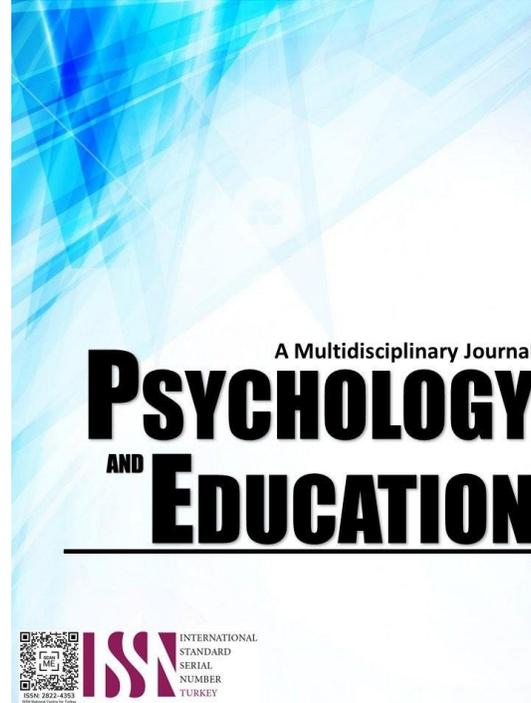


# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BEREAVED ADULTS WHO LOST THEIR PARENT



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## The Lived Experiences of Bereaved Adults Who Lost their Parent

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### Abstract

Parental loss represents one of life's most profound challenges. However, the research on Filipino adults' grief experiences remains scarce. The study is a descriptive phenomenological study that aims to know the lived experiences of Filipino adults who have lost a parent, with particular focus on how cultural context influences their grief journey, coping mechanisms, and meaning-making processes. Using Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach and the Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement as theoretical frameworks, in-depth interviews were conducted with Filipino young adults who experienced parental death. Data were analysed using Colaizzi's method. The findings are five major themes that emerged from the analysis: (1) Emotional Disruption, characterized by initial numbness, delayed grief responses, and profound disorientation, particularly for those physically distant during the parent's death; (2) Altered Sense of Identity and Role, reflecting participants' premature assumption of adult responsibilities, development of resilience, and reconstruction of self-concept; (3) Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies, including goal-directed actions as tribute to deceased parents, distraction through busyness, spiritual reconnection through prayer, and memory recall as sources of strength; (4) Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding, encompassing heightened empathy toward others, re-evaluation of social bonds, and use of success for social affirmation; and (5) Reflection and Realization of Mortality, involving regrets over unfinished business, appreciation for life's impermanence, and pathways to forgiveness and reconciliation. Results suggest that grief can be simultaneously destructive and transformative, leading to enhanced self-reliance, altered life perspectives, and more substantial commitment to honouring parental legacy.

**Keywords:** *bereavement, parental loss, bereaved adults, sudden death, phenomenology*

### Introduction

Losing someone is never an easy phase in our lives, and this is an inevitable situation. As we grow older, we may experience the loss of people we once grew up with. It may be a loved one, a friend, a colleague, a sibling, or an essential member of society. This loss will bring tears and unimaginable pain, especially if the loss is deeply connected to our lives. Considering the devastating effect of this situation, individuals immediately respond to this through different coping strategies. These coping strategies vary from individual understanding of the loss, closeness to the departed loved ones, and the type of death. This type of death includes sudden death, terminal illness, old age, and accidental death. Out of these, the crucial types of death are sudden death and accidental death due to their unexpected nature.

Losing a loved one not only affects a single individual but also affects the family, and each member has their own experiences brought by the loss of a loved one. Though everyone grieves differently, the experience of death will shape and change the lives of surviving members of the family. Death affects all individuals, with the impact shaped by their roles, relationships, and cultural expectations. The study by Glat (2018) presented the following findings: parents often perceive the loss of a child as a distressing experience; siblings feel an emotional burden and assume responsibilities for the deceased; adult children who lose a parent face long-term emotional and behavioural challenges; and a spouse's loss is associated with physical health decline and an elevated risk of suicide.

There are different responses to death across the lifespan. Children respond to death with crying, despair, and eventually pathological detachment. Moreover, their ability to grieve is tied to emotional connection rather than cognitive maturity (Papalia & Martorell, 2024). During adulthood, taking on more responsibilities, providing emotional support to surviving parents, and some adults during the process of bereavement, leads to mental health issues such as depression, conduct disorder, and substance abuse (Santrock, 2023). The present study's emphasis is on the experiences of young adults aged 20–35 who have lost a parent. The young adults' age group experiences emotional and behavioral issues after losing a parent. Some of the problems are poor psychosocial well-being, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and low life satisfaction (Lundberg et al., 2018).

One of the standard theories of grief is the five (5) stages model presented by Kubler–Ross, popularly referred to as DABDA, which includes denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, and notes that these stages are not linear (Tomasic, M., 2022). Some individuals may not experience any of them. Others might undergo a few stages. It is well established that these emotions are commonly observed in the grieving population.

Talking about loved ones, losing the parents who nurtured, cared for, and reared us is a profound sorrow. The standard times of losing a parent are in childhood or adulthood. The pain brought by loss can affect the individual's functioning, particularly on their mental health and daily life. In mental health, it was found that individuals who experienced the death of a parent have a higher risk of developing major mental disorders (Li et al., 2022). The prevalence and mental health consequences on bereaved individuals have been found to likely develop symptoms of anxiety and depression (Aguirre et al., 2024). The impact on children who lose their parents is

experienced as increased aggression and an increase in self-harm (O'Keefe, 2021).

Bereaved individuals experience complex and intense emotions, including desolation, shock, blame, relief, detachment, and a sense of unreality. These feelings are normal reactions to grief (HealthDirect Australia, 2024). On the other hand, the physiological impact of loss includes physical symptoms such as tiredness, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, and effects on the immune system and weight (West, 2022).

