

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mom, Jane Quinn, who supported me, loved me, and helped me survive and thrive after my dad died. I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me. I love you so much.

This dissertation is dedicated to all the children who have experienced the death of a parent.

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the people who help grieving children.

Abstract

A review of the literature reveals few articles that deal with social work with grieving children in the public school setting. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social workers provide to grieving children. Grieving children are defined as those who have experienced loss through death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend). This research addressed the following questions: 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children? 2) What services are provided? 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize? 4) To what community resources do school social workers refer grieving students? 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children? 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed? 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If so, what services are they providing? and 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

A purposive sample of 105 school social workers was selected based on the following criteria: (a) currently licensed in Minnesota as a school social worker, (b) currently employed as a school social worker in the Twin Cities, and (c) currently a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association. One hundred five school social workers were invited to participate in two parts of the study. Fifty-nine agreed to participate in the preliminary e-mail survey. Subsequently, of the 59, 22 school social workers were interviewed in-person for approximately 45-60 minutes.

This exploratory study required an open-ended, inductive approach using qualitative methods. Interviews were transcribed and coded through NVivo qualitative analysis software. Major codes were developed using the guided interview questions. Constant comparison was also utilized. The data analysis identified four main themes in the responses: (a) barriers to helping grieving students, (b) limitations placed on how grief is defined, (c) social workers' wide range on preparation for dealing with grief and loss issues, and (d) referring grieving students to outside resources. Subthemes were developed under each theme.

School social workers faced various barriers in helping grieving children, including parents' privacy and confidentiality concerns, teachers' lack of support, lack of time, lack of resources, being limited on what can be discussed in public schools related to religion and spirituality, and no private space to meet with students. School social workers reported that the definition of grief encompassed much more than grief over the death of a family member. Grief for children comes in many forms, including death of a parent, death of extended family member, student death, divorce, and pet loss. All school social workers interviewed recognized that they could not be available to students at all times and could not provide all the services that grieving students need. They realized that it was necessary for them to have good referral sources for the students, including various outside agencies and community resources. School social workers are not always receiving the type of training that is necessary to work with grieving students. They believed that they received little preparation in assisting children with grief and loss issues, and that they only received education on this topic if they sought it out themselves and took elective courses or continuing education.

Implications for practice: (1) School social workers' education should include courses that look at the types of grief experienced by children and be provided specific training in how to deal with grief. (2) School districts need to reconsider the budget allotted to hiring school social workers and to the resources they need. School social workers' roles should be expanded so they can respond to new and emerging needs of grieving students. (3) Social workers in the community and social workers in the school should communicate more with each other about their roles in helping grieving children, and this could help decrease duplication of services.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introduction

The topic of children's grief, school social work, and the school system is important because it affects so many people. Death is a part of life, and many children will experience the death of a loved one or a pet. According to the Social Security Administration, in the United States, an estimated 3.5% of children under age 18 (approximately 2.5 million) have experienced the death of a parent (Haine, R.A. et al., 2008). There are 70 million children under the age of 18 in the United States, with 36 million enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grades and 14 million enrolled in ninth through twelfth grades (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). There are over 15,000 school social workers across the country (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002).

On a daily basis, school social workers encounter children who have experienced a wide variety of stressful events (Williams, 1990). Therefore, social workers need a working knowledge of crisis intervention, grief, and treatment for post-traumatic stress (Williams, 1990). When a death occurs, people experience a stress reaction, and while most people will put the stress behind them, at least ten percent of children and possibly adults will experience profound long-lasting stress effects (Williams, 1990).

Social workers provide services in 45% of the public schools across the country (Allen-Meares, 2004). Education reform and an increasing emphasis on educational achievement have expanded social and mental health services in schools in the past several decades (Allen-Meares, 2004). Because schools are now mandated to develop systems that address barriers to learning for all students, not only those in special

education, there is an increasing reliance on school social workers (Allen-Meares, 2004). However, many schools and students, especially grieving students, still have no access to a social worker (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

There is an increased need for school social workers, because students increasingly suffer from mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Grief can sometimes lead to these more serious mental health issues. Social workers are the largest mental health providers in the United States, and it makes sense that they would provide mental health services to students in the schools. Approximately 20 percent of children and adolescents are significantly depressed, and many more have low-self esteem (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Suicide is the third leading cause of death among adolescents and young adults in the United States, and those who feel depressed, overwhelmed, and hopeless about the future often consider suicide (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

Today's children face an increasing number of social and health issues, and "every year, one in five children and adolescents experiences the signs and symptoms of a DSM-IV disorder" (Allen-Meares, p. 278, 2004). Grieving children often experience some initial depression and anxiety, and although this is normal, it can sometimes linger and become problematic. School social workers who are clinically trained can differentiate between normal and problematic grief, depression, and anxiety. If school social workers are given enough time to work with grieving, depressed, and anxious students, they can help decrease students' symptoms, improve their functioning, and help them feel better emotionally.

There is a need to have social workers available to all students, not just students with special needs or in special education. Schools need to enable every student, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and cognitive ability, to reach her or his full potential (Constable, 1992). School social workers are in an excellent central position to work with all types of students, issues, problems, and needs, particularly changes in family structures (Constable, 1992). Providing assistance to the entire student population means increasing school social work involvement in a multitude of issues and problems that students are facing, including grief (Constable, 1992).

Schools are no longer just buildings or classrooms, but are conceptualized as communities of families and school personnel engaged in the educational process, and school social workers assist in making schools real communities (Constable, 1992). For some children, school is a respite from their problematic home life; for others, school is a source of anxiety and stress (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Their larger communities and societal context impact schools; if social supports are not present for children and their families to buffer the consequences of issues and problems affecting them, school success is unlikely (Allen-Meares, 2004).

Most of the literature about schools, students, and social work does not even mention grieving children. Groups identified as needing school social work assistance include students in poverty, gay and lesbian youth, abused and neglected children, students with special needs, students using or addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, violent children, children with ADHD or other mental illness diagnoses, students at risk for suicide, students in gangs, students with delinquent behavior, truant students, students

of a different race or culture, and students who speak English as a second language.

However, time and time again, mourning children are forgotten.

This paper outlines the importance of school social work with grieving children. The first chapter consists of the introduction. The second chapter is a review of the literature. The literature review encompasses areas of grief and schools, schools' responses, the history of school social work, school social work roles, roles of other school professionals (counselors and psychologists), children's grief, the ecological perspective, and school social work with grieving children. The research question is also stated in the second chapter. The third chapter discusses methodology, design, sample, subject recruitment, data collection and management, and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the results/findings. The fifth chapter consists of the discussion, including limitations and implications for practice.

Definitions

Children: Students in grades kindergarten through twelve in Minnesota schools

Grief: The normal response to loss; these responses include thoughts, feelings, behaviors, physical responses, and spiritual responses

Grieving Children: Children who have experienced loss through the death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend)

Loss: The condition of having lost something or someone through death; loss is experienced as “a threat to the grieving individual’s continued existence because she or he may not find another person to meet the critical emotional social, and physical needs formerly met by the dead person” (Freeman, p. 243, 1984)

School Social Worker: Social workers who are licensed as school social workers by the Minnesota Department of Education

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Grief in Schools and Schools' Responses

Death can take many forms in schools, including being violent and unexpected, like what happened at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (Klicker, 1999) or at the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota. It can also be quiet and anticipated, like the death of a student with a long illness (Klicker, 1999). Most of the literature surrounding death, grief, and schools involves the former, and involves the death of students.

However, what is missing from the literature is the impact that the death of a family member can have on a student. There is very little about how this type of death and grief affects a student in school and how the school should respond and help students grieving the death of a loved one. Most of the literature and research relating to children and grief discusses grief reactions and counseling or therapy; there is a scarcity of studies that directly discuss addressing children's grief over the death of a loved one and how this issue relates to and impacts the school setting. And yet, grieving students need a supportive, caring, and helpful environment (Klicker, 1999).

