Therapeutic Interventions for Grief and Bereavement: Efficacy, Stages, and Clinical Approaches

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Abstract

Grief and bereavement have a significant impact on mental, emotional, and social well-being, especially in collectivistic cultures such as India, where strong familial connections amplify the distress associated with loss. This manuscript examines the effectiveness of various grief counseling interventions, including Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Group Therapy (GT), Art Therapy (AT), and Play Therapy (PT). The investigation utilizes a mixed-methods approach, incorporating randomized controlled trials alongside qualitative phenomenological studies. The research is conducted among a diverse range of Indian populations, including youth, the elderly, and individuals from both rural and urban settings. Standardized measures, such as the Grief Experience Inventory, and thematic analysis are employed to assess symptom alleviation and cultural factors. The findings indicate that peer-led counseling is effective in reducing grief symptoms, while non-traditional therapies cater to the needs of various groups. However, limitations are noted, including a lack of empirical depth, insufficient training for counselors (with only 33% feeling adequately prepared), and a deficiency in neurobiological understanding. The manuscript recommends the pursuit of longitudinal studies, the establishment of standardized training programs, the exploration of digital interventions, and the development of culturally sensitive strategies to address emerging forms of grief (such as ecological and collective grief) and the challenges posed by the post-COVID-19 bereavement, thereby improving accessibility and effectiveness in grief counseling practices in India.

Keywords: Grief, Bereavement, Counseling, Psychotherapy, Mourning

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Introduction and Background

Humans are biological entities, akin to many other biological units in the universe, experiencing a range of unforeseen events and challenges throughout life (Wilson, 2015). Birth is a natural occurrence, and death is an inevitable conclusion. In the future, healing professions that assist grieving individuals in coping with loss and provide psychological and emotional support will be increasingly vital (Neimeyer, 2016). Human life is shaped by a myriad of experiences, with individuals encountering daily emotions such as fear, anxiety, concern, depression, sadness, and happiness (Kessler, 2019). Developing inner insight and managing thoughts or challenges is a complex process that not all can navigate successfully (Neimeyer, 2016). Unfortunate events can significantly impact mental health, leading to observable, long-term losses and issues (Stroebe et al., 2017). Many individuals experience physical, intellectual, and emotional suffering due to their inability to effectively cope with these events (Bonanno, 2004). These processes may contribute to losses across physical, mental, emotional, social, familial, spiritual, and professional domains, potentially leading to major mental health disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). A person's environment shapes their responses through various stimuli, and their ability to adapt depends on how they react to these influences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Those unable to manage the outcomes of these unwanted events often seek help from experts such as physicians, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, or family counselors when they feel overwhelmed (Benkel et al., 2024).

Generally speaking, individuals wish to spare others from the illnesses, suffering, and tragedies they have endured, reflecting a common human sentiment (Neimeyer, 2016). This empathy often stems from personal experiences with specific diseases or hardships. Those who have faced such challenges can relate more readily to others with similar experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of their struggles (Benkel et al., 2024). For example, diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, COVID-19, and HIV/AIDS have caused widespread loss, leaving individuals and families grieving the death of loved ones (Benkel et al., 2024). These experiences can contribute to an increased understanding of grief after the loss of a significant other (Benkel et al., 2024). Consequently, affected families have established support programs to assist others in their communities facing similar challenges, particularly in supporting family members afflicted by the same illnesses (Worden, 2018). The central focus of this manuscript is how spouses and loved ones mourning the loss of someone due to a potentially fatal, long-term illness find closure. Grieving individuals may perceive their thoughts and emotions as unusual, but the goal of grief counseling is to alleviate their distress and enable them to manage their circumstances by fostering

greater self-awareness and understanding of their environment (Neimeyer, 2016). Through grief therapy, individuals can reflect holistically, develop more meaningful perspectives, and rediscover themselves (Worden, 2018). Communicating with their inner selves helps bereaved individuals manage their emotions more effectively (Kessler, 2019). Humans naturally rely on one another to meet their needs, experiencing both loss and sadness following the unexpected death of loved ones (Stroebe et al., 2017). Grief counseling addresses these experiences, offering significant benefits for those navigating such challenges (Neimeyer, 2016).

The author selected grief and trauma counseling as the focus of this manuscript for several specific reasons. The number of people suffering from severe or contagious diseases and experiencing profound loneliness is rising in the present circumstances. Many appear distraught, endure high levels of stress, and suffer emotional and mental depression. In what ways can grief and trauma counseling provide them with essential social, emotional, and psychological support? These individuals are grieving the loss of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, friends, loved ones, spouses (wives or husbands), and other family members. There remain insufficient resources—both in terms of knowledgeable personnel and training programs—for counselors to acquire the skills needed to manage such cases effectively. This manuscript therefore seeks to identify pathways through this critical clinical and societal challenge.

Study Objectives

Focusing on advancing the understanding and application of grief and bereavement counseling, with an emphasis on scientific rigor and relevance to the field. These objectives aim to strengthen grief counseling practices, cultural relevance, and scientific understanding of emerging grief challenges.