In terms of statistics, the number of people who have lost a parent increases with age. It was highlighted in recent research in the United States that approximately 11.5% of 18 – 29-year-olds and 23.4% of 30 – 39-year-olds have experienced the death of a parent (US Census Bureau, 2023). On the other hand, research conducted in the Philippines has shown that one out of three youths grew up without parents. One of the reasons stipulated there is the passing of a parent. The age range of the youth in this research is 18–24 (Kabamalan, 2022). On the other hand, mental health data further highlight the urgency of understanding bereavement in the Philippines. According to the Department of Health, approximately 3.3% of Filipinos suffer from depression, with grief being a significant contributing factor (Del Rosario, 2023).

Parental loss impacts the lives of family members significantly, and each member has their way of coping. These vary from culture to culture. Filipinos are known for their strong family ties and family-oriented values, characterized by close-knit relationships and deep respect for family members (Gata, 2016).

The culture of death is not just a personal loss but a significant event that affects the family and the community. "Pakikipagkapwa-tao" refers to shared identity and empathy, both of which are crucial to this study. It suggests that grief is shared among family and friends, rather than being something one goes through alone (Thim, 2025). Moreover, "kapamilya" presents a deep sense of belonging and unity among family members. These concepts emphasize the interconnectedness of familial relationships and underscore the significance of family bonds in shaping individual identities (Pineda, 2025). In terms of grieving practices, there is a collective approach to mourning that includes lamay, pasiyam, and babang luksa, in which family members and the community play vital roles in honoring the deceased and supporting the bereaved. These practices support the Filipino notion of community and further strengthen the concept of kapwa.

Through closed family ties such as memories, meditations, prayers, and dreams, Filipinos used to preserve a connection with their deceased loved ones. This enduring bond reflects the solidarity of the Filipino family (Gorospe, 2017). The study of Santiago–Saamon (2017) reveals that Filipino emerging adults often prioritize family welfare over personal emotional processing. Bereaved individuals choose to suppress their grief to remain strong for their families.

Despite the rich traditions, bereaved adults often face complex emotional terrains shaped by societal expectations to remain resilient. The tension between communal rituals and personal healing can lead to suppressed grief, especially when emotional expression is discouraged (Sadian-Cercado, 2021).

The exploration of bereaved adults' lived experiences following parent loss aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal, specifically Good Health and Well-being, which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promotion of well-being for all ages by 2030. The framework recognizes that health encompasses mental, emotional, and social aspects, which are affected by bereavement experiences. The findings of this research generate knowledge essential for developing interventions that improve psychological well-being.

The study needs to explore individual experiences that reveal the nuanced ways Filipinos handle the demise of their parent. Moreover, Filipinos' grief is heavily affected by culture and beliefs, despite numerous studies available that tackle the perspectives of losing loved ones for bereaved spouses, siblings, and parents. Moreover, the available research is primarily foreign. It could also be appealing to understand Filipinos' perspectives on loss. Thus, the research aims to contribute to a localized understanding of bereavement.

Another attribute of this study is that it targets Filipinos with a collectivist attitude and a strong family orientation. Understanding their involvement, experiences, and choices is crucial in enhancing existing knowledge about the phenomenon. The current research is focused on young adults as they are often overlooked due to the notion that adulthood is the expected time for bereavement. It was also established that the loss of a parent presents profound psychological trauma to young adults, as it presents threats to their emotional and social development. (Home of Dissertations, 2024) Consequently, it acknowledges the problematic effects of loss on adults, as identified by other research.

The study is a descriptive phenomenological study that aims to discover the lived experience of bereaved adults who lost a parent. Understanding and interpreting the experiences of bereaved adults may contribute to knowledge of Filipino grief. The findings could form the basis for future qualitative and quantitative analyses. Lastly, the researcher believed that understanding individual experiences of loss is crucial for providing effective interventions and approaches.

## Research Questions

The study focused on understanding the lived experiences of the bereaved adult in the loss of their parent. Specifically, the researcher aimed to find out the experiences of young adults on the sudden death of their parents. This study is guided by one research question:

1. What are the lived experiences of adults losing their parents?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study explored perceptions and lived experiences of the bereaved adult on the loss of their parents. Therefore, a qualitative analysis is deemed suitable for addressing and understanding the phenomenon of loss. The qualitative method allows processes that occur naturally, without human intervention, enabling valuable insights into participants' inherent development (Sutton et al., 2015). Through this, participants can express a first-person perspective, highlighting the setting and its outcomes.

The phenomenological design facilitates exploration of the participant's experience. The phenomenological framework, which provides a systematic approach to understanding human experience, was developed and popularized by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century. Nassaji (2020) supported the notion that understanding an individual's perceptions of a phenomenon helps researchers gain a profound understanding. Consequently, the study employed the phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of bereaved adults following the loss of their parents.

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, Husserl's descriptive phenomenology was a suitable framework for the study. The methodological approach entails the researcher systematically recording the participant's verbatim words, transcribing each of them, and using the generated data to identify recurring themes and subthemes. Participants' thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and beliefs were grounded in the meaning of their lived experiences and human knowledge. Crucially, the methodological approach required the researcher to refrain from imposing personal interpretation and avoid biases and prejudice. The study was grounded by Colaizzi's method of phenomenological analysis, which comprehends the lived experiences of bereaved adults following the loss of a parent. Neubauer et al. (2019) assert that the descriptive phenomenological approach was employed to explore a phenomenon, aiming to increase understanding when limited research is available.

### Participants

The researcher gathered as much data as possible from individuals who met the study's criteria. Snowball sampling was used to select four (4) qualified participants in this study. After a participant was interviewed, they were asked to suggest another adult who had experienced parental death.

To ensure the relevance and consistency of participants' experiences, this study adhered to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were required to have experienced the death of a parent during early adulthood, specifically between the ages of 20 and 35. The parental death occurred more than one year prior to the interview. The loss was classified as sudden death, defined as an unexpected medical demise. Furthermore, participants were expected to be emotionally and cognitively able to discuss their grief experiences in a face-to-face interview. Exclusion criteria included individuals who experienced parental death less than one year prior, as their grief may still be too immediate and emotionally raw. Additionally, prospective participants who were undergoing acute psychological treatment or expressed discomfort discussing their loss during initial screening were respectfully not included.

According to Arnett et al. (2004), emerging adulthood is an age marked with profound importance and change for most young people in industrialized countries. Thus, the death of a parent can create pressure and affect various domains of life. The exclusion criteria are those individuals who experienced parental death less than a year ago. The researcher presumed that less than a year would be a sensitive and uncomfortable time for the bereaved individual.

