became withdrawn,” have excessive “absenteeism,” or are “very agitated—easily upset by otherwise normal things.”

Concerning academics, reports from participants paralleled empirical research. Stikkelbroek et al. (2016) observed students who have endured the death of a parent commonly internalize concerns and emotions, which has the propensity to fuel the development of behavioral problems. Unhealthy coping mechanisms practiced by students who are parentally bereft include deliberate and severe self-harm, alcohol or drug abuse, and promiscuity in an attempt to quell the emotional pain experienced from the death of a parent (Burrell et al., 2020; Miller, 2017).

Participants were asked how the anniversary of the parent’s death might affect a student’s academics and student behavior (see Appendix E). Anniversary of the death is an established theme relative to Research Question 2. Participants supposed a trigger, such as an anniversary of the death would harm both academics and behavior. P10 predicted a “student might be sullen, quiet, withdrawn” or “might seek attention just to have someone to talk to.” P11 recalled a specific student who “would be absent on the day of the anniversary—student fell right back into black hole. The anniversary surfaces all the sadness.” P14 related the struggle of dealing with the first anniversary of her father’s death: “Even as an adult, we feel the sadness all over again.” P1

remarked the anniversary is “a trying time - bereft students are often more withdrawn, emotional.” In P16’s experience, “Students become isolated and withdrawn, almost fixated on the past, which leads into depression, resulting in an inability to learn. Behavior and learning are intertwined. The situation is a silent problem, negatively attacking students’ development.”

Situation After Parent Death

Situation after parent death is an emergent theme related to participants’ perceptions of students who are parentally bereft in relation to academics and behavior. The general perception was students “need strong people and structure around them.” “If remaining parent is strong, child may be fine,” P14 recalled of a student whose mother had died after a long battle with cancer; “the father is able to grieve properly so he can better support his daughter.” P13 agreed, “If there is a decent support system, things can be better. A support system can help maintain some normalcy.”

When a strong system is not in place to help the student grieve properly, participants reported negative incidences. P11 spoke of a student whose mother died of a drug overdose when the girl was in ninth grade and then her aunt, the appointed guardian, died when the girl was in 11th grade. The girl remained with the uncle because the father was habitually incarcerated:

“JC” had a rocky relationship with the uncle. Being elderly, he was not able to provide necessary supports for a teenage girl. At one point, the father got out of jail and “JC” perked up and looked forward to having a parent again. Well, that lasted about 2 months and the father was incarcerated again.

P13 echoed the sentiment when recalling a young girl who had lost both parents: “Student living with grandfather. Fast food every night for dinner. Work was handed in late and she was very sluggish. Student was practically left to raise herself.”

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 addressed educators' perceptions of the importance of identifying students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States. The proposal of a formal identification system for students who are bereft emerged during the semistructured interviews and focus group. Educators unanimously agreed such a system would have a positive effect on bereft students' academics and behavior. P11 offered, "There is need to socially and emotionally support [bereft] students throughout the years because it [grief] doesn't go away in a year or two." P16 thought an identification system would be especially helpful in her capacity: "Knowing, I would be able to treat [students who are bereft] with better understanding and nonjudgment. I would be more sympathetic—offering resources." P10 suggested a specialized education plan, stating, "Such information should be part of any education plan. If not, could pigeonhole a student. Underlying issues uncover means to overcome."

Several educators suggested an identification system similar to or part of a 504 plan, "a document educators can pull." "Not necessarily a long document but similar to a 504 plan," offered P11. P10 added, "Identification considered just as an IEP or 504. It is all specialized education."

Section 504 is an essential piece of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the Office for Civil Rights (2020), Section 504 is an extension beyond individuals recognized by IDEA, who are covered with an IEP, and guarantees a free and appropriate public education supplemented with funding and services for students who attend a school receiving federal financial assistance. Qualifications for Section 504 include students who have a mental or physical impairment significantly impeding one or more major life activities,

students who can be regarded as having a mental or physical impairment significantly impeding one or more major life activities, and students who have a record of a mental or physical impairment significantly impeding one or more major life activities (Office for Civil Rights, 2020).

Educators Formally Informed of Parent Death

Whether educators are formally informed of a student who is parentally bereft in the classroom is an established theme directly related to Research Question 3. Participant responses provided indication of the need for a formal identification system. Fifteen of 16 participants were asked if they had ever been formally notified of a student who is parentally bereft; all 15 emphatically stated no formal identification had been given. P15 stressed not being notified “even if the death occurred during the school year.” Four exceptions were participants who might have been notified through email if the parent death occurred during the school year.

How Educators Learned of Parent Death

How educators learned of parent death emerged in conjunction with the theme of whether educators are ever formally informed of parent death. Participants responded overwhelmingly “no” when asked whether participants received formal notification of a student who is parentally bereft. Often, it seems, students divulge the death of a parent in assigned essays, journals, or other projects. Once a teacher learns of a student who is bereft, “casual conversation among coworkers” disperses the information. Less common is a family member reaching out to someone at the school to share the information. P15 recalled discovering a student’s mother had died only after reporting his excessive absences to the Home and School Visitor:

At first, his absence was a tell that something was wrong. I reached out to the Home and School Visitor, which prompted the school to investigate his absences. Other students

heard what had happened to the mother and told me. I then spoke with the Home and School Visitor and the principal about what the students were saying. Two weeks after the death, district confirmed mother had died.

