

Psychological Consequences Of Early Demise Of Spouses And The Effect Of The Coping Strategies On The Health Of The Survivors In Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effect of coping strategies on psychological consequences of early demise on surviving spouses in Ogun State, Nigeria. Two thousand respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, while the instrument for data collection was a psychological consequences of early demise on surviving spouses questionnaire ($r=0.75$). Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data at 0.05 level of significance. The results of regression analysis on joint effects of coping strategies on the psychological consequences was significant ($F_{(6,1993)} = 387.10, P<0.05$). The relative contributions of the coping variables on the psychological consequences variable are in the following descending order: relocating ($\beta=4.22, t=21.68, P<0.05$), recreation/exercise ($\beta=4.12, t=19.18; P<0.05$), engaging in more social activities ($\beta=3.98, t=18.27; P<0.05$), comfort from admirers ($\beta=3.14, t=17.44; P<0.05$), comfort from children ($\beta=2.01, t=12.84; P<0.05$) and burying oneself in work ($\beta=1.34, t=4.06; P<0.05$). The study identified the psychological consequences arising from early demise of spouses were instrumental for the throes and sorrow experienced by the surviving spouses. The recommendations included: the survivor should relocate to another place to pick up the pieces of their shattered life and start another life again, more over a new widow or widower should seek helpful counsel from experienced widows and widowers who have successfully adjusted to normal life after the tragic event.*

KEYWORDS: *psychological consequences, early demise, spouses, coping, well-being*

INTRODUCTION

The death of a spouse is one of the most tragic events that a person can experience in life, especially after a long period of staying together as husband and wife, rearing the children together, and enjoying good companionship. Stoll (2000) buttressed this view by stating that the death of a spouse can be one of the most stressful experiences of adulthood. A surviving spouse, in the throes of sorrow, confused about the present and worried about his or her future may become confused on how to manage the home affairs with a number of challenges presenting themselves. Linderman (2005) corroborated this statement when he said that spouses depend on each other for survival, just like a baby depends on his/her mother.

Widowhood begins with new and often strange identity of being a single person again. The bereaved feels alone, uncomfortable and anxiety beclouds his/her vision. Ore and Akin (1998) and Hall (1991) stressed that the death of a spouse makes the survivor to undergo a certain degree of acute separation, and distress. Widows and widowers can loose interest in their own

lives and activities, because going through life without their spouses makes life to have little purpose or meaning to them. Many survivors are usually struggling to grapple with death event as they are literally swimming in the rough river of grief. Shear (2003) agreed with this statement by saying that when a person experiences the death of a spouse, the survivor is confronted by mortality and undergoes a certain degree of acute separation and psychological distress such as restlessness, sadness, nervousness, heart palpitation, fright, spells of terror and panic feeling that something bad is going to happen as anxiety beclouds the person's vision.

Szymania (1994) observed that the early loss of a beloved spouse gives room for psychological manifestations, such as anxiety, depression and stress. Many who lose their spouses early in life experience prolonged grief characterized, by stress, depression and anxiety which may have serious effect on the vital organs of the survivor. Boyle (2003) stated that the death of a spouse has far reaching effects on the physiology of the survivor. Udoh (2003) supported this view that, it is the living that suffers grief and this can become detrimental to health and wellbeing, if it is not kept under control and is allowed to linger on for weeks, months or even years. While grieving, the bereaved person is occupied with the thoughts of the deceased, yearning for him or her to come back keeps on reviewing their relationship, especially the positive and less negative aspects and perhaps harboring feelings of guilt that he/she could have prevented the death. As this transition to a new life without a spouse continues, the intensity of grief subsides and the bereaved begins to adjust to life alone. Brooks and Brooks (1999) saw bereavement as a process by which a person suffers, sustains and recovers after the death of a loved one. Nelson (2005) likened grief to a mother who after having a baby would recount the whole process, including each and every contraction, but with time she forgets the details.

Statement of the Problem

The rate of premature death among young person in Ogun State has become alarming. These deaths are losses to the immediate families, neighbours, colleagues, friends and the state. These deaths also affect the bereaved spouses, children, parents, close friends, and co-workers in different ways. Some are engrossed in shock and depression, while others feel physically incapacitated, disoriented psychologically and unable to accept the loss. The bereaved spouses find it difficult to pick up pieces of their lives together as , others manage to recover after some time and to re-organize their life once again. While some are subjected to on over whelming stress for a number of months or years

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses tested are:

1. The respective variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological wellbeing of selected living spouses in Ogun State, Nigeria.
2. The joint variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological wellbeing of selected living spouses in Ogun State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design and instrument

The descriptive survey research design was used for this study. The population for the study comprised all literate widows / widowers under the age of fifty (50), specifically 21-49 years of age in Ogun State Nigeria. The sample for this study was drawn from four (4) traditional councils recognized in the state namely: Egba, with seven local government, Ijebu, with six LG, Remo with three LG and Yewa with four LG. Presently, the state has Twenty (20) Local Government Areas. One hundred (100) respondents were purposively sampled from each of the twenty (20) Local Government for the study. A total of Two thousand (2,000) respondents constituted the sample. The instrument for this study was a self-structured Psychological Consequences of Early Demise on Surviving Spouses questionnaire ($r = 0.75$). The researcher administered and collected the questionnaire copies with the help of eight (8) research assistance who were widowers/widows and had been trained on what to do. The instrument was administered directly to the respondents in their various places of work and homes.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1:

Ho: The respective variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological wellbeing of selected living spouses in Ogun State Nigeria.