The data-gathering method used is a semi-structured interview. This type of interview is helpful in exploratory research. The open-ended nature of the questions defined the topic well and provided an opportunity to discuss issues in detail. If participants had trouble answering a question, the researcher may use cues or prompts to encourage them to consider the question further (Mathers, Fox, & Hunn, 2000).

### Instrument

The research instrument employed was a semi-structured interview format, designed to elicit rich and reflective accounts from participants who had experienced the death of a parent. The open-ended approach enabled bereaved Filipino adults to narrate their experiences naturally, facilitating a deeper exploration of grief. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and used a set of Interview Guide Questions (IGQs) carefully developed to align with the study's objectives.

The Interview Guide Question was constructed by adapting and enhancing questions from previously reviewed bereavement-related instruments in existing literature. These initial items were refined to better align with the Filipino cultural context and the study's focus on sudden parental loss during young adulthood. The revised Interview Guide Questions were subjected to expert validation through consultations with three licensed psychologists specializing in grief counseling and qualitative research, to ensure their appropriateness, relevance, clarity, and emotional sensitivity. The validation process incorporated the feedback and subsequently informed the development of the final structure, ensuring adherence to thematic coherence and ethical soundness.

An audio recorder was used during each interview to preserve the participant's narrative and facilitate accurate verbatim transcription for analysis. Prior to each session, the researcher introduced himself, explained the purpose of the study, and obtained informed consent

from participants, including permission to record. The interview process began with collecting basic demographic information such as age, cause of parental death, and date of death.

### **Procedure**

The researcher employed snowball sampling and established the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participant identification. Following that, qualified participants will be provided with informed consent forms. Once approved, interviews are scheduled at a time and location convenient for them. The researcher conducted in-person, in-depth interviews. The verbal interview will last 90 to 120 minutes and will be documented using an electronic voice recorder.

The data analysis for the descriptive phenomenology followed Colaizzi's seven-step procedures. The recorded interviews of bereaved adults were transcribed. The transcripts of each participant were read and re-read to ensure a thorough understanding of the idea. Then, each transcript should extract a significant statement about parental death. The statements were recorded on a separate sheet, with their corresponding page and line numbers noted. Following that, meanings were formulated from these significant statements. Then, the meanings were sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. The findings were combined into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. Then, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon was described. Finally, validating the findings obtained from the research participants is essential to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences. (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). To ensure understanding for all readers, the selection's verbalization will be translated from Filipino to English. The researcher's technique for validating emerging ideas is "member checking," which involves obtaining participants' agreement with the emerging results (Shosha, 2012).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained clearance from the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Graduate School Research Ethics Committee (GSREC) to ensure compliance with the research ethics standards. The study prioritized informed consent, confidentiality, emotional safety, and the respectful treatment of sensitive subject matter related to parental bereavement.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, beginning with one eligible adult and expanding through referrals. Invitation letters outlined the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study's objective, and assurances of voluntary participation. No coercion was involved in recruitment. Once eligibility was confirmed, participants were contacted, and interviews were arranged in a safe, quiet, and convenient location of their choice.

Before the interview, each participant is provided with a consent form that details the purpose, risks, benefits, procedure, confidentiality, and right to withdraw at any time without penalty. They were informed of their option to decline specific questions or end the session at any time, particularly if they experienced emotional discomfort. Written consent and permission to audio-record the interview were obtained prior to the interview.

To protect participants' identities, they were identified using coded labels (e.g., Participant A, B, C, and D). All interview-related documents are kept in locked folders, while transcriptions and audio recordings are kept on a password-protected laptop. Identifying information was excluded from the manuscript, and any quotations deemed sensitive or privacy-compromising were removed.

In acknowledgement of emotional sensitivity associated with discussing parental bereavement, the researcher implemented several safeguarding measures. Continuous monitoring of the participant's well-being was maintained during the interview. Should any signs of distress emerge, including but not limited to emotional overwhelm, prolonged silence, or difficulty continuing, the researcher was prepared to pause or stop as appropriate. A debriefing session was held after the interview to help participants process their emotions about sharing their experiences. Furthermore, a systematic referral protocol was established to provide therapeutic support beyond the scope of the research. The implemented safeguards ensured that each participant was treated with ethical responsibility, with the study adhering to the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence while enabling a meaningful contribution to grief research.

### **Results and Discussion**

The section presents, analyzes, and interprets the results of a phenomenological study on the lived experiences of bereaved Filipino adults who have lost their parents. Responses from four participants were analyzed, yielding five primary themes. Anchored by a central research question, the study employed Interview Guide Questions to gain deeper insight into how participants' perceptions and meaning-making processes regarding their loss. Data analysis followed Colaizzi's seven-step method (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher conducted member checking, which involves returning the synthesized themes to participants for verification, as per Colaizzi's final validation step.

The five major themes that emerged in the study are Emotional Disruption and Shock, Altered Sense of Identity and Role, Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies, Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding, and Realization of Mortality. Each theme is organized into several subthemes. The subthemes for Emotional Disruption re: Physical Distance and Helplessness, Emotional Numbness and Suddenness, Motivation Loss and Despair, and Suppressed and Delayed Grief. For Altered Sense of Identity: Role Assumption and Responsibility, Redefined Self and Resilience, and Insecurity Rooted in Absence. For Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies: Goal-Directed Actions as Tribute, Distraction through Busyness, Spiritual Reconnection, and Memory Recall as Strength. The subthemes



for Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding are Heightened Empathy Toward Others, Re-evaluation of Social Bonds, and Social Comparison and Affirmation. The subthemes of Reflection and Realization of Mortality are Regret and Unfinished Business, Impermanence and Appreciation, and Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the study participants, including pertinent information such as age, gender, relationship to the deceased, years since parental loss, and cause of parental death.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Relationship to Deceased	Years Since Parental Loss	Cause of Parental Death
A	35	MALE	MOTHER	7	Complications from stroke
B	25	MALE	FATHER	4	Medical complications
C	28	FEMALE	FATHER	4	Medical complications
D	27	FEMALE	FATHER	2	Complications from diabetes