Perhaps the most compelling account of the negative effect the death of a parent has on a student and the strongest case for implementation of a formal identification system was told by P7. P7 taught at an alternative education facility early in his teaching career. In the United States, alternative education facilities have become a place for students with behavioral and emotional disorders who cannot function normally or safely in the general education setting (Kumm et al., 2020). For the duration of the school year, the student was P7's "best student, never a behavior problem." On one particular day, the student "went off the wall, out of control." The student was in such a state, P7 had to "physically restrain the student to prevent him from harming himself or others." P7 physically had to drag the student to the principal's office. After leaving the office, P7 stopped in the guidance office to notify the guidance counselor of what had happened and to ask if there was any indication such behavior should have been expected. It was then the guidance counselor informed P7 the student's father had been murdered. The guidance counselor told P7 that, prior to the student's admittance to the alternative education facility, the student was a regular education honor student. The student was moved to the alternative education facility shortly after the death of his father as a result of his severe academic decline and behavioral outbursts. Coincidentally, the behavior meltdown occurred on the second anniversary of the death. Two years prior, the student's father had been missing. "The student and his mother found the father's car in a remote location. When they opened the trunk, they found the father's dismembered body." Before the behavior incident, P7 was not aware of the death.

In the interview, P7 was asked if there was a benefit to formal identification of students

who are parentally bereft. “Certainly! I would not have reacted so strongly to the student’s poor behavior on that day. I would not have treated the situation as a discipline matter.”

Overall, participants were enthusiastic about the potential benefits of the study. Participants were eager to share stories regarding their lived experiences, noting how desperately an identification system for students who are bereft is needed. The participants’ perceptions provided valuable insight into the reality of unidentified students who are bereft and the challenges these students face academically and behaviorally.

Reliability and Validity

Upholding reliability and validity is of high priority for ensuring ethical research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validity, confirmed through credibility in qualitative research, was achieved by gathering data from stakeholders with varying backgrounds in the education discipline: one guidance counselor, one school nurse, two principals, and 12 teachers. The use of two data collection instruments—semistructured interviews and a focus group—further ensured credibility. Diverse roles and perspectives supported triangulation, which promotes credibility by explaining the complexity of human behavior from various perspectives (Noble & Heale, 2019). Walsh (2019) noted focus groups enhance credibility, indicative of validity, by measuring what is intended to be measured. Note taking and recording of all interviews and the focus group ensured accurate transcription of the phenomena discovered during each session, in turn enhancing credibility (Kallio et al., 2016).

Credibility refers to the trustworthiness of a study premised on the study’s believability (Noble & Heale, 2019). Credibility was furthered through participant validation, known as member checking. Member checking involves returning research results to participants to allow the opportunity to verify accuracy and eliminate any notion of researcher bias. Ideally, research

findings resonate with participants' lived experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Research findings were shared with all 16 participants, and none found discrepancies or deviation from participant experiences.

Dependability and transferability are the means to prove reliability in qualitative research (Kallio et al., 2016). Dependability is the ability to reproduce the study under the same conditions and produce the same or nearly the same results (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview is a guide for the semistructured interview and the focus group were presented, allowing other researchers the opportunity to replicate the study. An abundance of rich data rooted in behavior, context, and experience was produced based on participants' responses to the interview questions and focus group discussion. Such findings are meaningful to others and ensure transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Chapter Summary

The findings from the qualitative phenomenological research study of educators' lived experiences with students who are parentally bereft were presented. Data for the study were organized according to three research questions supported by established themes. Research Question 1 was, how do educators describe the lived experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States? Data indicated educators' experiences were negative. Research Question 2 was, what are educators' perceptions of the academic performance and behaviors of students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States? Educators' perceptions reflected concern and empathy in relation to academics and behavior for students who had a parent who died. Research Question 3 was, what are educators' perceptions of the importance of identifying students who are bereft in grades 7-12, from a semiurban junior /

senior high school in the northeastern United States? Educators unanimously agreed identifying students who are bereft through a formal identification system would have a positive effect on bereft students' academics and behavior.

Several emergent themes developed upon analysis of the data. Data were collected via in-person and virtual semistructured interviews and a virtual focus group. Results were presented through detailed participant responses, figures, and tables. Chapter 5 includes a review of the study's findings, interpretations, and conclusions. Limitations, recommendations, and implications for leadership are discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Losing a parent during childhood or adolescence can have a lasting effect on one's future. Unhealthy lifestyle choices are likely to develop in a child or adolescent who does not move properly through the grief process (Bylund-Grenklo et al., 2016). Left unresolved, such behaviors can perpetuate into adulthood (Zisook & Shear, 2009). Students who are bereft who are identified and receive guidance and support are more likely to experience academic success and appropriate behavior development (Noppe Cupit et al., 2016). The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators.