There is ample literature in the United States about children's grief in general and about various interventions in schools. Yet, this writer could find no United States-based research that directly collected data from schools by asking school professionals, including school social workers, what they are observing in regard to the grieving children in their schools. However, one study of English school children (Holland, 1993) reported that seventy percent of primary schools have bereaved children, and many of these children have physical or psychological problems; forty percent of bereaved school children have disruptive behaviors, such as anger, crying, withdrawal,

violence, insecurity, over-attachment, obsessive behavior, depression, lack of concentration, and deterioration in school work (Klicker, p. 5, 1999). Another English study (Holland & Ludford, 1995) reported that although secondary school students are likely to have a more sophisticated concept of death, they may lack sympathetic support in schools with a large number of students. Eighty-seven percent of secondary schools reported post-bereavement physical or psychological problems, such as anger, depression, withdrawal, attention-seeking behavior, reduced levels of motivation, lack of concentration, and increased absenteeism (Klicker, 1999).

Increasing numbers of school-age children are experiencing grief reactions due to the death of parents or other people with whom they had significant relationships (Freeman, 1984). However, “the impact of the death of a parent often is not appreciated in all its importance by school personnel,” even though “the death of a parent can have an adverse impact on academic performance and social behavior” (Zambelli & Clark, p. 3, 1994). Schools often do not assist students in their abilities to cope with grief and loss (Freeman, 1984).

Some students experience stressful events in their lives outside of school, and these events, like parental death, create huge losses and affect their adjustment to school (Freeman, 1984). Schools often do not respond to grieving students’ needs, and their losses can be intensified and efforts to resolve the related grief may be blocked (Freeman, 1984). “Schools often exacerbate students’ losses because of inadequate knowledge and inappropriate responses by staff” (Freeman, p. 246, 1984).

This writer could find no U.S.-based studies, but Holland’s (2003) research in England with adults bereaved as children found that “their experiences on returning to

school after a death were not always positive” (p. 76). In fact, children’s return to school was “often problematic,” with school personnel and peers not knowing how to respond to grieving children once they returned to school (p. 76). Children felt ignored, isolated, embarrassed, uncertain, and different, and felt that their schools gave them little support or understanding.

Holland (2008) states that schools are in a “unique position to help grieving children” (p. 415). Even though grief is a family issue, it has the potential to affect children while they are in school, especially since children spend so much of their time in school. Schools have “the potential to be a safe haven” and even a “second family” (p. 425). It is important to establish trust and rapport with grieving students and their families. Sensitive staff who acknowledge the needs of grieving students can help them cope with their loss. Holland’s study consisted of interviews with adults who had experienced grief in childhood, so the number of participants were limited, and because the interviews occurred well past the time the bereavement occurred, this study added only a little to what is known about childhood grief.

There is a great deal of information on grief and loss, however there is not as much information on how to help students or school communities deal with grief and loss. Death is a part of life, and schools need to enhance their response. The available literature indicates there is a need for school personnel to learn how death affects both the student and the school community, and there is also a need for schools to develop a specific plan to respond to a death, including in-service training programs around grief and loss (Klicker, 1999).

Although the literature shows that more and more schools have developed or are developing a response plan for a crisis situation or for death of someone within the school community, there is little discussion about what schools do or should do when a student experiences the death of a loved one (especially a parent) and is grieving. Many schools have crisis response teams for events or incidents that affect a large group of students, like when a student or teacher dies. Yet again, the literature does not address having a grief response team or a response plan for when just one student is grieving, such as when a student loses a parent.

(Klicker, 1999).

History of School Social Work

School social work began during the school year 1906-1907 (Allen-Meares, 2004). It began independently in three cities: New York, Boston, and Hartford. The development of school social work originated outside of the school system: private agencies and civic organizations in these three cities supported the work. In 1906, “as education became increasingly regarded as a right for every child, the importance of linking school and community took on more significance” (Allen-Meares, p. 23, 2004). During this time, school social workers (then called visiting teachers) took on the important role of linking school and home (Allen-Meares, 2004). The goal was to promote understanding and communication between school and community, which would bring about more harmony between school and home, making the child’s education more effective.

In the 1910s, the main role of the school social worker continued to be as a home-school-community liaison. One of the most important functions was to “supply

evidence of unfavorable conditions that underlie children's school difficulties and by pointing out needed change" (Allen-Meares, p. 26, 2004). However, as compulsory school attendance laws passed, some school social workers were also assigned the responsibility of being attendance enforcement officers.

The number of school social workers increased in the 1920s, largely as a result of demonstrations backed by the support of the Commonwealth Fund of New York, which was aimed at the prevention of juvenile delinquency (Allen-Meares, 2004). The 1920s marked the beginning of a therapeutic role for school social workers. The mental hygiene movement increased the emphasis on treating the individual child. School social workers helped diagnose and treat nervous and difficult children.

During the 1930s, school social workers continued to focus on a more specialized role—providing emotional support for troubled children (Allen-Meares, 2004). There was a push for social workers to be more professional and have a more well-defined role. The role was changing from one of school-community liaison to preventing poor mental health among children.

During the 1940s and 1950s, school social workers put less emphasis on their liaison role and focused primarily on the casework approach (Allen-Meares, 2004). Social change and neighborhood conditions were no longer seen as targets of intervention. Instead, there was mostly a clinical orientation, and the personality needs of the individual child was the primary focus.

During the 1960s and 1970s, school social workers played a variety of roles. Social workers broadened their perspective and focused on many different areas: the individual student, the family, the community, and working as a team with other

disciplines. The focus shifted away from the individual child back to the broader world of the school and community (Allen-Meares, 2004).

During the 1980s, there were several important shifts in practice. First, school social work focused on pupil groups (specifically children with disabilities). Second, they focused on work with other school personnel. Third, the liaison role was again emphasized. Fourth, the role of promoting change in school policies was also emphasized. During the 1990s to the present time, legislation largely determines the school social worker role (Allen-Meares, 2004).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476), the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), and the Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 (P.L. 100-297), state that schools must provide services to special needs and at-risk students (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). A multi-disciplinary team, which may include school social workers, must provide services to students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, speech and language delays, developmental disorders (e.g., autism), severe cognitive impairments (e.g., mental retardation), physical disabilities, or serious emotional disturbances (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

These laws greatly increased the presence of social work services in the schools. The Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 103-382) also increased social work presence in the schools, because this act provides funding to school systems to raise academic skills of low-income and at-risk children (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

Unfortunately, funding for school social workers is primarily tied to the legislative initiatives that provide services only to disabled students, and therefore school social workers often serve primarily only those populations identified in these laws (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Therefore, school social work services are “driven by legislation rather than being empowered by its own vision of goals and objectives” (Huxtable & Blyth, p. 49, 2002). This situation makes it difficult for school social workers to respond to the increasing, new, and emerging needs that are occurring, including the needs of grieving students (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

School Social Work Roles

School social workers have been perceived at different times and places as educators, psychotherapists, social planners, and liaisons between home and school (Constable & Montgomery, 1985). Social workers have been part of the educational system since the early 20th century, and since that time, the focus of social work services has vacillated between direct and indirect services (Constable & Montgomery, 1985). The focus of school social work has gone back and forth between social workers delivering counseling services as their main role, to social workers providing consultation, collaboration, and systems and policy changes as their main role (Constable & Montgomery, 1985). Today, social workers perform a mixture of both indirect and direct roles, although it varies from school to school, and the role is broad (Constable & Montgomery, 1985). As children and families become more vulnerable, there is a greater recognition of the crucial role the school plays in the total life of the child (Constable & Montgomery, 1985).

There has been a growing trend toward a broader definition of the role of school social worker – school social workers now attend to a range of social and emotional needs of students (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). School social workers have wide-ranging responsibilities in special education, mental health, and advocacy. School social workers are seen as “experts in understanding human behavior, mental health issues, relationships, and interventions” (Huxtable & Blyth, p. 46, 2002).

The seven functions of school social workers’ roles are: 1) direct counseling with individuals, groups, and families, 2) advocacy, 3) consultation, 4) community linkage, 5) interdisciplinary team coordination, 6) needs assessment, and 7) program and policy development (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002). Social workers intervene at the individual, group, classroom, family, school, community, policy, and legislative levels (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

School social workers advocate for and empower students and families; maintain a link and communication between home and school; educate students and families; consult with teachers about students’ home and community lives; make referrals; and identify and develop resources for students, families, and communities (Dupper, 2003). School social workers also participate in conferences, collaborate with teachers and other school professionals, are members of crisis response teams, complete comprehensive assessments, provide individual and group counseling to students, conduct classroom activities, and implement prevention programs (Dupper, 2003).