Table 2. *Theme One: Emotional Disruption*

Theme	Subtheme	Constructions	Verbatim Excerpt
Emotional Disruption	Physical Distance and Helplessness	Grief was intensified by being far from home during the time of parental death.	“Malayo ako sa pamilya, kaya mahirap makauwi agad.” (A) “Sinabi na si papa ay 'pina-pump na.' Hindi ko alam ang ibig sabihin nito.” (B) “Halong gulat at lungkot ang naramdaman ko nung marinig ko ang balita na wala na siya.” (C) “Hindi mo alam ang gagawin dahil nagulat ka pa.” (A)
	Emotional Numbness and Suddenness	Participants initially experienced disbelief and emotional numbness.	“Parang hindi ko lubos na naramdaman ang sakit.” (B) “Noong nalaman ko po, emosyonal at parang namanhid ako” (D)
	Motivation Loss and Despair	Loss of a parent led to psychological withdrawal and a lack of motivation.	“Nawalan ako ng motivation. Nawalan ako ng gana.” (A) “Palaging may kulang.” (D)
	Suppressed and Delayed Grief	Grief did not manifest immediately but resurfaced during later life transitions.	“Hindi pa talaga ako nakamove on noong nawala si mama.” (A) “Ngayon... nararamdaman ko na ang hirap na wala nang ama.” (B)

**Emotional Disruption**

This emergent theme captures the impact of parental loss experienced by participants who were not present at the time of death. Initial reactions included disbelief, shock, and emotional numbness, followed by psychological withdrawal and diminished motivation. Notably, grief was not immediate but resurfaced during significant life transitions, highlighting the delayed and enduring nature of emotional disruption. The first theme captures the reactions of individuals after the death of a parent. The focus spans from the initial reactions to those emotions after many years have passed.

**Subtheme: Physical Distance and Helplessness**

Physical distance and helplessness emphasize the emotional struggles experienced by bereaved adults—particularly those who were geographically and emotionally distanced from their deceased parents at the time of death. The participants' narratives revealed that upon learning the death of their loved ones, such circumstances intensified their grief.

Participant A described that due to being geographically distant from the mother's passing, heightened grief was evident. Emotional isolation and a sense of helplessness promptly contributed due to the inability to return home promptly.

"Malayo ako sa pamilya, kaya mahirap makauwi agad."

"I was far from my family, it was hard for me to come home right away."

This quote points to the effects of geographical distance on the grieving process and the frustration of being unable to return home promptly. The study by Kraus & Walter (2023) supported this, arguing that physical distance complicates grief. In addition, Pamplona (2023) contends that the cause of roller-coaster emotions was due to the inability to be physically present during the death of their loved one.

On the other hand, Participant B stated that the helplessness added to his emotional struggle through a limited understanding of his ailing father's medical condition.

"Sinabi na si papa ay 'pina-pump na.' Hindi ko alam ang ibig sabihin nito."

"They said that he was being 'pumped.' I didn't know what that meant."

This statement caused psychological distress due to a lack of clarity and understanding. Participants who lacked clarity or understanding about the loss of their loved one experienced helplessness (Shapiro et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, Participant C displayed emotional vulnerability upon hearing the news of her father's death:

"Halong gulat at lungkot ang naramdaman ko nung marinig ko ang balita na wala na siya."

"I felt a mix of shock and sadness when I heard the news that he was gone."

The concurrent experience of shock and sadness was evident in the psychological impact of sudden and irreversible loss. This reaction among participants reflected the impact of loss, and these emotions are consistent with the findings of Cunanan et al. (2022) and Güven et al. (2022), who reported that individuals experienced emotional pain and melancholic emotions.

#### ***Subtheme: Emotional Numbness and Suddenness***

This subtheme provides the initial response to news of death. Along with the emotional reactions is the feeling of numbness brought by the death. Especially if the loss of an individual is sudden, leaving individuals unprepared emotionally.

This happens with Participant A when he hears the news about his mother's demise. He found himself at a halt and not knowing what to do.

"Hindi mo alam ang gagawin dahil nagulat ka pa."

"You don't know what to do because you're still in shock."

Aside from the initial shock Participant A felt at that time, he also experienced a sense of disorientation that affected his decision. This is supported by Mehmel (2021), who found that individuals might experience disorientation, affecting their activities. Moreover, the inability to make a decision is associated with disruptions in cognitive processes, as O'Connor (2022) states, a phenomenon often experienced by bereaved individuals.

While Participant B stated that he cannot fully embrace the pain as he heard his father's passing.

"Parang hindi ko lubos na naramdaman ang sakit."

"I could not fully feel the pain."

On the other hand, Participant D shared that she became emotional and felt numb emotionally as she relived the death of her father.

"Noong nalaman ko po, emosyonal at parang namanhid ako."

"When I heard the news, I felt emotional and numb."

The statements of Participant A, B, and D display that they felt emotional numbness upon hearing the news of the death of a parent. According to Royden's study (2019), this numbness serves as a protective mechanism against overwhelming pain.

#### ***Subtheme: Motivation Loss and Despair***

In this subtheme, the death of parents affected participants' sense of purpose. Moreover, it affects their lives in general, describing the emotional void they feel. This is related to the experience of Participant A and Participant D.

Participant A shared that the impact of losing his mother was that he experienced loss in motivation and a sense of purpose in life.

"Nawalan ako ng motivation. Nawalan ako ng gana."

"I lost my motivation. I lost my drive."

The current emotional distress contributes to the decline in Participant A's motivation (Villalobos et al., 2021). Moreover, the distress brought to Participant A provided a sense of unfamiliarity and questioning of himself and his purpose (Brubaker, 2025).

On the other hand, Participant D said that she feels that something is missing in her life after the loss of her father.

"Palaging may kulang."

"There is always something missing."

The statements of Participant D clearly provide that she experiences an emotional void. The remarks could indicate that the participant, at some point in his grief journey, withdraws from the usual activities and could struggle to experience joy in previously fulfilling acts (NeuroLaunch Editorial Team, 2024)

**Subtheme: Suppressed and Delayed Grief**

The subtheme suggests that participants' responses could occur years after the experience of death. The grief emerged after experiencing life transitions or when the absence is felt. This suppressed emotion is called delayed grief. Thus, grief may experience symptoms months or years after.