Chapter 4 detailed findings and data analysis resulting from the phenomenological study. Findings indicated educators' experiences are negative regarding Research Question 1. Concerning Research Question 2, findings indicated educators are concerned for and empathetic toward bereft students' academics and behavior. Findings regarding Research Question 3, the importance of identifying students who are bereft, indicated educators unanimously agree there is need for a formal identification system of students who are bereft.

Research of children and adolescents who are bereft exists. Nevertheless, few studies have addressed the academic and behavior benefits of an identification system of students who are bereft for public school educators. Specific to this study, no such system exists for the school setting. The qualitative study of educators' lived experiences with students who are bereft and educators' perceptions of students' who are bereft academics and behavior was conducted using phenomenological methods to address a gap in the literature. A gap exists in the literature regarding identification systems or programs to facilitate advocacy for students who are bereft.

Phenomenology was used specifically allowing real-world experiences and perceptions of unique phenomena to develop. Educators from various aspects in the field of education participated in semistructured interviews and a focus group to conceptualize the themes of their lived experiences with bereft students' academic performance and behavior to explore if a formal identification system of students who are bereft would be beneficial to educators.

The following sections present the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the study. Limitations of the study are described as well as recommendations for further research and improved practices. Implications for leadership describe the potential impact for positive societal change. In closing, the essence of the results and critical outcomes of the study are presented.

Findings, Interpretations, Conclusions

The findings from the study confirmed the peer-reviewed literature synthesized in Chapter 2 related to students who are bereft requiring identification, accommodations, and a support system to thrive in the school environment (Sasser et al., 2019). Success for students who are bereft is obtainable if students who are bereft are identified to educators. Findings showed educators are not informed of a student whose parent has died, with the rare exception when the death occurs during the current school year. The extent of the literature related to the benefits of a formal identification system for students who are bereft, as it relates to academic success and appropriate behavior development requires additional support. Research suggests students who are bereft who do not have accommodations and a support system in place to manage the effects of losing a parent may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that have the potential to manifest into long-lasting mental and physical health consequences detrimental to the individual and society, as a whole (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015). Findings from the study showed educators' perceptions of bereft students' academic performance and behavior are

negative.

The following interpretations, inferences, and conclusions do not exceed the data findings and scope of the study. Methods used to collect and analyze data for the study were appropriate for the goals and scope of the study. Transcription and the use of NVivo software prevented researcher bias from augmenting or misrepresenting participant feedback. Member checking ensured participants' lived experiences were accurately and fairly represented.

The researcher approached the study through the theoretical lens of theory of change and SLT. Theory of change is driven by comprehensive intersectoral, community-grounded interventions intended to improve communities by uplifting children, youth, and families (Weiss, 1995). Situational leadership theory calls on leaders to be flexible to meet the demands of diverse relationships and tasks (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Theory of Change

Regarding theory of change, students who are bereft, left unidentified, show a need-area for improvement. Educators unanimously agreed that having prior knowledge of students who have lost a parent could benefit students who are bereft by allowing educators the opportunity to provide accommodations and offer additional support to guide the student toward academic success and proper behavior. Findings suggested even minor accommodations improve students' who are parentally bereft academics and behavior. Improved academics and behavior may eliminate inappropriate coping mechanisms prior to manifestation, thus staving off long-term mental health consequences. Weiss (1995) reiterated, per theory of change, a stable young adult, equipped to manage daily life, is a benefit to the community.

Situational Leadership Theory

Educators, guidance counselors, principals, school nurses, and teachers are leaders in

different levels of education. Each leader plays an important role in students' academic experience and behavior management. Each leader experiences students in a different capacity, requiring flexibility of leadership style to meet and support the academic achievement and behavioral expectations of students (Hunzicker, 2017). An emergent theme of the study was educators are ill-equipped to effectively help students who are bereft. Findings call for ongoing grief training for educators. Grief training allows the opportunity for leaders to assume the key characteristics of a situational leader: adaptability and flexibility (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Conclusions

Significant conclusions were a result of the data analysis. In relation to Research Question 1, educators' experiences with students who are parentally bereft in relation to academics and behavior were negative. Educators indicated students who are parentally bereft often "lose academics" and "some milk the loss for a pass to not do." "Something happens mentally" to a student who has lost a parent.

Concerning Research Question 2, students who are parentally bereft are met with concern and empathy by educators. P12 struggles with determining the right approach: "Sometimes it is tough because you don't want to bring it up to not stir any emotions but at the same time, let the student know the teacher is there for them." P14 reflected on her personal struggle in grieving the loss of her father a year prior to the study:

Many times, you can just be there for the student. And keep trying to let them know you understand. Grief comes in so many stages, no experiences are the same. Our students' relationships with their parents are so different . . . whether very close or many times they have no relationship, and the death of a parent causes a finality that there will ever be any relationship.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion, related to Research Question 3, emerged as educators realized they are ill equipped to accommodate the needs of students who are parentally bereft primarily due to the lack of an identification system for students who are bereft. “It is important to have a school system identification so teachers year to year know how to handle the situation” and “it should follow throughout the student’s academic career.” Educators lack training in grief counseling. Even the position of a guidance counselor is insufficient to meet the mounting mental health concerns of students who are bereft (Lambie et al., 2019).