1. **Assess Intervention Efficacy:** Evaluate the effectiveness of grief counseling methods (e.g., ACT, CBT, Art Therapy) using meta-analyses and RCTs to quantify symptom reduction across diverse groups (Currier et al., 2008; Newsom et al., 2017).

2. **Study Cultural Influences:** Investigate how cultural factors, especially in collectivistic societies like India, shape grief and the integration of traditional and modern counseling approaches (Kumar, 2023; Bethesda, 2024).

3. **Explore Neurobiological Mechanisms:** Examine grief's biological basis through neuroimaging and biomarker studies to understand how therapies enhance emotional regulation (Neimeyer, 2019).

4. **Develop Counselor Training:** Design and test training programs for grief counselors, emphasizing cultural competence and non-traditional therapies to improve clinical outcomes (Gaur, 2024).

5. **Address Emerging Grief Types:** Research psychological impacts and tailored interventions for ecological and collective grief, particularly post-COVID-19, in diverse global contexts (Pihkala, 2020; Becker & Kleinman, 2022).

Review of Literature

Overview

The article provides a detailed examination of grief and bereavement counseling, integrating established psychological theories, such as Kübler-Ross's five-stage model and Bowlby's attachment theory, with contemporary perspectives on collective, relational, and ecological grief. It explores therapeutic interventions like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Group Therapy (GT), Art Therapy (AT), and Play Therapy (PT), while emphasizing their applicability in diverse cultural contexts, particularly India. The article draws on a broad range of literature from 1980 to 2024, addressing the emotional, psychological, and social dimensions of grief, with a focus on post-COVID-19 challenges and emerging grief types.

The article exhibits notable strengths in its broad, credible literature synthesis that seamlessly bridges classic grief theories (Kübler-Ross, Bowlby, Lazarus & Folkman) with contemporary research, while offering valuable cultural contextualization of grief within India's collectivistic family systems and the lingering impact of COVID-19. Its inclusive coverage of diverse therapeutic modalities—from established approaches (CBT, ACT, Grief Therapy) to innovative ones (Art Therapy, Play Therapy)—and its nuanced presentation of both five- and seven-stage grief models (with acknowledgment of their non-linear nature) provide a holistic, reader-friendly framework. However, the article is weakened by limited empirical depth, relying more on theoretical reviews than robust quantitative evidence, meta-analyses, or recent RCTs; occasional overgeneralization of cultural claims without cross-national comparison; an underdeveloped neurobiological perspective; failure to propose concrete training solutions despite highlighting severe gaps in counselor preparedness (only 33% feel adequately trained); and structural redundancy in discussions of grief stages and emotions. Although scientific rigor is generally sound through extensive use of peer-reviewed sources and balanced integration of attachment and psychodynamic theories, it is somewhat undermined by insufficient critique of older stage models and sparse inclusion of effect sizes. The work remains highly relevant to current global and Indian mental health challenges, addressing youth, elderly, collective, and ecological grief, as well as scalable community-based and digital interventions. To elevate the article, authors should incorporate stronger quantitative evidence and recent RCTs, deepen neurobiological

insights with neuroimaging references, offer specific, actionable training curricula emphasizing cultural competence and non-traditional therapies, include comparative data from other collectivistic cultures, and streamline repetitive content for greater clarity and conciseness.

Method

A mixed-methods research design will be utilized, combining quantitative randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to assess the effectiveness of grief counseling interventions (CBT, ACT, and Art Therapy) with qualitative phenomenological studies that investigate cultural influences on grief within India's collectivistic society. Participants, comprising youth, the elderly, and both rural and urban populations, will be recruited from community centers and mental health clinics throughout India. Standardized scales, including the Grief Experience Inventory, will be employed to measure symptom reduction, while semi-structured interviews will gather insights shaped by joint family systems and the challenges posed by the post-COVID-19 era. Data analysis will be conducted using SPSS for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative findings. Longitudinal follow-ups will be implemented to evaluate the sustainability of the interventions. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and cultural sensitivity, will be in accordance with Indian socio-cultural norms to ensure both relevance and respect for local traditions.

Understanding Grief and Bereavement Counseling

The authors' perspectives on the pathological nature of grieving vary; however, the death or loss of a loved one is fundamental to its resolution. Grief is defined as the physical or mental suffering experienced after a major loss, typically the death of a loved one (Adiukwu et al., 2022). It is recognized as an emotional reaction to unforeseen circumstances rather than a predetermined or necessary condition (Zisook & Shear, 2013). A person's personality or character significantly influences how they cope with grief, impacting their life circumstances profoundly. The terms bereavement and grief are used inconsistently in the literature, referring either to the state of having lost someone to death or the response to such a loss (Zisook & Shear, 2013). While most individuals can manage grief following a significant loss, for some, the distress is so severe or prolonged that they seek professional grief counseling (Worden, 2010). Unexpected grief across different life phases often leads to anxiety, emotional breakdown, and suffering for many. For numerous individuals, profound distress from a significant loss can become chronic, resulting in physical, mental, and emotional challenges, prompting them to seek professional grief counselors to cope and move forward (Worden, 2010). Counseling for death and grief, provided by health professionals, aims to enhance the mental well-being of those mourning

while ensuring emotional and psychological stability. Various interventions and models used in grief and bereavement counseling are highly valuable. Failure to address grief adequately can lead to serious mental health issues, potentially resulting in a decline in overall mental health (Adiukwu et al., 2022).