Participant A shared that the loss of his mother still affects him and feels stuck with the loss.

"Hindi pa talaga ako nakamove on noong nawala si mama."

"I really haven't moved on from when mama passed away."

Participant B laments that they realized that losing a father is hard and felt the difficulty without his presence.

"Ngayon... nararamdaman ko na ang hirap na wala nang ama."

"Now... I'm feeling the difficulty of not having a father anymore."

The statements can be considered as a delayed grief response that aligns with contemporary research indicating that grief does not always appear directly after loss, and individuals may experience symptoms months or years later (Lichtenthal et al., 2018). Moreover, it can be added that Filipinos, especially emerging adults, prioritize family welfare over emotional processing, leading to the suppression of feelings (Santiago-Saamon, 2017).

Table 3. Theme Two: Altered Sense of Identity and Role

Theme	Subtheme	Constructions	Verbatim Excerpt
Altered Sense of Identity and Role	Role Assumption and Responsibility	Participants took on adult or financial roles earlier than expected.	"Ako na ang nagbabayad ng mga dating ginagastos nila." (A) "Yung mga trabahong ginawa ng ama, napasa na sa akin." (B) "Kailangan maghanap ng bagong strategy para maka-adjust." (A)
	Redefined Self and Resilience	The experience of loss helped shape emotional strength and independence.	"Kahit nawala siya, tuloy pa rin ang buhay." (B) "Ginawa ko ang lahat para magtagumpay nang mag-isa." (C)
	Insecurity Rooted in Absence	The loss or absence of a parent during childhood affected self-concept.	"Participant D: narealize ko po na siguro gusto niyang matutunan ko na kaya ko ito mag-isa." (D) "Yung identity ko, parang naging insecure... wala akong tatay." (C)

**Altered Sense of Identity and Role**

The theme of an altered sense of identity and role reflects how parental loss reshaped participants' self-perception and life trajectory. This shows changes in the sense of self and in the expected performance of duty, as demanded by the environment, as individuals lose their parents. The absence of a parent in life due to death affects the familial arrangement and the self. That included the responsibilities from the moment the role was assumed. It was also noted that a sense of resilience has been fostered and a renewed sense of self has emerged. However, the absence of a parent during her childhood contributed to her insecurity about her identity.

**Subtheme: Role Assumption and Responsibility**

The death of a parent has shown that there are changes that happen inside the family arrangement, specifically in the home management. The filling in of the roles and responsibilities by the deceased loved one creates an adjustment for other family members.

In-home management includes the family's finances. For Participant A, the loss of a parent led him to take on the household expenses.

"Ako na ang nagbabayad ng mga dating ginagastos nila"

"I am now the one paying for what they used to spend on"

This is similar to the statements of Participant B, who transfers responsibilities and assumes the role of a father figure.

"Yung mga trabahong ginawa ng ama, napasa na sa akin"

"The work that my father did has now been passed to me."

The above-mentioned statements prove that the redistribution of roles and responsibilities is shared among the surviving family members. In the case of our participants, they inherited the financial responsibilities and a father figure's role. These actions of Participants A and B are consistent with the study by Kim-Appel et al. (2015), as they reorganize the responsibilities. Moreover, the sudden nature of the death of their loved one provided them with heightened role expectations despite their limited resources (Wang, 2015).



**Subtheme: Redefined Self and Resilience**

The participants experienced changes in self and increased toughness in life. Despite the weight of their emotions, individuals have found strategies to transform and be resilient. This is manifested in the statements of Participant A, B, C, and D.

For participant A, when asked about the meaning of the loss of a parent to him, he shared that it taught him to look for a strategy to adapt to the changes.

“Kailangan maghanap ng bagong strategy para maka-adjust.”

"I needed to find a new strategy to adjust."

On the other hand, Participant B, when asked about the meaning of loss for him, shared a perspective of moving forward despite his father's absence.

“Kahit nawala siya, tuloy pa rin ang buhay.”

"Even though they're gone, life must go on."

Participant C, when asked about the changes in his perspectives brought about by the loss of his father, said that he had no change in his perspective. She shared a remark of determination that she achieved success on her own.

“Ginawa ko ang lahat para magtagumpay nang mag-isa.”

"I did everything to succeed on my own."

Meanwhile, Participant D shared that the death of her father made her realise that she must learn on her own. This is a form of meaning made from the loss.

“Narealize ko po na siguro gusto niyang matutunan ko na kaya ko ito mag-isa.”

"I realized that maybe they wanted me to learn so I could do this on my own."

The statements above demonstrate that their perspective has changed after experiencing the loss for some time. Participants were found to have changed their perspective on how they see themselves after the demise of their parents. Moreover, differences in participants' attitudes, such as being strong, autonomous, and mature. This is consistent with the study by Aziz and Shafi (2023), which found that individuals reconstruct themselves and commit to personal growth. Moreover, it describes participants' personal growth, and their resilience was evident in a changed perspective, as they became emotionally more challenging (Apelian & Nesteruk, 2017).

**Subtheme: Insecurity Rooted in Absence**

The subtheme emerged from one participant's experience of insecurity, traced to the absence of his father during his childhood. She described her identity as insecure due to the unfulfilled needs brought by the absence of her father in her younger years. This emotion is tied to unmet emotional attachment needs and a father figure in her life.

She shared that when asked about the change in perspective when she experienced the loss of a parent. She shared that:

“Yung identity ko, parang naging insecure... wala akong tatay.”

"My identity felt insecure... I didn't have a father."

Participant C's statement reveals a fragility in her self-concept stemming from the loss of her father before his death. The lack of emotional support during her early years contributed to her insecure self-identity, as she describes. This sense of insecurity aligns with findings that a lack of parental presence significantly affects their emotional, developmental, and attachment needs (Gudoy & Mabulay, 2024).