One study found that 50 percent of a national sample of school social workers reported spending at least 75 percent of their time on tasks relating to P.L. 94-142 (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Another study shows that approximately 60 to 75 percent of

a school social worker's time is spent on services to disabled students. Although this population is very important, there are still many more students who need and could benefit from social work services who are not receiving them because there are not enough social workers or not enough time in school social workers' days to assist other students. Often, social workers only have time or are told by administrators to deal only with crises rather than be proactive or preventive.

Many referrals to school social workers are related to children's behavior problems, and other referrals involve family problems and social conditions that have created problems for the child in school (Ginsburg, 1990). It is important to know what current situations and issues that students are facing, their current status, and the resources available for coping with them (Ginsburg, 1990). Therefore, it is important that school social workers have knowledge about grief and loss and about interventions to help students cope. School social workers are often limited to working with students' family problems that affect students' in-school behavior and progress (Ginsburg, 1990). Grief unquestionably can affect children's functioning, behavior, and success in school, and therefore should be a concern and priority of school social workers.

Along with the increased demand for school social workers to serve students with developmental disabilities, it is also necessary that they assist with issues of a more diverse student population, increased poverty among children and families, increased violence, increased social issues, decreased funding, and decrease in quality in some schools (Allen-Meares, 2004). All of these significant concerns and problems leave school social workers with little time to provide counseling and assistance to grieving students.

School Social Worker Roles Compared to School Counselor and School Psychologist Roles

The roles of the school social worker, school psychologist, and school counselor do not have clearly delineated boundaries, and the functions of the three types of personnel often overlap (Radin & Welsh, 1984). This is not surprising, because all three professions have their roots in the social sciences, largely psychology (Radin & Welsh, 1984). The similarity in certain functions performed by these disciplines stems from some overlap in their theoretical bases (Radin & Welsh, 1984). There is competition among school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors regarding their roles, and their roles have become increasingly similar, exacerbated by budgetary constraints that limit the number of professionals that schools districts can hire (Agresta, 2004). All three types of school personnel are mental health workers, whatever other tasks they perform (Radin & Welsh, 1984). All are engaged in preventing students' emotional and social problems and reducing the consequences of early difficulties (Radin & Welsh, 1984). When reviewing the literature regarding the different disciplines, the reader saw the ecological perspective emphasized more often in social work practice than in the other professions.

School social workers are "members of a multidisciplinary team of school professionals," which can "sometimes result in role confusion and turf battles" (Dupper, pp. 9-10, 2003). For example, school social workers and school counselors provide individual and group counseling, and both social workers and psychologists may provide consultation and education to teachers (Dupper, 2003). However, each discipline has its own area of expertise. Psychologists have more knowledge and skill

in test administration, counselors have more knowledge regarding vocational guidance, and social workers have more knowledge regarding the home and the community (Radin & Welsh, 1984).

In one study (Agresta, 2004), school social workers reported spending on average 17% of their professional time on individual counseling and 10% of time on group counseling. School social workers in this study indicated that they would like to spend even more time on individual counseling and group counseling, with their ideal proportion being on average 22% and 13%, respectively (N= 486 total; 183 social workers, 137 psychologists, 166 school counselors). On average, school psychologists actually spent 7% of their time on individual counseling and 3% on group counseling, but would ideally like to spend on average 11% and 6% of their time in these roles, respectively. On average, school counselors actually spent 20% of their time on individual counseling and 8% on group counseling, and would ideally like to spend on average 26% and 14% of their time on these tasks, respectively. In this study, all three professions regarded individual and group counseling as appropriate roles for school social workers.

Children's Grief

Grief is universal, yet everyone grieves in her or his own way; grief is a normal response to loss for people of all ages. These responses include thoughts, feelings, behaviors, physical responses, and spiritual responses. Most people associate grief with a loss through death, but grief can be experienced after any major loss, like divorce, relocation, job loss, or a breakup of a relationship or friendship. Although everyone grieves differently, there are common grief responses that most children and adults

experience, and these include physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual responses. Loss is the condition of having lost something or someone through death. Loss is experienced as “a threat to the grieving individual’s continued existence because she or he may not find another person to meet the critical emotional social, and physical needs formerly met by the dead person” (Freeman, p. 243, 1984). Loss is often more of a threat to children because they are more dependent on others for their basic needs (Freeman, 1984).

The severity and duration of grief reactions to death losses are dependent on a number of interrelated variables, including the following: 1) the quality and closeness of the individual’s relationship with the person prior to the loss, 2) the opportunity for the individual to begin the mourning process prior to the loss, 3) the developmental stage the individual is in when the loss occurs, 4) the individual’s prior experiences with loss and grief, 5) the quality of the relationships between the individual and other significant individuals at the time the loss occurs, and 6) the amount of emotional and practical support provided to the individual during and after the loss (Freeman, 1984).

Parents, schools, and society cannot ignore or maintain innocence about grief in children (Rowling, 2003). Although there are some limitations to children’s understanding about death and grief, they do understand some aspects of loss, they experience it, and they do take action to cope (Rowling, 2003). With “appropriate knowledge and support,” children have the capacity to be resilient to grief and loss experiences (Rowling, p. 20, 2003). Unfortunately, however, children’s attempts to cope with their grief are not always recognized by adults and schools, and opportunities

to assist them in exploring their feelings and coping with grief may be lost (Rowling, 2003).

The signs and symptoms of children's grief are less obvious than adults' grief, due to children's incomplete emotional and cognitive development (Zambelli & Clark, 1994). Because of these "developmental differences in cognitive abilities and personality structures, children are at more psychological risk" after a death than adults (Zambelli & Clark, p. 3, 1994).

Grieving students may have the following reactions: want to call home during the school day, cannot concentrate on homework or class work, burst into tears in the middle of class, worry excessively about her or his own health, reject old friends and seek new friends who have experienced a similar loss through a death, feel the deceased is with her or him in some way, retell events of the deceased's death and funeral, dream of the deceased, sometimes appear to be unfeeling about loss, become the class clown to get attention, and be overly concerned with care-taking needs (Klicker, 1999). A wide range of grief behaviors in grieving school children need to be tolerated: screaming in anguish, pounding the lockers in anger, sobbing in the hallway, stunned silence, and inability to answer even simple questions, seeming totally unaffected as if nothing happened, and various disruptive or inappropriate statements (Klicker, 1999).

The cognitive symptoms of their reactions may include problem solving, loss of attention and concentration – all factors that are very important to successful school performance (Williams, 1990). In addition, grieving and stressed children may experience emotional symptoms like anxiety, fear, grief, depression, irritability, anger, and feeling overwhelmed or hopeless, all of which can also interfere with school

performance (Williams, 1990). Children who are experiencing loss often have a difficult time coping in the school environment and may experience a lack of concentration, an inability to complete tasks, fatigue, and/or be very emotional (Dupper, 2003).

In their literature review, Zambelli and Clark (1994) found that grieving children may experience increased daydreaming, social withdrawal, and lack of concentration. They may also refuse to go to school and want to remain close to home, because they have a fear of losing the remaining parent. When a parent or very close family member dies, the grieving child's trust in family life and general safety and well-being has been broken and the child may experience fear and apprehensiveness until a new sense of stability can be established.

The literature shows that children who have experienced the death of a parent are at greater risk for overall school maladaptation than children who have not experienced this, and therefore a child's grief response cannot be overlooked or ignored in the classroom or school setting (Zambelli & Clark, 1994). It is unclear why some grieving children have problems in school after parental death and others do not; Zambelli & Clark (1994) note that the literature suggests that socioeconomic status, religious orientation, ethnic background, prior relationship to the deceased, circumstances of the death, gender of the deceased, level of cognitive and emotional development, the child's prior exposure to death, and the family's overall adaptation to the death are all variables which may influence a child's reaction and school adjustment.

Often the first significant indicator that a child is experiencing emotional difficulty over the death of a parent is school maladjustment (Zambelli & Clark, 1994). Maladaptive grief responses in the classroom can be either immediate or delayed, and can include: school phobia, underachievement, learning disability, speech difficulties, discipline problems, shy-anxious behavior, school drop-out, and deeper psychological problems. Intervening and assisting grieving students can prevent and ameliorate these issues and problems. Being attentive to children's grief is crucial, since there can be many negative consequences or school problems that can occur because of a death in the family.