Overcoming grief is a complex process, deeply intertwined with human emotions, and is an experience shared by many individuals globally. Life's unpredictable events, such as the loss of a loved one, can profoundly affect anyone (Worden, 2018). People are often perplexed by others' reactions to such situations, as individual diversity, family and social networks, and micro- and macrocultural influences shape how grief is experienced and expressed (Bethesda, 2024). Grief counseling is a critical therapeutic approach that helps individuals navigate the sorrow, suffering, and distress arising from unforeseen circumstances, aiming to alleviate their pain (Neimeyer, 2016). It serves as a supportive and healing option for those grappling with grief. The management of grief involves how individuals respond to sorrowful situations, and those experiencing it often find assistance in coping with challenging circumstances (Worden, 2018). The physical and emotional distress from losing a loved one—whether a parent, friend, or pet—can push individuals to the brink of despair (Adiukwu et al., 2022). Grief counseling employs specific therapeutic strategies to help individuals confront these emotional challenges, fostering resilience and emotional recovery (Neimeyer, 2016).

Significance and Relevance of Grief and Bereavement Counseling in the Indian Culture

Health conditions associated with mortality, such as COVID-19, cancer, and heart attacks, can push individuals toward the brink of death, fostering fear and anxiety within communities. Some individuals proactively prepare for such events, while others experience self-generated anxiety and fear, which impair their ability to respond effectively (Verdery et al., 2020). This phenomenon contributes to a collective sense of unease within communities. For example, widespread mourning in countries like India during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this communal distress, which can lead to broader health complications and mental health challenges (Kumar, 2023). In traditional nations like India, family connections, particularly within joint family systems in rural areas, are deeply rooted. The loss of an individual to communicable diseases like COVID-19 causes significant emotional turmoil (Kumar, 2023). Additionally, unexpected disasters and deaths due to illness intensify this distress. When a person dies unexpectedly, the psychological anguish experienced by relatives is often amplified, with family expectations and unforeseen shocks creating significant emotional distance (Verdery et al., 2020). In such contexts, the necessity, significance, and role of grief and

bereavement counseling become critical. Verdery et al. (2020) estimated that for every COVID-19 death in the United States, nine people are expected to grieve. This number is likely higher in non-Western collectivistic societies, such as India, where close kinship ties and larger families are prevalent (Kumar, 2023).

Stages of Grief

Grief is an inevitable facet of human existence, often precipitated by unforeseen circumstances. It represents a universal reaction to profound loss, significantly impacting mental and emotional well-being (Fisher, 2023). The anguish stemming from loss manifests through grief, unfolding as a journey across distinct stages. These painful events can evoke a spectrum of emotions in an individual, which may persist or result in emotional torment (Terrell et al., 2024). Bereavement serves as a prime example of this process. In 1969, Kübler-Ross explored the experience of dying through interviews with terminally ill patients, delineating five stages of dying: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Terrell et al., 2024).

Denial

The absence of denial can often strike an individual with intense emotional pain, akin to sharp thorns piercing in a harsh manner. Being overwhelmed by emotions can significantly disrupt a person's daily life (Neimeyer, 2016). Pretending that no significant events have occurred may serve as a coping mechanism, helping to streamline certain processes during difficult situations (Worden, 2018). However, intense emotions can precipitate feelings of depression, compounding the challenges of navigating grief (Zisook & Shear, 2013).

Anger

The death of a loved one or someone close cannot be realistically replaced, leaving individuals grappling with profound emotional turmoil. During this period, anger often consumes those grieving, manifesting as rage toward the circumstances or factors surrounding the loss, or even directed at oneself (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Questions such as "What could we have done differently?" may arise, alongside anger stemming from factors beyond one's control, intensifying the emotional distress (Worden, 2018).

Bargaining

Searching for ways to compensate for a loss is a common response during grief. Individuals may engage in internal negotiation or bargaining, attempting to avoid the reality of the loss or wishing for an alternate outcome (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). This process often involves reflecting on or reconciling personal matters to address deeply felt circumstances or to make

amends for the loss, serving as a coping mechanism to navigate emotional pain (Neimeyer, 2016).