Table 4. Theme Three: Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies

Theme	Subtheme	Constructions	Verbatim Excerpt
Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies	Goal-Directed Actions as Tribute	Pursuing goals was a way to honor the dreams of the deceased parent.	“Kumuha ako ng mga eligibility exam... pangarap ng mama ko.” (A) “Yung pangarap nila, ako ang magtutuloy.” (B)
	Distraction through Busyness	Keeping oneself busy served as an avoidance and survival strategy.	“Binusy ko ang sarili ko para hindi mag-isip.” (B)
	Spiritual Reconnection	Prayer and faith became primary sources of comfort and meaning.	“Halos ngayon lagi na akong nagdadasal.” (A)
	Memory Recall as Strength	Positive recollections became emotional anchors during bereavement.	“Kapag naiisip ko yung mga kwento ni Papa... natutuwa ako.” (D)

### ***Coping and Meaning-Making Strategies***

Bereaved participants provided different strategies they employ in overcoming the loss of a parent. Participants were found to have navigated grief to find purpose out of the experience. Four subthemes were enumerated under this significant theme. They employ goal-directed actions, while others distance themselves from the overwhelming emotion through distraction. On the other hand, a spiritual connection can be established through faith and prayer. Lastly, positive recall of the memories with the deceased loved one.

#### ***Subtheme: Goal-Directed Actions as Tribute***

The subtheme suggests that participants take meaningful action that has a positive impact on their sense of self. The actions being employed are a testament to and an honor of the once-dreamed-of demise of their loved ones.

For participant A, pursuing goals becomes a symbolic act that honors his mother's dreams for his career. This serves as his motivation and shows his aspiration to fulfill the dream.

When Participant A was asked about his employed coping strategies, he shared that taking on the eligibility examination was once a dream for her by his late mother.

“Kumuha ako ng mga eligibility exam... pangarap ng mama ko.”

"I took the eligibility exams... it was my mother's dream."

The statement of Participant A revealed that he has goals and has the motivation to achieve them. The participants' thinking aligns with the study by Huang et al. (2022), which states that bereaved individuals, especially participant A, exhibit a forward-focused coping style. He sets goals that will have a positive impact on him.

On the other hand, Participant B echoed this sentiment, stating that he is taking steps to continue the dreams of his parent:

“Yung pangarap nila, ako ang magtutuloy.”

"I will continue the dreams they once had."

While the statement of Participant B shares similarities with the above statement of A, it aligns with the findings of Doctor et al. (2024) and the Dual Process Model (1999), which suggests that individuals employ loss- or restoration-oriented coping. In this manner, participants A and B provided statements that are equivalent to the restoration-focused activities of bereaved individuals. In the Filipino context, the culture of debt of gratitude is prevalent towards parents whom they regard as their primary source of emotional support. Moreover, they persevered to honour their late parents' dreams and aspirations.

#### ***Subtheme: Distraction through Busyness***

The subtheme discusses distraction as a means of coping with the overwhelming pain of losing someone. In this way of coping, individuals distance themselves from the sorrow associated with discussing loss. This can sometimes be referred to as an avoidance mechanism. Thus, redirecting tasks and routines to temporary acts that would sway their emotional pain.

When participant B was asked about his coping mechanism employed after the loss of his father, he shared that he let himself become busy by joining clubs and other extracurricular activities in school to sway his grief emotions.

Participant B's statement was:

“Binusy ko ang sarili ko para hindi mag-isip.”

"I kept myself busy so I would not think."

The individual's conscious effort to distract himself through actions is intended to realign him with other activities. His avoidance is considered an adaptive response to loss. This is related to the study by Baker et al. (2016), which suggests that avoidance in the initial stage of grief can be helpful. The research could highlight that engaging in other activities can provide temporary relief from stress. Allowing them to regain emotional balance before fully processing their grief. Furthermore, distraction allows individuals to reintegrate distressing memories at their own pace. It argues that distraction, when used appropriately, can support healing by balancing periods of grief immersion with moments of relief (Tendo, 2022).

#### ***Subtheme: Spiritual Reconnection***

In the aftermath of parental loss, prayer and faith emerged as vital sources of comfort, grounding, and meaning-making for participants. Spiritual practices were not only expressions of grief but also pathways to emotional regulation, existential reflection, and reconnection with a transcendent source of strength.

When participant A was asked about the influence of the loss on him, he shared that he became prayerful. He relies on the power of the supreme being, letting his will flow.



Participant A's statement reflects this matter:

“Halos ngayon lagi na akong nagdadasal.”

"These days, I find myself praying almost constantly."

The remarks of participant A show that he resorted to spiritual practices as part of his routine in dealing with the loss of his mother. This is related to the quantitative study conducted by Pazer (2024), which examines the impact of spiritual practices on stress management, resilience, and meaning in individuals' lives. In the Philippine setting, these actions are evident in individuals' use of spiritual and religious practices as coping mechanisms.

The findings suggest that spirituality moderates emotion regulation (Lee et al., 2021). Several studies have demonstrated the positive effects of spirituality on bereaved individuals. The statements reflect a deepened spiritual engagement, where prayer becomes an emotional anchor as they experience grief. Spirituality has direct effects on the aspects of life of bereaved individuals. That includes personal growth and valuing life. (Testoni et al., 2022).

**Subtheme: Memory Recall as Strength**

The subtheme focuses on participants' coping, which involves preserving connections with the deceased through remembrance. This is called a continuing bond, which is anchored in the sense that it extends the deceased's life through shared memories of loved ones. For others, this serves as comfort and a sense of enduring connection. This serves as a stabilizing force while navigating oneself through the overwhelming pain of grief.

Participant D shares his fond memories with his father, who loved to tell non-fiction stories when he was a child. Her statement proves that remembering her father brought her happiness.

“Kapag naiisip ko yung mga kwento ni Papa... natutuwa ako.”

"When I think about my father's stories... I feel happy."

This statement illustrates how memory recall can evoke joy and emotional grounding, transforming absence into presence through narrative remembrance. This excerpt also reflects a form of continuing bond. The continued bonds, maintained through symbolic connections with the deceased, can foster emotional resilience, helping individuals integrate their loss into their lives. Moreover, recalling shared experiences with the deceased can provide emotional relief (Hewson et al., 2023).

Individuals often find solace in remembering conversations, habits, and routines that keep their loved ones' presence alive in their daily lives (Doka, 2019). This is also aligned with the study of Gorospe (2017) that Filipinos maintain a connection with their deceased loved ones including memories. This enduring bond reflects the Filipino family's solidarity.