Another important concept in children's grief is that as children grow older, they "re-evaluate earlier losses, developing new perspectives as they mature" (Rowling, p. 30, 2003). This is important for school personnel to understand, because a child or teenager may be re-grieving her or his losses years after the initial death. Also, if a person experiences a new loss, she or he may connect it to a previous loss, and grieve the previous loss again or in a new way (Rowling, 2003). It is crucial to recognize and support students at these times.

Because children who have lost a parent by death may experience a wide variety of academic and behavioral difficulties at school, "school social workers need to be prepared to manage children's grief within the academic setting" (Zambelli & Clark, p. 1, 1994). A child who has experienced a parent's death must be viewed in an ecological perspective in how the death affects the child at all levels and aspects of life, including school (Zambelli & Clark, 1994).

The Potential Roles for School Social Work with Grieving Children

All schools should be prepared to handle issues related to death and grief, and the school social worker role and support is “invaluable in assisting students and school personnel (Openshaw, 2008, p. 241).” However, there is limited empirical research about what school social workers do with grieving children. Instead, the literature speaks mainly to the ideals of how they should and can help this population. When grief occurs, the psychologist or social worker is the primary in-school referral person, because their education, background, and experience renders them most qualified to provide in-school counseling of students, provide information and assistance to school staff, complete assessments, contact students’ families, and make referrals when necessary (Klicker, 1999). Social workers have the knowledge and skills to help students and staff through appropriate interventions, provide individual counseling and grief groups, and serve on crisis response teams (Openshaw, 2008). However, there is not yet data to support this; instead, most of the literature suggests aspirations for school social workers.

The support that people who are grieving receive usually diminishes over time (Openshaw, 2008). However, it takes time to grieve, and outside support often diminishes just as grieving families need it the most. Children may be “just beginning to deal with the pain of grief, and this is why it is so critical for school social workers and other school personnel to “be aware of students who have experienced the loss of a loved one and to offer support for many months afterward” (Openshaw, 2008, p. 229). School social workers can provide a supportive environment at school.

School social workers target four levels of intervention: individual, family, community, and societal (Allen-Meares, 2004). There is an opportunity to assist grieving students at each level by providing individual counseling, group counseling, family counseling, family education, community education, and societal education regarding grief and loss issues. Each of the four levels place various demands on students, and grieving students often need time, assistance, and understanding. If school social workers can temporarily decrease the demand from others on grieving students, they will be of great assistance.

Social workers could assist students with grief and loss issues by offering their time, empathy, education, counseling, and groups to students, families, and staff. A potential role for school social workers is to identify unmet needs or patterns and implement grief support groups when they could be helpful and effective. School social workers are also involved with crisis intervention and provide assistance in helping students move back to normal levels of functioning (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

There are many potential roles for school social workers working with grieving children. They could assist with a student's grief in a variety of ways, including serving as consultant, support person, and confidante to students, parents, staff, and community (Arbetter, 1984). School social workers could provide support to grieving students, and also teachers and other students. School social workers could assist teachers in explaining a death to other students, and can help facilitate a group discussion with students and classrooms that is sensitive to children's various developmental ages, degrees of coping skills, and varying experiences with death. Children's questions

related to grief and death should be answered simply and honestly, and school social workers can draw on their coursework and knowledge of child development.

School social workers can help create an atmosphere in school in which facts and feelings of life and death are openly discussed (Cole, 1987). School social workers give students the opportunity to grieve their losses, and they also create a school environment that is more sensitive to the significant number of children experiencing loss (Dupper, 2003).

Cole (1987) points out that grieving students can experience a decrease in self-esteem, and social workers can assist students with increasing their self-esteem and feeling better about themselves. School social workers could help integrate death into the educational experience, and be proactive in getting it into the school curriculum. When a student is grieving, school social workers could help them understand death and express their feelings about it. They could use techniques such as reading and discussing fairy tales and stories, role-playing, puppetry, art activities, and classroom discussions. Because of their training and expertise, school social workers could offer help and guidance to colleagues as well. School social workers can ensure that death, as a part of the life process, can be openly discussed in the educational setting.

Fear, sadness, anger, and uncertainty are normal emotions in a time of crisis and changing events (Franklin, 2002), including a death in the family. School social workers could help normalize and validate these grief reactions by offering students an opportunity to express their feelings and concerns. They could debrief and counsel students and offer emotional support to grieving and distressed students. Another role for school social workers to play when working with students facing a crisis, fear, and

uncertainty could be to promote rational problem solving and assist them with coping skills and adaptation responses. People who utilize problem-focused coping “take action and, despite feelings of anger, fear, or grief, purposefully act, or refrain from acting, to make things better” (Franklin, p. 4, 2002). However, children must be taught problem-focused coping skills (Franklin, 2002), social workers can teach both children and also their parents or guardians.

School social workers could assist with educating grieving students, their families, school personnel, and communities about which feelings, thoughts, and behaviors are normal. They could provide guidance on what is not normal (pathological grief), the warning signs of depression and suicide, and when a grieving child may need more help. School social workers could educate others about developmental aspects of children’s grief. They could also help grieving students with all of these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that go along with normal grief. School social workers could provide a caring, empathetic, patient, and understanding ear to grieving students.

School social workers could help students mitigate and cope effectively with their grief and loss (Freeman, 1984). They could immediately recognize the loss and provide opportunities for students to discuss and deal with the loss, which can include individual and group counseling. School social workers can help students develop new linkages and peer support systems, which can be accomplished by facilitating peer grief support groups or having one-on-one peer grief support. School social workers could also provide in-services for teachers, staff, and parents to increase their understanding of grief and loss issues.

According to the literature, grieving students need support, understanding, empathy, and caring that allows them to express grief, loss, and other emotions (Williams, 1990). School social work intervention is designed to help the grieving child utilize her/his capacities and resources to resolve traumatic memories as well as accompanying behavioral, cognitive, emotional, physiological, and relationship effects.

School social workers could support grieving students by: 1) developing an increased awareness of their own response patterns to personal and professional losses, 2) increasing their knowledge of theoretical perspectives on loss and grief, 3) developing their assessment skills, 4) identifying target groups of students who are experiencing major losses, and 5) developing a range of intervention strategies (Freeman, 1984).

Typical intervention strategies or approaches that could be utilized by school social workers when working with a grieving student include an initial assessment of the causes, extent and effects of the difficulties at the individual and group levels; an ecological approach is taken because the social looks at the problem systematically as it presents within the individual and the environment (Zambelli & Clark, 1994). School social workers could assess grieving children's support system, observe the child in the classroom, solicit feedback from teacher, and interview the family and child. School social workers could explore the grieving child's response to the death; the changes the death has caused in the child's life; the nature and intensity of feelings expressed; the methods of coping with death, feelings, and changes; the manner of handling feelings and reactions to the death; unproductive behavioral responses; and the child's understanding of the death.

When death and grief arise, it is helpful to establish support groups and counseling for grieving children in the schools because school is often “the one place in a child’s life where there is stability and continuity” (Mervis, p. 17, 1989). When a death, change, or other loss occurs, there “remains a consistency to the school routine that can be comforting to a child whose family life is in a state of upheaval” (Mervis, p. 17, 1989). Another reason for locating support groups and counseling in schools is that children spend a large portion of their day in school; arranging transportation or juggling schedules are difficult for already stressed and overwhelmed families (Mervis, 1989). Peer validation and support are so important to school-aged children, and this should be readily accessible in schools. Children with adequate support systems are better in crises than children who must face them alone.

The literature reviewed in the above section was conceptual in nature as there have been no studies in the United States that have dealt with the issue of school social workers and grieving school children. The present study by using a qualitative methodology will open up the area for further research based on the themes that are developed in the qualitative interviews.