Limitations

Limitations are weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). The study of educators’ perceptions of students’ who are bereft academic achievement and behavior was well-structured with a transparent research process, thus overcoming limitations associated with the qualitative method (Queirós et al., 2017). Data collection instruments were created to ensure the resulting tools would be appropriate and trustworthy; conversely, the data collection instruments have not been tested beyond the study. Trustworthiness of the researcher-created tools was improved through a field test of the interview guide used for the semistructured interviews and focus group. Five SMEs reviewed the interview questions. Conducting a field test strengthens research integrity (Kallio et al., 2016).

Internal validity, or credibility, was ensured by note taking and recording of each interview and the focus group. Credibility was established through triangulation achieved through the use of participants from various capacities in education. Representation of human behavior from multiple perspectives enhances research credibility (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Dependability of a study can be achieved if another study utilizes the same data collection tools. The interview guide (see Appendix E) allows future researchers to utilize the

guide for further studies. Studies reconstructed under the same or similar parameters and producing the same or similar results establish dependability of the study (Kallio et al., 2016).

The setting of the study was unique because there is no other public school situation exactly like the one in the northeastern United States. Despite the uniqueness of the setting, the educator's job is to serve all students academically and behaviorally. The lived experiences of the 16 educator participants in the study were broad enough to potentially match those of educators in other settings. Transferability of the study's findings is safeguarded through the rich data rooted in behavior, context, and experience (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Recommendations

All educator participants agreed the death of a parent during childhood or adolescence impacts students' academic achievement and behavior. Educators agreed identification of students who are parentally bereft would improve the likelihood of student success. Dyregrov et al. (2015) showed students who are bereft who are supported by equipped and informed educators have a greater chance for academic success and development. Intervention has proven to reverse negative academic, behavioral, and mental distress caused by untreated grief (Feigelman et al., 2016).

Future research should confirm the results of the study and identify proven interventions, strategies, and supports for students coping with the death of a parent. Additional research using the researcher-created data collection instruments in different settings should improve confirmability, credibility, dependability, and objectivity of the study's results. Studies should focus on the most effective way of identifying students who are parentally bereft and suitable accommodations and supports to be provided for students who are bereft to promote academic success and appropriate behavior development. Future research should broaden studies to include

elementary-age students and encompass the death of any persons significant to students. Future research might consider perspectives of widowed parents with children to explore parents' experiences and perceptions of the school's handling of students who are bereft. Far outside the scope of the study, recommendations are made for further investigation into societal determinants preventing students from reaching their full potential within the academic system. The death of a parent is just one piece of a complex problem of demotivated students.

Changes in policies and practices should begin on the district level with the addition of an indicator in student files to denote the death of a parent and the date of the death. Cause of death would also be beneficial information for an educator. Moreover, educators need to be provided with ongoing training to learn how to manage the needs of students who are parentally bereft. Grief management and accommodation techniques should be a part of a district's regular professional development. Students need compassionate educators equipped to understand the fragility of the situation. Students should have access to in-school and community services specializing in grief management. P14 stated, "Schools need professionals for grief management." P4 echoed, "Teachers are not psychologists."

Changes in policies and practices beyond the district level extend to state and federal departments of education. Increased funding is needed to supplement the necessary professional development sessions and provide a team of in-school professionals dedicated to supporting students who are bereft. There is room for improvement in the existing counseling, grief management, and intervention programs (Schoenfelder et al., 2015).

Additionally, IDEA should be amended to include consideration of students who are bereft. Section 504, the piece of IDEA guaranteeing a free and appropriate public education to students who have a mental or physical impairment that impedes major life activities, should be

expanded to include the effects of unmanaged grief on mental wellness (Office for Civil Rights, 2020). Enduring the death of a parent may cause a child or adolescent to internalize concerns and emotions, thus promoting the development of academic and behavioral problems (Stikkelbroek et al., 2016). Updating IDEA could quell short- and long-term mental issues arising from unidentified and unmanaged grief.

Implications for Leadership

Results of the study are intended to provide a guide toward meaningful improvements for students who are parentally bereft. Leaders, both inside and outside the public school system, can learn from the experiences and perceptions of the educator participants. Lessons can be applied to teachers working directly with students who are bereft, guidance counselors navigating a balance between academic goals and mental wellness of students who are bereft, school nurses deciphering psychosomatic ailments of students who are bereft, principals delivering appropriate consequences to students who are bereft, administrators setting district policy aimed to accommodate and support students who are bereft, and scholars conducting research to further understand the unique needs of students who are bereft.

The study is a supplement to the existing literature on the topics of educators' experiences with and perceptions of students who are parentally bereft and the benefits of a formal identification system for students who are bereft. Existing literature suggests students who are parentally bereft who do not have access to grief management treatment plans may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms that can evolve into long-term psychological disorders (Andriessen, Lobb, et al., 2018). If the students are left unidentified, the consequences could be life altering (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, et al., 2018). Existing research suggests educators are not properly trained to accommodate and support students who are bereft (Densen et al., 2012).

Such research aligns with the experiences of participants in the study. The researcher adds an essential component of educator perceptions of actions to take to better support students who are parentally bereft. Insights provided by participants in the study are student-centered and indicative of educators' dedication to students' academic success and appropriate behavior development because educators are often the preferred contact for students (Densen et al., 2012).