Table 5. Theme Four: Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding

Theme	Subtheme	Constructions	Verbatim Excerpt
Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding	Heightened Empathy Toward Others	Experiencing grief led to a greater compassion for others who are going through loss.	“Mas nauunawaan mo sila.” (A) “Tinutulungan ko sila na huwag nilang gawin ang mga hindi ko nagawa.” (B) Para po sa akin, hindi naman ako nahirapan makipag-adjust sa iba.” (A)
	Re-evaluation of Social Bonds	Relationships were reassessed, with greater discernment in trust and connection.	Sa pakikisalamuha sa ibang tao naman, wala namang nagbago. (B) “Mas lalo kaming napalapit sa isa’t isa” (C) “Hindi po ako masyado nagsha-share kasi toxic...” (D)
	Social Comparison and Affirmation	Success became a way to affirm self-worth and counter judgment.	“Napatunayan na may pinag-aralan na ako.” (B)

**Interpersonal Shifts and Social Understanding**

The theme focuses on the outward effect of loss for bereaved individuals. Losing someone shows that it affects an individual's social identity and their interactions with society. The loss reshaped participants' relationships and social perspectives. The following subthemes emerged. The heightened empathy towards others affirms that personal loss fosters deeper feelings in those individuals who face similar situations. Participants also evaluated their social bonds with others. Affirming self-worth and countering social judgment.

**Subtheme: Heightened Empathy Toward Others**

The loss of a parent is a debilitating emotional pain that affects our relationship with others around us. However, in this sub-theme, the study found that participants experienced stronger sympathy towards others. This relates to the person they meet who also experiences the same situation as they do. The statement came from Participant A in response to a question about how the loss affects their relationship with others. Participant A shared that:

“Mas nauunawaan mo sila.”

"You understand them more."

The statement of participant A was brief but reflects the emotional aspect that resonates. He develops a stronger sense of empathy for other people who also experience the death of their parents. The empathy of Participant A was also observed, as Participant B shared the same situation. In his statement, participant B shared that whenever she encounters others who have problems with their parents. She shared her experience and regrets with others, hoping they would not have to face similar setbacks.

“Tinutulungan ko sila na huwag nilang gawin ang mga hindi ko nagawa.”

"I help them avoid the things I was not able to do."

The statement illustrates a head-on approach of empathy where she serves as a guide for others.

This illustrates a proactive form of empathy in which lived experience serves as a guide. Moreover, this also transforms regret into relational support with others. Sharing stories and experiences with others, especially those who are experiencing the same situation, is a communal aspect of grief counselling. Through these acts of sharing, the weight of the individual's loneliness is alleviated (Lee, 2025). In the Filipino context, this theme resonates with pakikipagkapwa-*tao*, where the value of shared humanity and mutual understanding.

### ***Subtheme: Re-evaluation of Social Bonds***

The experience of parental loss prompted participants to reassess their social relationships, which reveals a range of responses ranging from strengthened connections to cautious withdrawal. Grief became a lens through which trust, emotional safety, and relational depth were reevaluated.

The responses of Participant A show that people who have experienced loss do not let it affect their relational interactions. The statement of participant A:

“Para po sa akin, hindi naman ako nahirapan makipag-adjust sa iba.”

"For me, I didn't really struggle to adjust to others."

The excerpt shows that there is no disruption in relationships with others. This was also noted in Participant B's statement, stating that there are no changes in interactions with others.

Participant B continued this by stating:

“Sa pakikisalamuha sa ibang tao naman, wala namang nagbago.”

"In interacting with others, nothing really changed."

This contradicts the results of studies published on the significant effect on interpersonal relationships after experiencing death. One reason Filipinos do not experience change in relationships is that grief in Filipino culture is communal, where emotional pain is transformed into compassion and relational solidarity (Thim, 2025). This finding could support the claim that having such social support has a positive impact on well-being after experiencing distressing or traumatic events (Scott et al., 2020).

On the other hand, Participant C shared that after her father's death, she devoted more time to her family. Participant C shared that:

“Mas lalo kaming napalapit sa isa’t isa.”

"We became even closer to one another."

As families mourn together, they tend to strengthen their emotional connections, thereby enhancing mutual support (Bergin, 2016). Thus, supporting the notion that after experiencing loss. There are bereaved individuals whose interpersonal relationships remain and improve. This could also be supported by the study by Aziz & Shafi (2023), which suggests that the participant has increased her concern for her family and also her commitment. Meanwhile, one participant expressed caution about relationships after the loss. Participant D shared that she refrains and limits herself from sharing due to:

“Hindi po ako masyado nagsha-share kasi toxic...”

"I do not share much because it is toxic..."

The statement could indicate that the participant withdraws from an unsafe emotional relationship and sets a boundary. The behaviour that had emanated is supported by Sturtevant (2018), explaining that emotional withdrawal during bereavement is not necessarily disconnecting from the environment but a self-preservation from a harmful or invalidating environment.



Table 6. *Theme Five: Reflection and Realization of Mortality*

Theme	Subtheme	Constructions	Verbatim Excerpt
Reflection and Realization of Mortality	Regret and Unfinished Business	Participants expressed sorrow over unresolved issues or missed moments.	““Maliban na lang sa mga pagsisisi ko tungkol sa kanya” (C) “May pagsisisi... tungkol sa gusto niyang mag-asawa.” (D)
	Impermanence and Appreciation	The death of a parent brought a renewed awareness of life's brevity and value.	“Napagtanto ko po na maikli lang ang oras natin.” (D)
	Forgiveness and Reconciliation	Bereavement opened a path to understanding, forgiveness, and closure.	“Mas tumuon sa pagpapatawad...” (C)

**Reflection and Realization of Mortality**

The theme centers on introspection and the understanding of life. The death of a parent brings the bereaved into different coping mechanisms and affects their perspective. There is a profound thought about the meaning of life. The emerging theme has different subthemes. Regret and unfinished business show that after death, there are some "what ifs" that have been going on in the minds of bereaved adults. In addition, participants experienced the impermanence of life and forgiveness toward the parent.