Theoretical Framework - Ecological Perspective

Literature suggests that the ecological perspective of practice is the most useful for the school social work profession; this perspective enables social workers to attain social work goals and to direct their practice (Allen-Meares, 2004). School social workers need to be aware of the effect that many different institutions and aspects of life have on the social functioning of the child. The ecological approach directs attention to the whole system surrounding the child, instead of just one aspect. For

example, this perspective takes into account the child's home environment, which has been shown to affect the level of a student's measured intelligence and success in school (Allen-Meares, 2004). Grief at home can potentially affect a child's school performance. The management of school maladjustment that results from parental death is best done with ecological interventions (Zambelli & Clark, 1994).

An ecological perspective provides the framework for understanding the nature of the transactions between the students and their environments (Allen-Meares, 2004), including grieving students and school. The impact of parental death on children should be viewed "in context with the role the event plays within the various levels of family structure as well as the effect on and between other ecological environments in the child's life," especially school (Zambelli & Clark, p. 2, 1994). The ecological perspective maintains that the school, the neighborhood, and the larger society impact a child's grief responses, adjustment in school, and school success (Zambelli & Clark, 1994).

Early school social work started with using the traditional casework emphasis (Chavkin, 1993), but has now moved to an ecological perspective and strengths-based approach that is similar to overall social work practice (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). This approach looks at the entire system: the whole school, target groups of students, and the relationships among home, school, and community. School social workers see the home, school, and community all as active participants in the educational process (Chavkin, 1993). School is seen as part of a larger social system, and school social workers are utilized in not only individual change, but in system and institutional change (Chavkin, 1993). The ecological perspective focuses on broader systems that

impact students, such as peers, teachers, classrooms, administrators, schools, and the community.

The ecological perspective has school social workers broadening their view and understanding of students' problems and therefore increasing the array and amount of interventions (Dupper, 2003), including interventions with grieving children. Rather than seeing problems as intrinsic within or to the child, problems are understood as something occurring between the child and her or his environment (Dupper, 2003). When considering interventions, school social workers not only address environmental stressors, but also enhance students' coping skills (Dupper, 2003). This perspective can be different than other disciplines working in schools, which may view problems as within the child, and social workers sometimes feel pressure to blame the child and help students adjust to dysfunctional school conditions rather than targeting those conditions for change (Dupper, 2003).

Social workers have a mission in schools that is unique to their profession: assist students as well as focus on schools, families, neighborhoods, and communities (Dupper, 2003). In other words, school social workers are both student-focused and system-focused (Dupper, 2003), and the ecological perspective is a good fit. School social workers' approach is to take a full view of the child and what is happening to her/him, including considering what is occurring from the child's point of view (Ginsburg, 1990). This perspective is crucial when working with grieving children. They view the child as a whole, and therefore focus on the child, family, and school/learning environment in relation to one another (Constable, McDonald, & Flynn, 2002). School social workers following the ecological perspective focus and build on

students' strengths, and they create interventions based on this; this perspective also provides the opportunity for school social workers to be preventive and proactive (Dupper, 2003).

Problem and Significance

There is not much written about school social work with grieving children. A great deal of the literature focuses separately on the facts of school social work and on children's grief, but these two topics are not linked together in either research or the literature. A review of the literature reveals few articles that deal with issues of death and loss in the public school setting. The available literature discusses student death in the schools, but ignores grieving students who have lost a parent, sibling, or close family member through death. School social work with grieving children is a very important issue because children spend most of their time in school, there are many children experiencing grief, and school social work is a resource for grieving children.

Research Question

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social workers provide to grieving children in schools. For this study, grieving children are defined as those who have experienced loss through the death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend). Data from this research will help advance our understanding of the work of school social workers with grieving students. This research is aimed at uncovering the following questions:

- 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children in Twin Cities schools?
- 2) What services are provided?

- 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize?
- 4) To which community resources do school social workers refer grieving students?
- 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children?
- 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed?
- 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If yes, what services are they providing?
- 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Institutional Review Board

The researcher applied for and received approval for this study from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Minnesota. The IRB Code Number is: 0806P35682.

Design

As previously noted, very little is known about school social work with grieving children, and therefore what is needed at this stage is a qualitative exploratory study to fill in the gap and increase the knowledge in the present body of research. Quantitative methods may not uncover the most important dimensions of the problems. Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out that qualitative methods can be used to explore areas about which little is known. Hence, a qualitative approach seems to be the most reasonable approach for answering these research questions (Patton, 1990).

The exploratory nature of the study required an inductive, open-ended approach. Qualitative methods are appropriate because the goal is to build theory that is grounded in data. The purpose is to uncover rich meaning and thick description that will aid in a better understanding of school social work with grieving children. The data analysis process included discovering themes and patterns and the relationships among them, which in turn will lead to increased knowledge and understanding of school social work with grieving children. Since little is known in this area, the purpose of this study is not to generalize to a larger population of social workers, so using qualitative methods is the best method.

In grounded theory, theory is derived from the examination of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The approach taken to gathering and analyzing the data will be an inductive process, rather than a deductive process. In the inductive process, a researcher does not have a preconceived theory in mind before beginning the research. Rather, the researcher brings an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Grounded theory, because it is drawn from data, offers insight and understanding.

With the research questions as a guide, the purpose of this study was to discover themes and patterns from the experiences of the participants and generate theory. The data collected and analyzed were grounded in the experiences of the participants. The process of this research allowed the experiences of the participants to be expressed and heard through in-depth interviews. Through this process, a better understanding about school social work with grieving children was gained.

This study was comprised of two parts. School social workers from the Twin Cities were invited to participate in (a) a preliminary, 6-question e-mail survey and (b) a 60-minute, in-person interview.

Sample

The sample consisted of school social workers in the Twin Cities Metro Area. The participants are licensed as School Social Workers by the Minnesota Department of Education. To be eligible to be licensed as a School Social Worker, one must first be licensed by the Minnesota State Board of Social Work. Even though all participants held a School Social Work license, they held different licenses from the Minnesota State Board of Social Work. These licenses include: Licensed Social Worker (LSW), Licensed Graduate Social Worker (LGSW), Licensed Independent Social Worker

(LISW), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LICSW). Social workers at any state licensure level can be licensed as a School Social Worker in Minnesota.

A purposive sample (Babbie, 2004) of 105 school social workers was selected based on the following criteria: (a) currently licensed in Minnesota as a school social worker, (b) currently employed as a school social worker in the Twin Cities, and (c) currently a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association.

Approximately 105 school social workers were sent an invitation via e-mail to participate in both parts of the study. Fifty-nine school social workers agreed to participate in the preliminary e-mail survey. Subsequently, 22 school social workers who agreed to participate in the second part of the study were interviewed in-person for approximately 45-60 minutes.

Efforts were made to diversify the sample by interviewing not only both urban and suburban school social workers, but also social workers who work at all levels—elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. This diversity was important because these differences in students' ages and in type of school may offer additional insights about services available for grieving children. Appendix K shows some demographic data of the 22 subjects who participated in the in-person interview.

Subject Recruitment

In order to obtain a list of possible participants, the researcher contacted the Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA) to obtain a list of names and e-mail addresses of school social workers who belong to this organization. To recruit participants, the researcher e-mailed a letter inviting school social workers to participate in the study (Appendix A). There are approximately 105 school social workers who

belong to the Minnesota School Social Workers Association and work in Twin Cities schools, and all of these members received an e-mail invitation to participate in the study. Of the 105 e-mails sent, 10 came back as undeliverable. Therefore, only 95 participants received the e-mail invitation. Individuals who were interested in participating in the preliminary six-question Internet survey clicked on the link from the e-mail and completed the survey. Individuals who were interested in participating in the 60-minute, in-person interview provided their name and contact information to the researcher.

One week later, the researcher followed up by again contacting possible participants via e-mail and asking them to participate in the study. No participant was compensated for volunteering to be part of this study.

Instrument

There were two instruments used in this study. The first instrument was a six-question survey distributed to social workers in the Twin City area. The survey consisted of some basic questions about whether the respondent had ever provided services to a grieving child in a Twin City school, what type of services had been provided, and at what grade level those services had been performed. Respondents were asked to describe the death the child was grieving (who died and how the person died), and they were also asked to share any experiences they might have had with a grieving child. Last, they were asked if they would agree to be interviewed further on the topic (see Appendix D).