All members of the school community should be aware of the unique needs of students who are bereft. Educator participants in the study made clear the great need for additional training, education, and preparation for educators at all levels: guidance counselors, principals, school nurses, and teachers. Research-driven and time-proven strategies are required to implement positive interventions to support bereft students' academic achievement and appropriate behavior development. Increased coordination and inclusion of school leaders and community-based grief management professionals could improve the lifelong outcomes for students who are parentally bereft beyond high school.

The study's findings are promising for positive social impact on multiple levels as prescribed by theory of change. Identification of students who are parentally bereft would improve the quality of life for the students. In turn, students who are bereft who are accommodated and supported are more likely to be in satisfactory life situations, thus improving the community (Weiss, 1995). Education leaders, as situational leaders, play an important role in assisting and guiding students who are bereft, with adaptation and flexibility, toward satisfactory life situations (Shonhiwa, 2016).

Conclusion

Caring, informed, and supportive educators are essential to the academic achievement and appropriate behavior development of students who are parentally bereft. Unmanaged grief

negatively impacts mental well-being, muddying the opportunity for academic achievement and appropriate behavior development. Educators cannot be responsible for diagnosing or treating a student suffering the consequences of unmanaged grief, though the support educators provide through accommodations, compassion, and empathy cannot be ignored. Educator participants recognizing they are ill equipped to accommodate the needs of students who are parentally bereft, primarily due to the lack of an identification system, is a step in the right direction for better outcomes. It is imperative for school district administrators in conjunction with state and federal departments of education to address the needs of students who are bereft and implement changes to ensure the students' success.

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Appendix A**Invitation to Participate**

Dear potential participant:

My name is Darlene Reilley. I am a doctoral candidate at the American College of Education. I am pursuing my EdD with a focus on Educational Leadership. I am contacting you to ask for your participation in my doctoral research study entitled: Adolescents who are Bereaved: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study. The intent of the study is to understand educators' lived experiences with adolescents who are bereft and their perception of the death of a parent's effect on student's academic performance and behavior and to determine if an identification system for children and adolescents who are bereft would be beneficial.

The study will engage educators who have had direct contact with students who are bereft through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. Participants will be asked to reply to a series of open-ended questions, which will reflect their experience. All meetings are intended to be in person but will be conducting virtually through a video conferencing tool such as Zoom should it not be possible to meet in person.

Time commitment is minimal. It is not anticipated to require much more than one to two hours over two weeks. No compensation will be provided for participation. However, your participation will be a valuable contribution to the topic of students who are bereft and how to best help these students navigate the grieving process.

Please reply to this email if you choose to participate in the study. Participants will be provided an Informed Consent letter once a sample population is established.

Any questions can be directed to me in person, through text or phone call, or by replying to this email.

Thank you in advance for your participation,

Darlene Reilley
Doctoral Candidate, American College of Education
dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us
570.417.7851

Appendix B

Informed Consent

American College of Education

Guidelines for Informed Consent for Research Participation

Prospective Research Participant: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether or not you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after you participated in this research.

Project Information

Project Title: Adolescents who are Bereaved: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Darlene Reilley
Email: darlenereilley@hotmail.com

Organization: American College of Education
Phone: 570.417.7851

Principal Investigator's Mentor/Chair:
Dr. Marsha Moore, Ph.D.
Email: marsha.moore@ace.edu

Organization: American College of Education
Phone: 817.235.3614

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INTRODUCTION

I am Darlene Reilley, and I am a doctoral student at the American College of Education. I am researching under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Marsha Moore. This letter was designed to give information about the project and invite you to be part of this study. Before you come to a final decision, please talk to anyone you are comfortable with about the research. This consent form may contain concepts and terminology you are not familiar with. I encourage you to ask any questions you may have. Please request further explanation where necessary.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before deciding to participate in this study, you must understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything, which is not clear or if you need more information.

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators.

Questions for the semi-structured interview and the focus group have been designed to encourage discussion.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

Selected participants will be asked to participate in two qualitative assessments, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, to conceptualize themes of lived experiences with students who are bereft. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in person or, if necessary, electronically.

Focus groups will be conducted in person or, if necessary, electronically. All meetings will be recorded.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

You are invited to take part in this research because your experience as an educator can contribute much to our understanding of lived experiences with students who are bereft. Additional criteria for selection include:

- A viable participant is to be an educator at the Northeastern Pennsylvania junior / senior high school.
- A viable participant has interacted with a student who is bereft on an academic or behavioral level.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether or not to participate. The choice you make will have no bearing on your job or any work-related evaluations or reports. You may change your mind later and stop participating even if you previously agreed to do so.

PROCEDURES

Your participation in this research project will help us learn more about your experiences with bereft students' academic performance and behavior. If you accept, you will be asked to respond to questions designed to encourage discussion and further the development of concepts related to students who are bereft. The questions will focus on your experiences and opinions of bereft students' academic performance and behavior.

DURATION

The research will take place through scheduled interviews and a focus group conducive to your schedule. Depending upon the length of responses, the entire process of participating in this research study will likely take one to two hours.