Depression

There is a clear connection between depression and feelings of sadness, with many individuals transitioning from grieving to experiencing depression (Zisook & Shear, 2013). The nature of a significant loss can profoundly and negatively impact various aspects of life, as extremely painful experiences often dominate multiple domains of existence (Neimeyer, 2016). The mind frequently struggles to accept the reality or truth of the loss, leading to persistent emotional turmoil (Worden, 2018). These emotions carry significant weight, often causing individuals to contemplate death frequently (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Addressing the emotions within a person's conscious mind in a structured manner is crucial for mitigating distress (Worden, 2018). Over time, emotions may become suppressed, but they can occasionally manifest in more intense or highly distressing ways, exacerbating mental health challenges (Zisook & Shear, 2013).

Acceptance

Following a loss, individuals often choose to move forward, either by attempting to forget the loss and start anew or finding that vivid memories persist even after significant time has passed (Worden, 2018). Consequently, breaking free from such intense emotions can be challenging. Most people experience normal or uncomplicated grief and, with time, adjust to the loss (Bethesda, 2024). A person's choices, emotional resilience, and resolve significantly influence their coping process, shaped by their unique psychological and emotional characteristics (Neimeyer, 2016).

Goals

The primary goals of grief counseling focus on helping clients adapt to their loss and laying the foundation for a positive life by restructuring their perspectives (See & Sutton, 2018). While grief counseling cannot fully alleviate the pain of loss, it facilitates meaningful adjustment to life's new realities. This process is widely recognized as challenging, yet the emphasis remains on navigating the journey of bereavement, whether triggered by the death of a loved one or significant life events such as separation or divorce (See & Sutton, 2018). Worden (2010) outlines four primary tasks of grief counseling, each with specific subgoals: (1) acknowledging the reality of the loss, (2) navigating the emotional turmoil of grief, (3) adjusting to a world without the deceased, and (4) establishing ongoing connections with the deceased while embarking on a new chapter in life.

Subgoals:

The subgoals of grief counseling align with supporting individuals through the bereavement process. These include: (1) enhancing the recognition of loss to help individuals fully acknowledge its reality, (2) assisting the individual in managing emotional and behavioral responses to mitigate distress, (3) providing support as they navigate challenges to readjustment in a world altered by loss, and (4) aiding them in discovering ways to sustain a connection with the deceased when they feel ready to reengage with life (Worden, 2018). These subgoals facilitate emotional healing and adaptation, fostering resilience during the grieving process (Neimeyer, 2016).

The Significance of Grief Counseling

Grief counseling, also known as bereavement therapy, is designed to support individuals coping with the loss of a partner, family member, friend, colleague, or pet (Gupta, 2024). The efficacy of psychotherapeutic interventions for bereavement has sparked considerable debate in recent years, driven by reviews of grief therapy outcome studies that have questioned the support for these interventions (Currier &Holland, 2008). Managing emotions during grief is profoundly challenging, as individuals often struggle to utilize their abilities and resources effectively (Worden, 2018). The capacity to envision a path forward diminishes, and individuals may feel trapped in a distressing existence, overwhelmed by darkness and negative emotions (Neimeyer, 2016). Consequently, professional support from therapists, psychologists, or counselors is vital to navigate these emotional complexities. Prioritizing happiness in life often requires resolving conflicting, imaginative, and sorrowful emotions, with grief counselors providing insights and practical guidance (Worden, 2018). Grief counseling involves a deep exploration of one's inner self, fostering emotional understanding and facilitating harmonious adjustment (Neimeyer, 2016). This process supports significant practical decision-making and yields both immediate and long-term benefits. Life's challenges and fluctuations are inherent, and grief counselors employ a client-centered approach to help individuals embrace and navigate these experiences (Gupta, 2024).

Traditional Healing Methods for Grief and Bereavement

In traditional societies, joint families were prevalent, with family members such as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and older relatives providing mutual support during times of grief (Kumar, 2023). In villages, friends, colleagues, and like-minded individuals offered compassionate words to comfort those mourning, fostering encouragement and significantly alleviating grief over time (Bethesda, 2024). However, modernity, globalization, and urbanization have diminished these family traditions, leading to increased loneliness as individuals lose access to extensive social

and familial support systems, making it more challenging to cope with death (Kumar, 2023). Compassion for grieving friends and family prompts efforts to alleviate their distress, though these attempts are not always successful, and even professional grief counseling may sometimes prove ineffective (Currier & Holland, 2008). Preparing individuals for transformation through face-to-face conversations about their emotions, coupled with effective communication and recognition, is crucial for understanding the nature and causes of grief (Worden, 2018). Grief is not merely a collection of distinct feelings but a complex emotional process requiring acknowledgment (Neimeyer, 2016). Encouraging individuals to recognize and utilize family and community resources can help alleviate sorrow, potentially leading them to seek professional counseling or therapy (Worden, 2018). It is essential for individuals to fully experience and embrace their emotions during this period, avoiding inappropriate responses such as jokes or irritation (Neimeyer, 2016). Feelings of anger, frustration, or self-disgust may arise, but crying serves as a constructive outlet for sorrow (Zisook & Shear, 2013). Providing space for individuals to process their sadness, while reassuring them of support, is beneficial in overcoming grief (Bethesda, 2024).