**Subtheme: Regret and Unfinished Business**

The subtheme reveals that some individuals have unresolved issues with the deceased loved one. This is when regrets came in about the missed opportunities with the parent. The regrets include those unspoken words and unmet expectations.

Participants expressed lasting sorrow over unresolved issues and missed opportunities with their deceased parents' emotions that surfaced not only during the loss but also in its aftermath. These regrets often centered on unspoken conversations, unmet expectations, and relational gaps that could no longer be bridged. When Participant C was asked about the effects of losing her father, she shared her regrets over unspoken words and did not reply to messages from her father.

“Maliban na lang sa mga pagsisisi ko tungkol sa kanya.”

"Except for the regrets I have about him."

The statement displays regret for the missed opportunities, and grief could be compounded with the closure. On the other hand, Participant D also expressed her regret about the unresolved matter regarding her father's familial hopes. As participant D shared:

“May pagsisisi... tungkol sa gusto niyang mag-asawa.”

"There is regret... about the marriage he wanted."

The statements of Participants C and D, related to the study of Wiener (2020), showed that the majority of regrets are connected with missed conversations and decisions. These regrets often bring feelings of guilt, and individuals would consider the "what if" scenario (BetterHelp Editorial Team, 2024). In addition, these regrets are prevalent in the immediate family, especially if the death of loved ones is sudden.

**Subtheme: Impermanence and Appreciation**

The loss of a parent brought participants to realize the essence of life. This leads to an appreciation of time spent with family and friends. Moreover, the shared moments and the quality of the relationship with others. It becomes a reflection that reshapes how bereaved individuals see their purpose. When participant D was asked about the meaning of loss for her, she shared that her realization was that time was short:

“Napagtanto ko po na maikli lang ang oras natin.”

"I realized that our time is short."

The statement reflects a profound shift in perspective, and the subtheme aligns with findings from Nahvi & Saxena (2024), who found that bereaved individuals often experience a heightened appreciation for life. They emphasized that awareness of impermanence frequently emerges as a transformative insight during the grieving process. The reflection also underscores the importance of cherishing relationships before loss, resonating with research on anticipatory grief (Doka, 2019).

**Subtheme: Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

For some participants, bereavement became a turning point for emotional healing and opening a path toward understanding, forgiveness, and closure. Rather than remaining in anger or regret, they described a shift in perspective that enabled them to let go of emotional burdens and restore inner peace.

Participant C reflected on the meaning emerging from the death of his father and was focused on forgiveness. As she shared:

“Mas tumuon sa pagpapatawad...”

"I focused more on forgiveness..."

This statement suggests a conscious decision to let go of lingering resentment or unresolved tension, using grief as a catalyst for emotional reconciliation. The statement of Participant C aligns with the stage of acceptance described by Kubler-Ross. It could be acknowledging the reality of it and finding a way to live with it (Tomasic, 2022). This could also be part of the experience of Post-Traumatic Growth, highlighted themes include self-discovery, personal strength, and relationship enhancement. Emphasizing that grief reshapes identity and fosters resilience (Villazor, 2023). Their study suggests that grief fosters a deeper understanding of personal and familial narratives.

## Conclusions

The research provided an avenue for redirecting the usual assumption that grief follows a linear path. Instead, the study reveals that grief is a complex and ongoing process that reshapes perspectives and relationships. Thus, Filipino young adults experience a simultaneous devastation and transformation throughout the situation. The findings highlight several important insights.

First, in this study, the grief is not linear. Participants did not follow predictable stages but rather oscillated between confronting their loss and rebuilding their lives. Some participants are noted to have experienced delayed grief that emerged years later during significant life events. Second, loss can lead to growth. While it is painful to experience loss, it was found that parental death often fostered resilience, independence, and emotional maturity. Participants emerged stronger and more self-reliant, even as they continued to carry ongoing sadness. Third, cultural and spiritual resources are important. Filipino values and spiritual practices provided crucial support systems. These include prayer, family solidarity, and the cultural emphasis on honoring parents, which helped participants find meaning in their loss. Fourth, social relationships are transformed. In this study, participants developed a stronger relationship with others through the sharing of experience, while others reevaluated for their emotional safety. Some developed heightened empathy and a desire to help others facing similar losses. Lastly, meaning-making is essential. Participants actively sought ways to make sense of their loss, whether by achieving goals their parents valued, helping others, or engaging in spiritual reflection.

On the other hand, while this study provides insights into Filipino experiences of parental loss, several limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size was limited to a specific demographic of early adulthood. There was limited representation of various types of parental loss, as the study did not adequately distinguish between different circumstances of death, such as sudden versus prolonged illness, or natural versus traumatic causes. The single-time-point data collection approach provided only a snapshot of participants' experiences, rather than tracking how their grief and coping mechanisms evolved. Furthermore, the study cannot capture variations within Filipino culture, including regional differences, socioeconomic classes, and religious backgrounds. Finally, the phenomenological approach, while providing rich, detailed insights, was limited in its ability to examine broader patterns across larger populations.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for various sectors to enhance support for bereaved individuals.

Future researchers may conduct longitudinal studies to understand better how grief experiences evolve over extended periods. They could also explore gender differences in how Filipino men and women experience and express parental grief. Another could be the investigation into the role of extended family and community in supporting bereaved young adults. Additionally, examine socioeconomic factors that may influence grief experiences and coping resources. Mental health practitioners and psychologists could identify and recognize delayed grief patterns and prepare for clients whose grief may resurface during significant life transitions, acknowledging the central role of prayer and faith in Filipino coping strategies. Focus on meaning-making processes and support clients as they navigate new roles and responsibilities, addressing identity reconstruction.

Academic institutions play a crucial role in promoting awareness and education about grief. Encourage academic research on grief adaptation and resilience to inform the development of evidence-based interventions. Additionally, universities and colleges should ensure access to mental health support services and establish peer groups to help students navigate grief. Workplace settings could provide training programs that help managers and colleagues support grieving employees with empathy and flexibility, enabling them to offer support with compassion and understanding. Workplace wellness initiatives that include emotional resilience training. Furthermore, organizations should acknowledge loss and encourage employees to balance their grieving process with their professional responsibilities, ensuring emotional well-being.

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