Multiple regression analysis showing the effect of the respective variables of coping strategies on the psychological consequences of early death on the living spouse

Dependent Variable: Psychological

Parameter Estimates for the respective variables of coping strategies

| Variable | DF | Parameter Estimate | Standard Error | T for H0: | Prob> T | Remark |
|------------------------------------|----|--------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| Intercept | 1 | 50.54 | 1.35 | 37.44 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Burying oneself in work | 1 | 1.34 | 0.33 | 4.06 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Engaging is more social activities | 1 | 2.01 | 0.11 | 18.27 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Relocating | 1 | 4.12 | 0.19 | 21.68 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Comfort from child/children | 1 | 3.98 | 0.31 | 12.84 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Comfort from admirers | 1 | 3.14 | 0.18 | 17.44 | 0.0001 | Significant |
| Recreation/exercise | 1 | 4.22 | 0.22 | 19.18 | 0.0001 | Significant |

Multiple regression analysis was carried out using the linear equation

$$Y=a+b_1X_1+b_2X_2+b_3X_3+ \dots +b_nX_n$$

Where y=psychological effect (dependent variable)

X_is are the variables of coping strategies (independent)

To determine the relative contribution of each of the variables of coping strategies to the collective variables of psychological effect of early demise of a living spouse, a linear regression analysis was carried using psychological variables as dependent while variables of coping strategies were used as independent variables each showing relative contribution to the psychological state of the living spouse.

The result in shows that all the variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) contributed significantly ($p < 0.05$) to the psychological wellbeing of the living spouse of early demise. Furthermore, the table revealed that relocation ($T=21.68$, $P < 0.05$) was the most significant followed by recreation/exercise ($T=19.18$, $P < 0.05$). Also, ability to engage in more social activities ($T=18.27$, $P < 0.05$) was next followed by comfort from admirers ($T=17.44$, $P < 0.05$), comfort from children ($T=12.84$, $P < 0.05$) and burying oneself in work ($T=4.06$, $P < 0.05$) was the least.

This revealed that for survivors of early demise to enjoy good psychological state of mind, all the variables of coping strategies are employed.

It can thus be concluded that the respective variables of coping strategies such as, burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise will significantly contribute to the psychological state of mind of surviving spouses in Ogun State Nigeria. Hypothesis 1 which states that the respective variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological status of selected living spouses in Ogun State Nigeria is rejected.

This is in line with Carr (2003) emphasizing relocation that those who change their apartment and had friends around coped better than those remained in the same apartment they had shared with their late spouse. Christopher (2000) indicated that survivors of early demise need to relocate and be busy with activities.

Hypothesis 2:

Ho: The joint variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological status of selected living spouses in Ogun State Nigeria.

Regression analysis showing the joint effect of the variables of coping strategies on the psychological consequences of early death on the living spouse

Dependent Variable: Psychological status

Model effect for the joint variables of coping strategies

| Source | DF | Sum of Squares | Mean Square | F Value | Prob>F | R ² |
|--------|------|----------------|-------------|---------|--------|----------------|
| Model | 6 | 60215 | 10035.83 | 387.10 | 0.0001 | 0.71 |
| Error | 1993 | 51670 | 25.93 | | | |
| Total | 1999 | 111885 | | | | |

Joint regression analysis was carried out using the linear equation

$$Y=a+bX$$

Where y=psychological effect (dependent variable)

X is the variable of coping strategies (independent)

To determine the joint contribution of the variables of coping strategies to the collective variables of psychological effect of early demise of a living spouse, a linear regression analysis was carried using psychological variables as dependent while variables of coping strategies were jointly used as independent variable showing holistic effect.

Result in table above shows that the variables have collective significance (F=387.10, Prob=0.0001 <0.05, DF=(6,1993) while the squared correlation coefficient is 0.71. That is, data consistency is above very good.

This implied that when all the variables of coping strategies are lumped together to determine their combined effect on the psychological wellbeing of the living spouse of victims of early demise, the effect is significant. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that the joint variables of coping strategies (burying oneself in work, engaging in more social activities, relocating, comfort from child/children, comfort from admirers and recreation/exercise) of early demise would not significantly influence the psychological status of selected living spouses in Ogun State Nigeria is rejected.

This is in line with Pakes (2004) who stated that survivors need to engage fully in their work to help them to transit to life. Udoh (2000) also stressed that grief can be suppressed in frenzy of activities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The rate of increase in the early demise of surviving spouses has becoming alarming in the State. These deaths affected immediate families, neighbours, close friends and co-workers in different ways. The study has confirmed that the psychological consequences arising from early demise of spouses such as depression, anxiety, anger, despair, yearning and intrusive thoughts were instrumental for the throes and sorrow experienced by the surviving spouses. It also established

that all coping strategies namely relocating, recreation/exercise, engaging in more social activities, comfort from admirers, comfort from children and burying oneself in work were significant in ameliorating their pains. Based on these findings the following are recommended

- 1 The State Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare should adopt the appropriate coping strategies to rehabilitate survivors as well as implementing policies for the welfare of widows/widowers in the state while the Federal Government should enact a law that will protect widows/widowers from being deprived of their rights.
2. Young women should be encouraged to have a job of their own and not depend fully on their husbands for survival.
3. Awareness campaigns should be mounted by nongovernmental organizations to sensitize couples to prepare their wills in favour of their spouses.
4. Survivors should seek fresh air out of doors.
- 5 A new Widows/widowers should seek helpful counsel from experienced widows and widowers who have successfully adjusted to normal life after the event.
- 6 Widows/widowers should improve their human interaction and be ready to discuss freely about the deceased spouse with good humour and about the pleasant time they had together.
- 7 Widows/widowers should avoid risk factors such as over eating, alcohol consumption, heavy smoking, promiscuous life, drug abuse and misuse. Or doing things they believe in ignorance that will make them forget the unpleasant past. Survivors should be going for recreation/exercise regularly.

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