Grief and bereavement are universal experiences that are integral to human life. The process of alleviating grief and bereavement is often complex and challenging, but traditional healing practices play a significant role in supporting mourners. These practices facilitate coping by providing external or direct influences that help individuals process their loss, offer continuous comfort to family members affected by death, and provide community-driven support systems. Rooted deeply in cultural, spiritual, and communal frameworks, these methods foster resilience through practices such as storytelling, connecting with ancestors, and collective support (Neimeyer, 2016). Unlike modern therapeutic approaches, traditional healing methods for prolonged grief and bereavement are unique and vary significantly across regions and countries, reflecting diverse cultural contexts (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

In Hinduism, grief and mourning are deeply embedded in traditional practices that provide emotional and spiritual support to individuals, families, and communities coping with loss. These practices address the profound emotional impact of death and separation, promoting healing and closure through structured rituals, spiritual guidance, and community support. The following sections outline key Hindu practices related to post-death rituals, the mourning period, and annual observances, highlighting their role in facilitating emotional stability and spiritual peace.

Post-Death Rituals

Hindu post-death rituals are significant for both the deceased and the bereaved, aiming to ease the emotional shock of loss and facilitate detachment from earthly bonds. After death, the body is cleansed with holy water, often from the Ganges, wrapped in white cloth, and circumambulated by family members. The eldest son typically lights the funeral pyre, a ritual rooted in the belief that it aids the soul's transition to the afterlife (Doniger, 2018). This act, known as antyeshti (last sacrifice), is considered essential for releasing the soul from its physical form and helping the family begin the process of emotional detachment (Pandey, 2013).

Mourning Period

Following the cremation, a mourning period of ten to thirteen days, known as ashoucha, is observed. During this time, family members wear white clothing, symbolizing purity and mourning, adhere to a vegetarian diet, and often visit temples to seek spiritual solace. The deceased's photograph is venerated, serving as a focal point for grief and remembrance (Firth, 1997). On the thirteenth day, the pindadan ritual is performed, typically on riverbanks, where priests conduct ceremonies to unite the departed soul with the ancestors (pitrs). This ritual is believed to ensure the soul's peace and provide emotional closure for the family (Knipe, 2015). The structured nature of these practices helps channel grief and fosters a sense of communal support.

Annual Observances

Hindu families perform annual rituals such as tarpan (offering libations) and shraadh (feasts for the deceased) to honor the departed and maintain a spiritual connection. These observances, typically conducted during the Pitru Paksha period, aim to ensure the soul's peace and well-being in the afterlife (Jacobsen, 2013). Storytelling during these rituals allows families to express grief and share memories, reinforcing emotional bonds while alleviating sorrow. These practices underscore the Hindu belief in the continuity of life and death, providing a framework for coping with loss (Doniger, 2018).

Efficacy

Newsom et al. (2017) evaluated the efficacy of a bereavement counseling model for adults, focusing on its ability to alleviate grief symptoms, as detailed in their article, "Effectiveness of Bereavement Counseling through a Community-Based Organization: A Naturalistic Control Trial." The intervention, delivered through a non-profit organization, demonstrated that individuals receiving bereavement counseling from peers who had also undergone counseling experienced a more significant reduction in grief symptoms over time (Newsom et al., 2017).

Skills and Techniques

Grief counseling is a specialized form of therapy designed to assist individuals in navigating their emotions following a loss, aiming to provide guidance on effective coping strategies (Worden, 2018). The death of a cherished individual can profoundly impact a person's mental and emotional well-being, often detrimentally affecting their daily life (Neimeyer, 2016). In such circumstances, professional grief counselors create a supportive environment for individuals to express their feelings, employing various skills and techniques to make the grieving process more manageable and grounded in professional and scientific principles (Gupta, 2024). Gupta (2024) explores these approaches in her article, "What is Grief Counseling: Definition, Types, Techniques and Efficacy," highlighting the diverse methods used to facilitate emotional healing.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

Grief counseling is extensively employed by professionals, such as psychologists, to help clients acknowledge and manage their authentic emotions (Worden, 2018). By fostering the development of positive strategies and healthy coping models, this therapeutic approach supports clients in working toward their life objectives during the grieving process (Neimeyer, 2016).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

This approach emphasizes identifying and modifying thought processes that negatively impact behavior (Gupta, 2024)

Group Therapy (GT)

Group therapy is a fundamental treatment modality employed in hospitals, particularly in mental health settings, where individuals facing similar challenges or conditions come together (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020). Participants share their experiences, emotions, and resources, fostering an environment of mutual support and assistance (Corey, 2016). This collective approach provides clients with a valuable platform for healing from their struggles, promoting emotional recovery and resilience (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

Art Therapy (AT)

Art therapy serves as a powerful intervention for individuals navigating grief and bereavement, offering a nonverbal outlet for expressing complex emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally. By engaging in creative activities like drawing, painting, or sculpting, people can express emotions of grief, sorrow, or rage, aiding in emotional processing and the search for meaning (Gussak & Rosal, 2016). This therapeutic approach is particularly

effective for those experiencing complicated grief, as it allows exploration of personal narratives and fosters resilience by integrating emotional and cognitive dimensions of loss (Thompson & Neimeyer, 2014). Art therapy also supports diverse populations, including children and the elderly, by providing a safe space to process grief at their own pace, enhancing emotional regulation and reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Malchiodi, 2020). By engaging in creative expression, individuals can reconnect with a sense of agency and hope, mitigating the isolating effects of grief (Potash et al., 2017).