RISKS

You will not be asked to share personal or confidential information. If at any point you feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics, you do not have to answer any question. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you can terminate participation at any time.

BENEFITS

The anticipated benefits of this study could be felt in many groups. The discipline of education could benefit through the addition of participants' experiences and insights into helping identify bereft students' perceived academic and behavioral needs. This study could be used to improve academic and behavioral outcomes for students who are bereft.

REIMBURSEMENTS

No reimbursements for participation will be provided. Thank you for your willingness to contribute to the discipline of education through participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to these data collection tools will be anonymous. No identifying information will be connected to your responses. Participant data will be kept confidential except in cases where the researcher is legally obligated to report specific incidents. These incidents include, but may not be limited to, incidents of abuse and suicide risk. Participant confidentiality and privacy will be safeguarded through the assignment of fictitious names on all research documents. A non-disclosure policy will be adopted regarding any information shared throughout the research data collection. All data collected will be secured on a pin-encrypted laptop only accessible by the researcher and retained for three years post-study.

SHARING THE RESULTS

Each participant will receive a summary of the research findings.

RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW

Participation is completely voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

WHO TO CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. This research plan has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of American College of Education. This is a committee whose role is to make sure research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to ask questions of this group, email IRB@ace.edu.

CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study of the bereft students' academic performance and behavior.

Print or Type Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered to the best of my ability. I confirm the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print or type name of the principal investigator: Darlene Reilley

Signature of principal investigator: _____

Signature of mentor/chair if principal investigator is a student: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Site Permission Request

9.April.2020

Dr. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Area School District Superintendent

Dear [REDACTED]:

My name is Darlene Reilley, and I am a doctoral candidate at American College of Education (ACE) writing to request permission to conduct interviews and focus groups with WBASD Educators. This information will be used for my dissertation research related to Adolescents who are Bereaved. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the academic performance and behavior experiences of students who are bereft in grades 7-12 in a semiurban junior / senior high school in the northeastern United States through the perceptions of their educators.

It is my belief this study is necessary to identify problems existing in relation to unresolved grief in adolescents and all stakeholders: Children and adolescents who are bereft and families, educators, and future societies, which may have to accommodate a potentially ill-adapted adult.

Important Contacts for this study include:

Principal Investigator: Darlene Reilley
E-mail: darlenereilley@hotmail.com
Phone: 570.417.7851

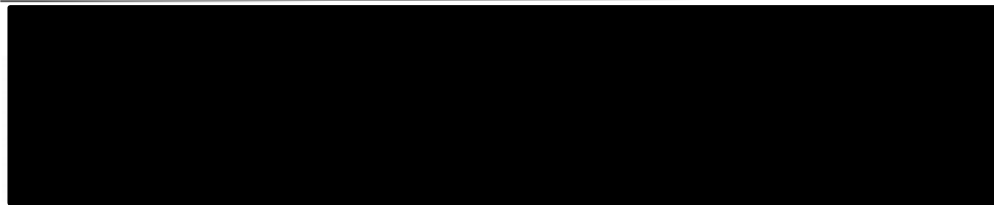
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Marsha Moore, Ph.D.
E-mail: marsha.moore@ace.edu
Phone: 817.235.3614

Thank you for your attention to this request and prompt response. I appreciate your time and consideration of my request.

Regards,
Darlene Reilley, MEd

Appendix D

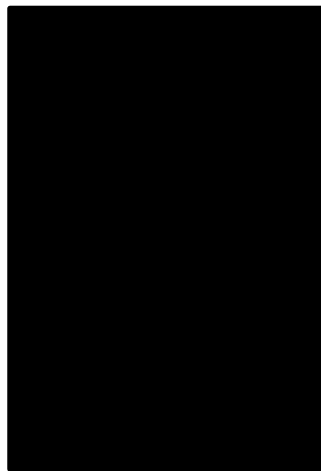
Site Permission Granted



April 21, 2020

Hello Darlene,

You are approved to interview and to conduct focus groups with educators of the Wilkes-Barre Area School district who choose to participate with your study. Participation is strictly voluntarily and not required. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.



Notice of Non-Discrimination
The [REDACTED] does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups.
The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies:
The [REDACTED]

Appendix E

Semistructured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about a time when you worked with a bereft student.
2. How do you believe losing a parent affects a student even years beyond the death of the parent?
3. Did you know the student had suffered the death of a parent in his or her lifetime when you first met?
- 4a. If no, can you recall how you learned of the parent's death?
- 4b. If yes, did you adjust your interactions with the student in any way?
5. If no, what was the student's level of academic performance?
6. What was the student's behavior?
5. If yes, how did your altered approach affect the student's academic performance?
6. How did your altered approach affect the student's behavior?
7. Based on your experience as an educator, how do you think losing a parent in childhood or as an adolescent has an impact on a student's academic performance?
8. Based on your experience as an educator, how do you think losing a parent in childhood or as an adolescent has an impact on a student's ability to behave appropriately?
9. Imagine a student who is approaching the anniversary of his or her parent's death. How do you think such an event might affect a student's ability to learn?
10. Imagine a student who is approaching the anniversary of his or her parent's death. How do you think such an event could affect a student's ability to behave appropriately?