The second instrument was an 11 question open-ended interview. All who volunteered to be interviewed ($N = 22$) were asked the same questions. The last

question in the interview asked participants if there was anything else they wanted to add to the interview (see Appendix E)

Data Collection and Management

In early September 2008, an e-mail was sent inviting school social workers to answer a brief, six-question survey (Appendix A). Clicking on a link brought them to a survey at surveymonkey.com (Appendix D). This e-mail survey was anonymous; that is, no identifying information was attached to any of the 6 questions. The survey included one yes/no question, two multiple-choice questions, and two short-answer questions. The final question asked participants to provide their name and contact information if they were willing to participate in the interview portion of the study. Consent was implied when participants choose to complete the survey. A total of 59 participants completed the survey.

For participants who expressed interest in participating in the interview, the researcher immediately contacted them and e-mailed them a letter inviting them to participate in the interview (Appendix B). There were 22 participants who expressed interest in participating in the interview, and all 22 participants did participate. For these participants, the researcher e-mailed the consent form to the potential participants in advance of the interview so they could review it and ask any questions. Participants and the researcher then agreed upon a time and place for the interview. Participants signed the consent form (Appendix C) in person prior to the start of the interview. The researcher then conducted an approximately 45-60-minute in-depth interview with each subject. Interviews took place in September and October 2008. The interviews were in person at a location chosen by the subjects. These interviews were open-ended, with

the researcher using an interview guide (Appendix E). Initial questions were asked about the subject's background, and subsequent questions were asked about their work with grieving students.

Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder so that they could be transcribed using Microsoft Word. Interviews were transcribed within 48 hours of each interview. The electronic files of the interviews were stored on a secure computer in an encrypted file that is password protected. Once transcribed, the transcripts were in Microsoft Word format and also stored on a secure computer in an encrypted file that is password protected. Hard copies of the transcripts were kept in a locked and secure file cabinet at the researcher's home and will remain there for three years. After three years the transcripts will be shredded and then discarded.

All interviews were confidential, and subjects were only identified as "Participant 1," "Participant 2," "Participant 3," and so forth on the digital voice recorder and on subsequent transcription. Subjects' identifying information was stored separately from survey responses. The Microsoft Word documents of transcripts were formatted and exported into the NVivo 8 program for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis on the preliminary, six-question preliminary survey began immediately and continued as more responses were received. The sixth survey question was utilized to identify those participants who were willing to be interviewed, and the researcher contacted these subjects immediately. Data were collected via the surveymonkey.com Web site, and the researcher was notified via this Web site when responses were received.

Data analysis on the interview began immediately after transcription. As soon as possible after transcription, coding was begun to separate and categorize the data. Coding grounded the analysis in the actual data. The interviews were coded using NVivo analysis software. NVivo has many advantages: 1) There is an enormous capacity to do many things with the data, 2) Files can be imported into a project, 3) Information can be coded in a project, 4) Flexible codes (nodes) can be organized in a project, 5) Complex searches can be made in a project, 6) Models can be developed for theoretical positions, 7) A large amount of data can be managed, 8) Files for personal memories and self-reflections can be created, and 9) There is online support and training (Lichtman, 2006). Disadvantages of NVivo are: 1) It is difficult to learn, 2) It is expensive, and 3) It is not needed if there is only a small amount of data (Lichtman, 2006). Major codes were developed using the guided interview questions. The three basic components of coding are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant comparison was also utilized.

Constant Comparison

One technique used in the analysis of data from this study is called constant comparison (Glaser, 1978). *Constant comparison* is defined as a particular procedure used in qualitative research wherein the researcher compares the newly collected data in an ongoing manner with data that were collected earlier. For example, the researcher compared each newly conducted interview data with all the previously conducted interviews to refine the theoretically relevant categories that were developed using qualitative software.

According to Glaser (1978), there are six steps required for constant comparison:

1. Begin the collection of data;
2. Look through data for key issues, events, or activities that can be developed into categories for the reporting of data;
3. Collect data from as many incidents as possible to ensure that there is diversity in the data;
4. Make notes about the categories being described and keep a list of all the incidents listed in the data while constantly looking for new incidents.
5. Work with the collected data to find basic social processes and relationships;
6. Engage in coding, categorizing, and writing as the core categories are developed.

The researcher used constant comparison during the analysis of the data to ensure that no data were overlooked during each level of analysis.

Open Coding

Open coding or substantive coding is the first level of coding. During open coding, “data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences” (Strauss and Corbin, p. 102, 1990). Responses are analyzed and consistent categories were identified. Categories were created and used to categorize responses, and a preliminary label was placed on them. Subcategories were then identified that relate to each research question. Categories and subcategories were identified by recognizing recurring ideas, words, phrases, and patterns. As the coding

continued, some categories had to be renamed and modified. The main goal was to generate categories and their properties and then determine how they vary.

Open coding began after the transcribed interviews were exported into NVivo 8. The initial open coding process helped put the data into more manageable segments. Within NVivo 8, the coding process involved highlighting and copying passages from the interviews into specific text container sites, called nodes. Each node was descriptively titled to identify the repeating or important themes or ideas that accrued. A tree of nodes, with each node having similar repeating or important ideas, grew through the process of reviewing and coding all 22 participant interviews.

Major codes were developed using the guided interview questions. For example, during this first level of coding, one node was entitled “Barriers,” which corresponded to the eighth question of the interview. This question and the subsequent answers covered various aspects of the participants’ experiences related to barriers to providing services to grieving students. Under this node “Barriers,” there were subnodes, such as “Teachers,” “Culture,” “School Policies,” “Funding,” “Role/job description,” “High Caseloads,” “Belief that school is only for academics.”

Major codes were organized based on participant interview questions. The researcher began by coding each transcript within the structure of the eleven interview questions. Before beginning individual transcript coding, the interviewer developed a single main code for each question asked in the interviews to serve as an organizing structure for subsequent coding. Each participant interview question was coded to one major code.

Next, the researcher read and coded responses one question at a time across all participant interviews. For example, the researcher read and coded the response to Question 1 for Participant 1, then read and coded the responses to Question 1 for Participant 2, and so forth through all 22 participant interviews. Figure 1 is a diagram of some of the 58 nodes or critical words from the interviews that were found in the open-coding process.

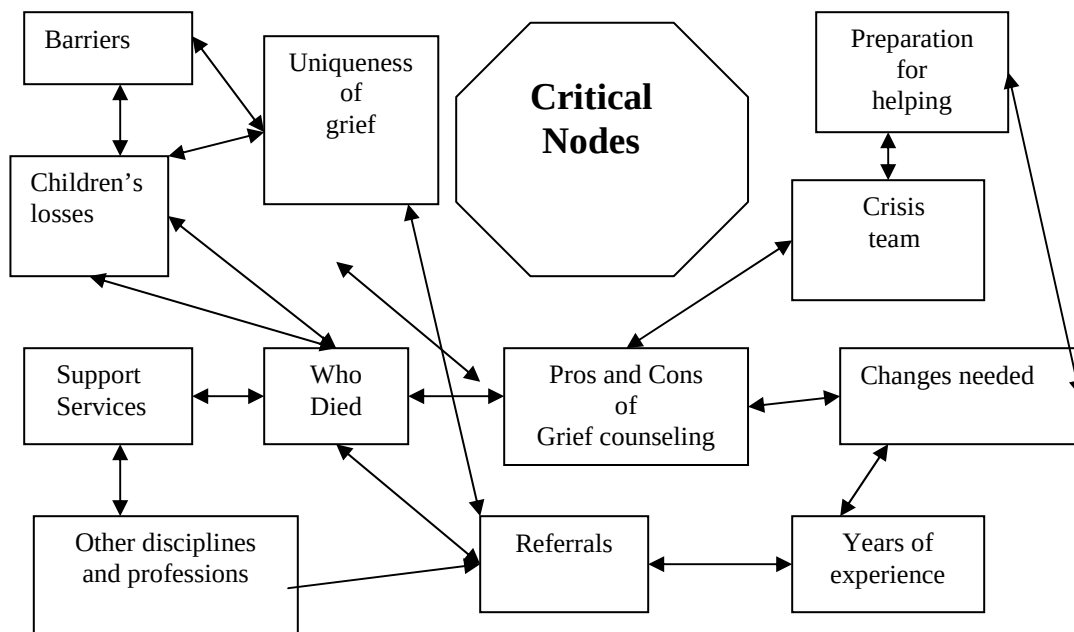


*Figure 1. Initial NVivo nodes developed for themes
Axial Coding*

During axial coding, “categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations” (Strauss and Corbin, p. 124, 1990). Data that were broken down in open coding were reassembled. During axial coding, relationships were uncovered among categories. Also, structure was related with process, which is

important because this helped answer the question of not only why something occurred, but also how it occurred. The main goal is to link categories with subcategories.