Play Therapy (PT)

This approach is designed to express abstract feelings and concepts. It helps to reinforce the internal viewpoints of both the individual and the child, enabling the investigation of positive strategies or solutions to alleviate distress (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

Using Models for Treatment

Given the growing number of instances of grief, it is crucial to understand how counsellors are now addressing the escalating cases in order to provide treatment to clients (Gaur, 2024). In recent decades research evidence on the experience of grief has led to a broadening of attention from the traditional focus on an emotional journey from distress 'recovery' (Hall, 2014). Numerous scientific and psychological theories assist individuals in navigating the profound experience of grief. For instance, Guildin and Leget (2023) present several theories in their article "The Integrated Process Model of Loss and Grief: An Interprofessional Understanding," which encompass physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual aspects. These theories advocate for a balanced approach to treatment, integrating both the integrity and clinical dimensions of grief. Freud proposed the original 'grief work' theory, which involved the breaking of ties with the deceased, readjusting to new life circumstances, and building new relationships (Hamilton, 2016). The effectiveness of these models is significantly enhanced by the support of family and community. Continued research and scientific inquiry will further illuminate the various aspects of bereavement and grief. Guildin and Leget (2023) note that grief is inherently connected to death, with the majority of research originating from the field of psychology, particularly focusing on pathological manifestations of grief.

Individuals who have suffered the loss of a person with whom they had a close bond will continue to feel a lasting connection to the deceased, even after their death. This illustrates the enduring and lifelong relationship that was formed with that individual. It represents an emotional attachment, and several bereavement theorists, including White, Headtke, and Winslade, have also challenged conventional methods of addressing grief and bereavement.

Instead, they have investigated ways for the bereaved individual to sustain a relationship with the deceased (Palmer, 2018, p. 2).

Recommendations

To advance the field of grief and bereavement counseling, future work should prioritize greater empirical rigor through updated meta-analyses, RCTs, and longitudinal studies that incorporate effect sizes and identify predictors of prolonged grief disorder, while integrating neuroimaging and psychophysiological data to deepen understanding of grief's neurobiological mechanisms (Currier et al., 2008; Neimeyer, 2019). Comprehensive, standardized training curricula emphasizing cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and non-traditional modalities (e.g., Art Therapy, Play Therapy) are needed to address documented training deficits (Gaur, 2024), alongside comparative cross-cultural research with other collectivistic societies to strengthen the generalizability of India-specific findings.

Additionally, research should evaluate the efficacy, therapeutic alliance, and cost-effectiveness of digital/telehealth interventions and scalable community- or peer-led models, particularly for rural and low-resource settings; develop tailored approaches for emerging grief types such as ecological and collective grief (Pihkala, 2020); and design developmentally appropriate interventions for adolescents that leverage peer support and social media. These steps, combined with structural refinements for greater readability, will enhance scientific rigor, cultural relevance, accessibility, and practical impact of grief counseling in diverse and evolving global contexts.

Findings

The article provides a comprehensive synthesis of grief literature, effectively bridging foundational theories (e.g., Kübler-Ross's five-stage model, Bowlby's attachment theory) with contemporary perspectives, while addressing psychological, cultural, and clinical dimensions across diverse global contexts. It significantly enhances cultural relevance by focusing on India's collectivistic family structures and the amplified grief experiences following the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how close kinship ties and disrupted mourning rituals have increased prolonged grief disorder, particularly among youth and the elderly (Kumar, 2023; Verdery et al., 2020). The article evaluates a range of therapeutic interventions—including ACT, CBT, group therapy, art therapy, and play therapy—demonstrating their adaptability across age groups and settings, with emerging evidence supporting non-traditional approaches for emotional expression in children and older adults.

Additionally, it expands traditional grief models into a more nuanced seven-stage framework, incorporates critiques of stage linearity (Stroebe

et al., 2017), and recognizes emerging grief forms such as ecological and collective grief amid climate change and disasters. However, the article exhibits limitations in empirical rigor, relying primarily on theoretical and qualitative reviews rather than large-scale RCTs or meta-analyses, with sparse effect-size data for intervention efficacy. Notable gaps include inadequate grief counseling training (only 33% of counselors feel prepared; Gaur, 2024), underdeveloped exploration of neurobiological mechanisms, and structural redundancy in discussing grief stages and emotions, which affects readability and conciseness. Despite these shortcomings, the article remains highly timely in addressing post-pandemic mental health challenges and evolving counseling needs.