Appendix F

Subject Matter Expert Letters of Request, Acceptance, and Feedback



Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

Subject Matter Expert

Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

Tue, May 12, 2020 at 7:44 PM

Good evening,

My name is Darlene Reilley. I am a teacher at GAR High School and a doctoral student at the American College of Education. I am in the process of developing my dissertation and am searching for Subject Matter Experts to guide me toward developing reliable and valid questions for my semi structured interviews and focus group.

It is my strong belief an identification system for bereft children and adolescents must be developed for K-12 schools and the identification must follow students throughout their education in order to best suit their unique emotional and, thus, academic and behavioral, needs.

I attached a copy of my Concept Paper for you to review in hopes you will find the study valuable enough to agree to be an SME for me.

I can offer no compensation but I do think the findings of my study could further research and move closer to helping bereft youth navigate the grieving process.

What is required is your review and feedback of my self-developed research tools for my study. That is, approximately 10-15 questions to be used in semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The questions will be presented to you as a field test for credibility, reliability, and validity.

Once developed, I would forward the questions to you to review and make suggestions that would improve their usefulness in my study. I do not expect the time commitment to be much more than a handful of emails.

I would consider myself so fortunate to have someone with your experience support my study. Again, I do believe time commitment will be nominal and I am willing to work around your schedule.

Should you have questions regarding my request, please contact my Dissertation Chair.

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Marsha Moore, Ph.D.

E-mail: marsha.moore@ace.edu

Phone: 817.235.3614

Your quick response would be so appreciated.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions or comments.


I thank you in advance for your consideration,

--Darlene Reilley

[Quoted text hidden]

...

-D. Reilley


WBASD

Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>


Subject Matter Expert

Tue, May 12, 2020 at 10:25 AM

To: "Reilley, Darlene" <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

I will assist you. Let me know what you need, interesting topic.

From: Reilley, Darlene [mailto:dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us]
Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2020 6:23 PM
Subject: Subject Matter Expert



to me ▾

Tue, Jun 2, 8:31 AM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello,

Below are some thoughts as I reviewed your questions. Is there a specific age range you are focusing your study on?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Questions 3 & 4 Suggestions:

- Is there currently a confidential way to identify these students? Should there be?
- What is the time frame students and teachers are addressing?
 - Current year?
 - 1 – 2 years?
 - A longer period?

Questions 7 & 8 Suggestions;

- Where you aware of the student's academic performance prior to losing a parent, has that academic performance changed? If so, how?
- Where you aware of the student's behavior patterns prior to losing a parent, has those behavior patterns changed? If so, how?

I thought the Focus Group questions were good. I think you address some of my thoughts above in the Focus Group questions.

Hopefully this is helpful. I look at things from a quantitative perspective so this is a bit outside my wheelhouse.



WBASD

Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

(no subject)

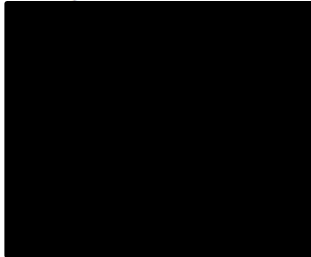
[REDACTED]
To: "Reilley, Darlene" <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

Thu, May 7, 2020 at 10:08 AM

Hi Darlene,

I would be more than happy to help you. I am one of the district's school psychologists and also have my PhD in Human Development. Additionally, I conducted a phenomenological study for my dissertation, so I may be able to help you in regard to that type of qualitative study. This topic is very interesting to me, as I lost my mother to cancer when I was 25 so I can relate to the psychological stress of losing a parent. I would be very interested to know more on how we can help students overcome their grief successfully. Keep me posted if I can be of assistance.

Thanks,



IMPORTANT WARNING: The information in this message (and the documents attached to it, if any) is confidential and may be legally privileged. It is intended solely for the addressee. Access to this message by anyone else is unauthorized. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure, copying, distribution or any action taken, or omitted to be taken, in reliance on it is prohibited and may be unlawful. If you have received this message in error, please delete all electronic copies of this message (and the documents attached to it, if any), destroy any hard copies you may have created and notify me immediately by replying to this email. Thank you

Interview/Focus Group Questions Review for Subject Matter Experts - Dr. Welgosh

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score				Questions NOT meeting standard (Please note Interview or Focus Group and question #). Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.
		1=Not Acceptable (major modifications needed)	2=Below Expectations (some modifications needed)	3=Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes)	4=Exceeds Expectations (no modifications needed)	
		1	2	3	4	
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The questions are direct and specific. Only one question is asked at a time. The participants can understand what is being asked. There are no <i>double-barreled</i> questions (two questions in one). 				X	
Wordiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions are concise. There are no unnecessary words 				X	
Negative Wording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions are asked using the affirmative (e.g., Instead of asking, "Which methods are not used?", the researcher asks, "Which methods <i>are</i> used?") 				X	
Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The questions are unbiased and do not lead the participants to a response. The questions are asked using a neutral tone. 				X	
Use of Jargon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The terms used are understandable by the target population. There are no clichés or hyperbole in the wording of the questions. 			X		As already addressed re: terminology "bereft"
Use of Technical Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of technical language is minimal and appropriate. 				X	
Application to Praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The questions asked relate to the daily practices or expertise of the potential participants. 				X	
Relationship to Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The questions are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study The questions are sufficient to answer the research questions. The questions are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study. 				X	

Comments and Suggestions

Good Job! You may also consider asking Questions 5 and 6 of the Focus Group, during the Semi-Structured Interview as well. This way you can gather good ideas from each participant separately first and could potentially categorize these ideas when you are doing your analysis. This may lead you to come up with a framework for how to address this issue. I am thinking you may get more diverse suggestions asking individually versus in a group setting.

