

Picking Up the Pieces: Coping with A Friend's Suicide

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Introduction. People left behind have to grieve and accept the powerlessness over death. They have to grapple and face the void left by the dead person. One of the most tragic deaths is suicide. The ultimate sufferers in this tragedy are those left behind to cope with the emotional trauma of losing a significant other, struggling with many unanswerable questions, self-blaming, and an inability to move on with their lives. For adolescents, losing a peer, classmate, or friend to suicide increases their risk of depression and anxiety. Their psychological well-being is compromised, often leading to complicated grief, major depression, and posttrauma stress. The present study aims to explore, describe, and interpret the lived

experiences of peer suicide loss survivors.

Methods. This study utilized the phenomenological research design. The participants were selected based on their having experienced the phenomenon of being a peer suicide loss survivor. The researcher explored the experience of the students who have lost a fellow student to suicide and how they coped from that loss. The researcher utilized the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) and the Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWBI) to identify the students greatly impacted. Ten participants who scored low on resiliency and who were severely distressed volunteered to participate. The Individual Written Narrative Story Form and the Phenomenological In-Depth Interview Guide were utilized to gather the qualitative data for this study. Data explication is a way of transforming qualitative data. The researcher ended the explication by writing a composite summary, which captured the essence of being peer suicide loss survivors. The validity of this study was verified concurrently with the data explication through auditability, credibility, and fittingness.

Results. Common themes for the lived experiences of being a peer suicide loss survivor are: confused about the reported suicide; no more denying the truth; stunned by the suicide; grieving the loss of a friend; questioning why the deed was done; accepting the death of a friend; finding solace from friends, and experiencing growth after the trauma. The participants received information about suicide with the likelihood of disinformation. Once they got confirmation that it was one of their classmates, it was a bitter pill to swallow, but the truth, nonetheless. Suicide is no ordinary news, and the participants experienced shock and disbelief with the unexpected news of their friend's suicide. They were left emotionally shattered while they grieved the loss of their friend. The suicide of their friend destroyed the natural order of death where a person does not die young, and the participants questioned God and themselves. This questioning was gradually replaced by acceptance, even if the death of their friend still hurts. In the sudden loss of their classmate and friend, their shared grief strengthens their friendship. As much as resilience involved the participants "bouncing back" from the death by suicide of a good friend, it resulted in profound posttraumatic growth.

Conclusion. Being a peer suicide loss survivor may be one of the most challenging experiences these students have. While there is no easy way for these students to grieve, it helps them understand what they are experiencing. Although peer suicide loss survivors may experience similar emotions, it does not mean this overall experience is the same for them. They experienced similar grieving processes that included shock, denial, guilt, sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, frustration, bitterness, anger, self-pity, rejection, confusion with unanswered questions, and acceptance. Engaging in discussions regarding grief experienced by these peer suicide loss survivors promotes healing. Acceptance for these suicide loss survivors is learning to live again while remembering their friend who died.

Practical Value of the Paper. This study contributes to the scarce literature on suicide loss survivors in the Philippines. There is a scarcity of studies on how suicide loss affects the country's survivors, as most studies focus on suicidal thoughts and ideations. This study provides the basis for school suicide intervention programs for peer suicide loss survivors in a supportive environment.

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