Discussion

A substantial body of scholarly literature exists in the domain of grief and bereavement, contributed by a diverse array of researchers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists. The present author has critically examined and disseminated scientific research and articles in both national and international journals, which illuminate the mediating factors involved in grief processes and therapeutic responses. In this study, the author endeavors to evaluate the different perspectives presented by various scholars, researchers, psychologists, and psychotherapists regarding the efficacy of grief and bereavement therapy. This examination contributes to a deeper understanding of the relevance, importance, and breadth of interventions related to grief and bereavement therapies.

Counseling provides psychological and emotional assistance to individuals facing challenges or crises, enabling them to effectively manage their circumstances and the realities of their lives. Many grief counselors take pride in their role, helping individuals navigate the profound and often overwhelming experience of loss (Larson & Hoyt, 2009). Numerous individuals find it challenging to control or regulate their emotions during times of grief. The prevalence of depression, anxiety, and sadness among the elderly is greater than in other demographics, and grief counseling plays a significant role in alleviating and managing their feelings of sorrow. As the global population of older adults continues to rise swiftly, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the psychological and social requirements of this age group (Rono et al., 2024). Emotions such as anger and jealousy often arise in these circumstances. It may be challenging to maintain control over feelings of helplessness. Those experiencing anger may not have a clear perspective. In such situations, emotional self-protection can be difficult to achieve.

What steps can be taken during times of grief? Jen Mak suggests that it is important to grant oneself the time and space to fully experience these

emotions. She also notes that significant progress, such as through practices like linear progress, may not be attainable at this time, as the emotions and thoughts that surface can often be confusing, overwhelming, and distressing. As trained mental health professionals, grief counsellors are also aware that these generally positive clinical experiences are only one source of data about the effectiveness of what we do (Larson & Hoyt, 2009).

When the intensity of grief reaches its peak, it necessitates the intervention of professionals. While many individuals may manage to cope with general sorrow and pain, the intricacies of complicated grief require specialized clinical assistance. This experience is deeply connected to our emotional state, significantly influencing our feelings and potentially fostering negative outlooks. Research indicates that bereavement, encompassing grief, adversely affects both physical and mental health, establishing a correlation with mortality. This heightened state of grief elevates the risk of death and can lead to serious physical and psychological conditions. It exacerbates the prominent symptoms of various psychiatric disorders, contributing to their prevalence over time.

When an individual is experiencing sadness, it is essential to examine the various stages they may be navigating. There is a perspective that the stages of the Kübler-Ross model do not always unfold sequentially. Not every individual will encounter each stage, and the progression through these stages is not necessarily linear. Many individuals can relate to these stages, making them a useful framework for self-reflection and understanding (https://www.therapistaid.com). The experience of death is often accompanied by heightened feelings of fear, vulnerability, indifference, and conservatism. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross articulated these stages based on her research with terminally ill patients at the University of Chicago, and her findings remain relevant and applicable to those who are grieving or facing the end of life.

Following thorough discussion, analysis, and the application of Kübler-Ross' original five-stage model, contemporary literature has expanded this framework into seven advanced stages that offer a valuable lens for understanding the internal experiences associated with loss. These stages— shock and disbelief, denial, guilt, anger and bargaining, depression, loneliness and reflection, reconstruction, and acceptance—are not necessarily experienced sequentially or by every individual. Rather, people may encounter them in varying orders or revisit certain stages at different points in their lives, reflecting the diverse ways in which we navigate challenging events, losses, and suffering.

A grief counselor may provide formal professional treatment, services, or interventions to individuals ("arthashastras" appears to be a typographical error and has been removed) in the event of complex grief. Appropriate interventions have been developed in order to improve their conditions.

More formal professional therapeutic interventions may be effective with those experiencing complex grief responses, according to available studies. However, evidence suggests that counseling may not be effective unless those who have lost a loved one feel that they themselves need help (Schut, 2010). Formal training provided to counselors in grief counseling enhances their understanding of clients and the challenges they face, enabling them to identify appropriate solutions to these issues. Numerous studies in the realm of grief counseling have explored effective methods for counselors currently in practice and strategies for managing clients in distress. However, many counselors lack adequate training and education in this area. For instance, a study conducted by Gaur revealed that only 33% of the 67% of counselors surveyed believed they had received formal training in grief counseling, and those who did felt that such training significantly improved their ability to conceptualize and diagnose the issues presented by their clients (Gaur, 2024).

Numerous studies in the area of grief and bereavement indicate a notable rise in the number of individuals experiencing these issues, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent findings have demonstrated that levels of stress and depression are especially elevated among young men and women. This increase can be attributed to various factors, including physical, mental, personal, educational, occupational, economic, and familial influences. Additionally, challenges such as social environments, relationship failures, and marital breakdowns contribute to this situation. Consequently, feelings of depression, anxiety, and sadness have become prevalent among the youth. People who interact with recently bereaved youth find them sad, angry, and fearful. Their behavior includes appetite and sleep disturbances, withdrawal, concentration difficulties, dependency, regression, restlessness, and learning difficulties (Loucia & Rany, 2018).