As the researcher read each response, the researcher developed subcodes for each question. For example, Question 7 asked participants what kinds of losses grieving students have experienced. Participants answered based on both who died in the child's life (e.g., mother, father, sibling, etc.) and also the cause of death (e.g., accident, suicide, cancer, etc.).

Figure 2 displays the main category of Barriers (from Question 8) and the subtopics that were developed based on a second analysis of the transcripts from Question 8. During open coding, the researcher found that many of the school social workers talked about barriers that they faced while attempting to help the grieving child. During the axial coding, or second phase of data analysis, the researcher began with a set of initial codes or preliminary concepts (see Figure 1). During axial coding the researcher focused on those initial coded themes more than the data. Subtopics emerged during this second pass through the data, yielding new ideas and key concepts under the themes that were identified during open coding. During axial coding, the researcher looked at the causes or consequences of the themes and looked for concepts that cluster together. Thus, the theme of Barriers yielded the participants' perceived cause of barriers that kept the school social worker from helping the grieving child. All open coding themes were broken down into subtopics during axial coding (see Figure 2).

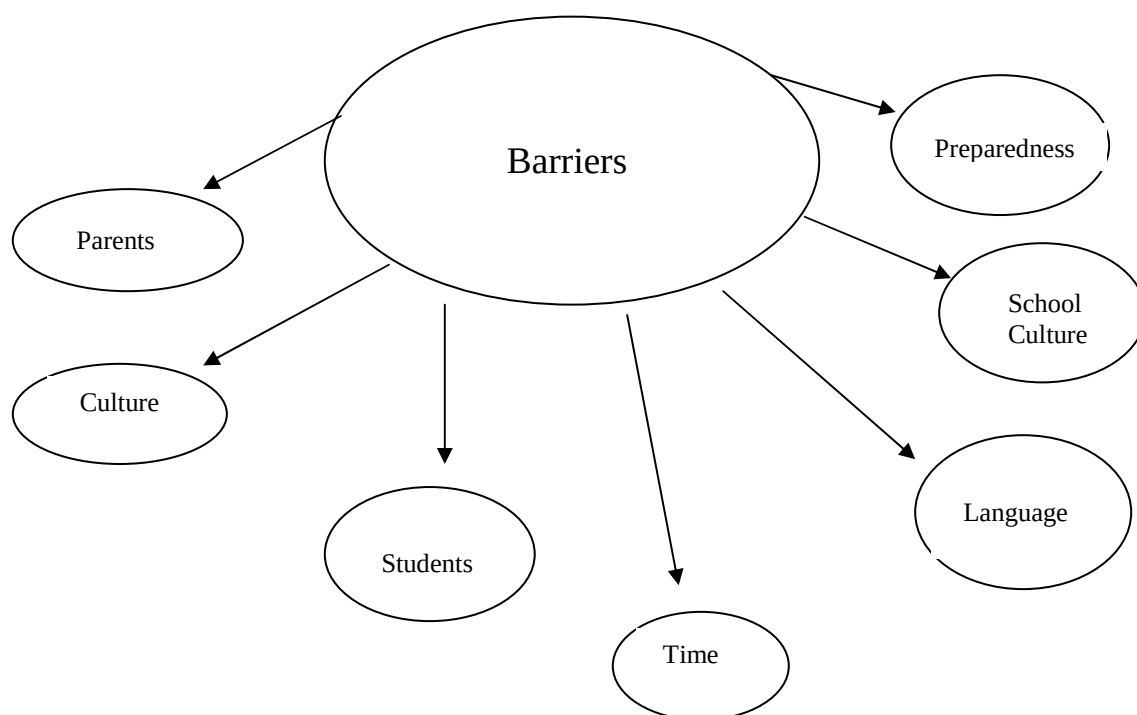


Figure 2. Example of axial coding—main code to developed subcodes

Selective Coding

During selective coding, the “process of integrating and refining the theory” occurs (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 143). Categories are organized around a central explanatory concept, and major categories are related to it through explanatory statements of relationships. Once the theory is refined, it is validated by comparing it to raw data or by presenting it to the participants for their reactions. The main goal is to integrate categories and refine theory.

During selective coding, it is sometimes necessary for the researcher to revise the terms or themes. It is also necessary to use constant comparison as the researcher goes back through the data to make sure that all possible themes have been exhausted.

The researcher used this phase of data analysis to prepare the narrative that would be used to report the findings of the study. Table 1 lists the themes, subcodes and emerging themes that were discovered during data analysis.

Table 1

Selective Coding

<u>Main code</u>	<u>Subcode</u>	<u>Emerging themes</u>
Years of Experience		Experience helps
Interventions/Experiences		Individual basis/ Depends on the student/ Both ad-hoc and planned
Services for grieving children	Counseling	Use general SW skills
Other disciplines and professionals	School counselors School psychologists School principal Special education staff Crisis teams for the district	Team Effort
Referrals	School personnel Students refer other students Students self refer Parents Community professionals Church	
Losses	Who died Cause of death	
Barriers	School personnel Space Preparedness/education Students Parents Culture Lack of respect for profession Language Summer	Dependent on school

Preparation/Education	Training Continuing education Formal education School personnel/support from others/supervisor	More training = more comfort and more likely to do grief work
Community resources/Referring out	When to refer out Community resources	School and community need to work together

Reliability and Validity

One of the concerns raised in a qualitative study is how reliability and validity can be measured in the absence of quantifiable data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are ways to make sure that a qualitative study is both reliable and valid. In a qualitative study internal and external validity are called credibility and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability and objectivity are substituted with dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility means that the researcher establishes that the results of the qualitative study are credible and believable from the perspective of the study's participants. This was done in this study by asking the participants to review their transcribed interviews and to sign off on the interview if they felt the transcripts were an accurate representation of what was said.

Transferability refers to the degree in which the results in the qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other context or settings. The findings in this study may be generalized to other school social workers throughout the United States because participants included school social workers from both urban and rural districts, enhancing the possibility that this group of school social workers have similar

experiences to other school social workers in other areas of the country (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reliability is usually defined in quantitative studies as the ability of another researcher to replicate the study. In a qualitative study the term is dependability rather than reliability. Dependability emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which the research occurred. In other words, any changes that occurred during data collection need to be reported by the researcher in the data reporting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability refers to the degree in which each research brings his or her own perspective to the research. Confirmability is much like credibility in that it refers to the degree in which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are several ways to do this. The first way is for the researcher to take the “devil’s advocate” role with respect to the results, and this is a process that can be documented. Additionally, the researcher can actively search for and describe any negative instances that contradict prior observations. Third, after the data is collected the researcher can conduct a data audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For the purposes of the present study, the researcher used all four methods to ensure that the results obtained in this study were as accurate and complete as possible.

To increase validity, a member check was completed by the researcher. Member checking occurs when the researcher asks the participants of their study to confirm or disconfirm the accuracy of the researcher’s observations and interpretations (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). This researcher e-mailed the interview transcript via Microsoft Word to each participant and asked each participant to review and confirm or

disconfirm the accuracy of his or her interview and to make any necessary corrections.

A total of 10 participants returned transcripts with comments. No content was changed by the participants; however, there were several spelling errors that the participants noted and changed.

The point of qualitative research is to “study and describe things in such depth and detail, and from such multiple perspectives and meanings, that there is less need to worry about whether one particular measure is really measuring what it’s intended to measure” (Rubin & Babbie, 2001, p. 203). Rubin and Babbie (2001) argue that the directness, depth, and detail of qualitative research often gives it better validity than quantitative measurement.