RE: Subject Matter Expert

From:

Sent: Wednesday, May 6, 2020 7:23 PM

To: Darlene Reilley <DarleneReilley@hotmail.com>

Subject: RE: Subject Matter Expert

Hi Darlene,

Many thanks for your email and your interest in my work. Congratulations for embarking on a PhD, I had a quick look at your concept paper, and I can see value in the proposal. Before I make any promises, I was wondering if you could tell me more about what you would expect from me, how much work it would involve, timeframe,... Do you plan to publish the study? Who are other people involved, such as your supervisors?

Again many thanks for the invitation, and looking forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards,

RE: Subject Matter Expert

KA

Wed 5/6/2020 9:43 PM

To: Darlene Reilley

Hi Darlene,
Thank you, I will see what I can do.
Best wishes,

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about a time when you worked with a bereft student.
2. How do you believe losing a parent affects a student even years beyond the death of the parent?
3. Did you know the student had suffered the death of a parent in his or her lifetime when you first met?
 - 4a. If no, can you recall how you learned of the parent's death?
 - 4b. If yes, did you adjust your interactions with the student in any way?
 5. If no, what was the student's level of academic performance?
 6. What was the student's behavior?
 5. If yes, how did your altered approach affect the student's academic performance?
 6. How did your altered approach affect the student's behavior?
7. Based on your experience as an educator, how do you think losing a parent in childhood or as an adolescent has an impact on a student's academic performance?
8. Based on your experience as an educator, how do you think losing a parent in childhood or as an adolescent has an impact on a student's ability to behave appropriately?
9. Imagine a student who is approaching the anniversary of his or her parent's death. How do you think such an event might affect a student's ability to learn?
10. Imagine a student who is approaching the anniversary of his or her parent's death. How do you think such an event could affect a student's ability to behave appropriately?

Focus Group Questions

1. What would be a benefit in knowing if a student has lost a parent during his or her lifetime prior to your engagement with him or her?
2. Can you describe an experience you had helping a bereft student?
3. What accommodations would best assist a bereft student academically?
4. What accommodations would best assist a bereft student behaviorally?
5. In your opinion, what should schools do to provide support for students coping with the death of a parent?
6. Do you see a benefit in a program to assist a bereft student even years beyond the parent's death?

KA

I would delete this question. It is a very specific question, and at this stage in the interview you are assuming a lot. In other words, there is no basis to ask this question here.

The interview should start with an open question such as:

Q1: Please tell me a bit about your experience in working with bereaved students?

Then you would have a few probes such as:

-how frequent is this, how many students?

-Are these recently bereaved students, or deaths that occurred several years before?

My second question would be:

Q2: How do you find out about these students' bereavement? Probes:

-Have they told you themselves? Or from parents?

From colleagues? From other students? From the media?

Question 3 is:

Q3: Do you perceive any impact of the death on the students' functioning?

Probes are:

KA

The study is limited to death of a parent? I would keep it open, death of a sibling or a friend could be equally important.

KA

Given that these participants already participated in the interviews, I would start by giving them some acknowledgement about their previous contribution to the research and how this has informed the topics of discussion in the focus group.

KA

You cannot ask this question as a first question. Please start with general questions and then move to more specific questions.

KA

Again, I would not limit this to loss of a parent. Loss of another primary carer, such as a grandparent, or a sibling or friend may be equally important.

KA

This is a repetition from the interview questions



Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

Subject Matter Expert



Mon, May 18, 2020 at 10:59 AM

To: "Reilley, Darlene" <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

yes
no problem, I would be able to help



From: Reilley, Darlene <dreilley@wbasd.k12.pa.us>

Sent: Monday, May 18, 2020 10:49 AM

To: [Redacted]

Subject: Re: Subject Matter Expert



Mon, Jun 15, 11:07 AM ☆ ↩ ⋮

to me ▾

Interview questions review

Suggestions

Maybe first question should be No. 3

Question 1 maybe at end to explain in more details then question you have asked in the survey

Question 2 just move down in survey

Question 10 should be maybe how does a student behavior change on the anniversary and if haven't dealt with yet what is prediction

Those are my suggestions



Appendix G**Focus Group Questions**

1. What would be a benefit in knowing if a student has lost a parent during his or her lifetime before your engagement with him or her?
2. Can you describe an experience you had helping a bereft student?
3. What accommodations would best assist a bereft student academically?
4. What accommodations would best assist a bereft student behaviorally?
5. In your opinion, what should schools do to provide support for students coping with the death of a parent?
6. Do you see a benefit in a program to assist a bereft student even years beyond the parent's death?