Grief and bereavement are common experiences in daily life, not classified as illnesses but as fundamental aspects of the human condition (Palmer, 2018). However, grief can lead to significant mental health challenges, particularly for those already managing existing mental health issues (Palmer, 2018). For teenagers, grief is uniquely complex due to developmental factors. The Illume Editorial Team (2023) identifies five key causes of grief in teenagers: the rise in hormone levels and emotional intensity exacerbates feelings associated with grief; young individuals often lack the capacity to navigate profound emotions as effectively as adults; support during times of loss highlights the reliance on adult figures; emphasis on peer relationships is significant; and the experience of death necessitates a reassessment of one's identity and perspective on the world (Illume Editorial Team, 2023).

Additionally, Kumar (2023) outlines four unique phases of grief in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing on Bowlby's (1980) phase

model: (a) numbing, characterized by shock and disbelief; (b) yearning and searching, marked by longing for the deceased; (c) disorganization and despair, involving sadness and difficulty adjusting; and (d) reorganization, where acceptance and rebuilding occur (Bowlby, 1980, as cited in Kumar, 2023). These phases were often disrupted during the pandemic, increasing the risk of prolonged grief disorder (Kumar, 2023).

Grief for self

It illustrates the various manifestations of grief that individuals encounter throughout their lives. These manifestations are often triggered by unforeseen circumstances, including illnesses, that arise unexpectedly. The characteristics of complicated grief gradually emerge within the individual over time. It can classically range from losing a loved one to the perceived loss of autonomy and dignity (Kumar, 2023).

Relational grief

Individuals may experience heightened emotions due to a series of life events. Common symptoms include tension, frustration, conflict, and depression. This experience of loss is intertwined with numerous fluctuations that we encounter, such as financial difficulties, unemployment, prolonged health deterioration, loss of social security, the death of loved ones, and the erosion of autonomy and dignity. This type of grief encompasses multiple dimensions, including mourning for a deceased loved one, ambiguous grief, anticipatory grief, and complex grief, among others (Kumar, 2023).

Collective grief

Numerous natural disasters, infectious diseases, and other unexpected occurrences pose significant threats to the lives of community members, resulting in increased mortality rates. Such sorrow deeply affects the community, leading to widespread suffering (Becker & Kleinman, 2022).

Ecological grief

This situation is closely tied to the anticipated damage inflicted upon the environment and ecosystems. Our vital natural surroundings and species have been suffering for an extended period. This grief arises from the harm inflicted on the environment, which serves as our protector, whether due to human actions or natural disasters (Pihkala, 2020).

Conclusion

Each individual encounters sorrowful pain at various points throughout their lives. This experience significantly influences our mental state and emotional well-being, often altering the course of our existence. The intensity

of the pain tends to escalate with the severity of the emotional turmoil. Grief counseling serves as a means to liberate us from this intricate web of suffering. The experience of grief can differ widely among individuals, both in intensity and in the effectiveness of coping mechanisms, influenced by the specific circumstances surrounding the loss and our personal responses to it. It's very natural to feel alone in your grief or worry that you're not grieving 'normally' (Usher, 2020). Early recognition of grief, coupled with appropriate therapeutic interventions or counseling, can mitigate its impact on our lives. Furthermore, if an individual adopts a strategy of negotiation with their grief, it may lead to increased comfort and a sense of happiness.

Grief is a multifaceted and intricate subject. This article illustrates that thorough investigation, along with compassionate and efficient support and guidance, is crucial for comprehending it. In the absence of adequate knowledge and essential skills for self-managing grief, seeking the assistance of a professional counselor becomes imperative. This approach provides the necessary understanding and deeper insight into the various stages and processes of grief (Neimeyer, 2019). Consequently, it facilitates more effective management and resilience in facing any future grief that may arise.

Potential Directions for Future Research

Future research on grief and bereavement counseling should prioritize closing existing knowledge gaps and responding to emerging global challenges. Key areas include culturally tailored interventions that integrate traditional support systems (e.g., joint-family structures in India) with modern therapies; longitudinal studies on the predictors and long-term outcomes of complicated and prolonged grief disorder, particularly among youth and the elderly; and rigorous evaluation of digital/telehealth platforms, non-traditional approaches (e.g., Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Art Therapy, Play Therapy, and narrative therapies), and their cost-effectiveness and scalability, especially in rural and low-resource settings.

Additional priorities encompass the impact of standardized, culturally sensitive grief counseling training on counselor competency and client outcomes; the neurobiological mechanisms underlying grief and therapeutic change; the unique features of pandemic-related, collective, disenfranchised, and ecological grief; and developmentally appropriate interventions for adolescents and young adults, including peer support and the role of social media. These directions will strengthen the evidence base, improve accessibility, and ensure that grief support remains relevant in diverse and rapidly changing sociocultural and environmental contexts.

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