Chapter 4 – Results/Findings

Introduction

Interviews were conducted with 22 participants who were all employed as school social workers in the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The participants came from a list obtained from the MSSWA. The researcher was provided with the e-mail addresses of members. Possible participants were e-mailed a letter inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix A). There are approximately 105 school social workers who belong to the Minnesota School Social Workers Association and work in Twin Cities schools, and all of these members received an e-mail invitation to participate in the study. Of the 105 e-mails sent, 10 came back as undeliverable. Therefore, only 95 participants received the e-mail invitation. Individuals who were interested in participating in the preliminary six-question Internet survey clicked on the link from the e-mail and completed the survey. Appendix F shows the number of responses received per question. A total of 59 school social workers responded to the preliminary survey questions. Individuals who were interested in participating in the 60-minute, in-person interview provided their name and contact information to the researcher. A total of 22 individuals agreed to be interviewed in-person for the study.

Results of the Preliminary Internet Survey

There were six questions posed to potential participants. Appendix F displays the number of answers for each question. Appendix G displays overall answers to questions. Appendix H displays answers to question number two: “What services have you provided?” Appendix I displays the answers given to question number four: “What

kinds of other death losses are students experiencing?” These answers, which were later supported by the in-person interview data collected, were an important finding in this study. School social workers pointed out that there were many types of grief that children might experience, even though it often thought that grief comes from the loss of a loved one. As the responses in Appendix I show, grief for children may be more than a loss of a loved one. Children can be affected by many types of losses. Appendix J displays the answers to question five: “Is there anything else you would like to say about school social work with grieving children?”

Themes

There were four main themes that were developed: (a) barriers to helping grieving students, (b) limitations placed on how grief is defined, (c) social workers’ wide range of preparation for dealing with grief and loss issues, and (d) referring grieving students to outside resources. There are subthemes that were developed under each theme. These themes and subthemes were developed from both parts of the study, but they were primarily drawn from the interviews conducted. Figure 3 illustrates the themes and subthemes developed from the data.

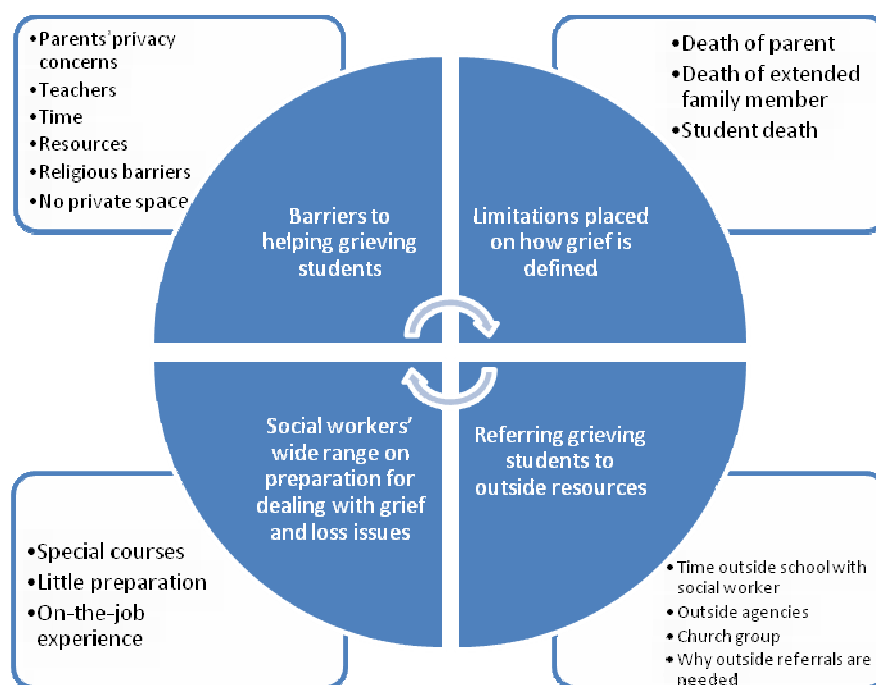


Figure 3. Themes from interviews

Theme 1: Barriers to Helping Grieving Students

Participants reported many barriers to their effectively helping a child through the stages of grief. Some of the barriers were minor ones such as parents being difficult to reach because of working, but some of the barriers were major ones that directly impacted the social workers' ability to help the child. Those major barriers were parents, teachers, not enough time, not enough resources, religious barriers, and no space to meet with groups of students for counseling. Each of these barriers is discussed below:

Parents

Participants reported that the greatest barrier they experienced barrier was divided between parents and teachers, both of whom seemed to think that grief

counseling interfered in some way with their rights and responsibilities. Many participants said that one major barrier is dealing with parents' objections to school social workers working with students. Some parents felt as though the social worker was involving him or her in private family matters. Social workers felt that parents did not understand how the grief the child was experiencing influenced their school behavior and achievement. As Participant 7 remarked,

Language barriers, sometimes families have mistrust of social workers; you are going to remove my kids. If one of their children dies, I am going to get blamed for the death. Sometimes the families are really hard to reach. They are hard to get a hold of, to find out what is exactly going on. They will keep the kids out of school for a long period of time and if you ask about that, they get defensive.

Social workers responded that they were often seen as part of "the system" that was there not to help the families recover, but instead there to separate the families. This was especially true, the participants reported, when there was a language barrier.

Parents seemed to feel uncomfortable with what they saw as an invasion of the parent's privacy. Parents did not want to be questioned about how they raised their child.

Participant 3 summed up the privacy issue the best.

We say that in my school that I can see children one time without a parent's consent, and after that they have to sign a consent form. So, if for some reason, the parent were to say no, like if a parent, because, and I think this is a legitimate thing too, I mean, these are community schools, do they want the school to know everything that is going on in their family? Well, maybe not. I respect their confidentiality and their privacy and that they might not want this looked at within the school for privacy sake and you know, that's where all the neighbors of this child are going, and you know that's how schools work. So, that's an interesting piece. Most parents will say yes that I can see the students. Especially with a death, if there's a death, most parents will say yes. If it's a family change situation, then perhaps not. Or, if it's a death, the parents will say yes and sign the consent form, but they don't want to or can't come in. They're working, they can't get away, and school staff doesn't work in the evening.

Almost all of the social workers interviewed reported that they often encountered resistance from parents when it came to counseling children. The social workers acknowledged the difficulty that they faced because of the way their role was perceived by the parents.

Teachers

Teachers were also considered a barrier to helping children. The social workers reported that teachers did not like to have the children leave the instructional classroom. Teachers felt it was more important that the child remain in the classroom regardless of the situation, according to social workers interviewed. Participants said that teachers do not cooperate when the school social workers want to meet with students during class time. As Participants 1 and 2 elaborated,

Participant 1: In the school system, the barrier I run up against most often is teachers not seeing that.... There are some teachers who don't think that school is the time or the place to deal with personal issues. And so they will struggle with a student leaving their classroom and that type of thing.

Participant 2: Yes, I think that one of the big things is that teachers sometimes have an issue with letting students out of class to see me. With one of more recent deaths, they were kind of questioning the reason and need for the student to come down. They wonder if the student really needs that much time with me? Maybe not thinking it's needed to have the student to be pulled out of the classroom. They think that their class work is more important than coming down to talk to me about what's going on. So, that would probably be the biggest barrier to preventing me from providing services to grieving kids in schools.

Social workers cited feeling very frustrated with the lack of support from teachers. One participant wondered if teachers realized that the only time a social worker could see the children in need was during school time. The participants were also curious about why teachers thought grieving children were better off in the classroom than being with the

social worker and discussing their grief. Some participants thought that teachers were not being sensitive enough to the needs of these grieving children.

Time

Many participants stated that there is not enough time in the school day to handle the issues and problems of grief and loss. This is especially true because of the barriers that teachers created by resisting having the child taken out of the classroom. Additionally, most social workers try to create groups for grieving children so that they can receive comfort from others experiencing the same pain. However, social worker participants reported that there is very little free time during a school day in which to hold these group sessions. Likewise, there is almost no possibility of having any type of after school group as well. Many participants in this study thought that their job of helping children cope with life's stresses was considered secondary to the child's academic performance. As Participant 9 said, "The biggest is the time constraints. There is such a focus on the kids coming to school, the academic piece. To actually do group work in 40 minutes it is difficult."

Resources

Many participants stated that there are not enough resources allocated to helping students with grief and loss issues. School social workers cited both time and money as resources that are lacking. Often school social workers have to pay for special books or games that children can use during counseling sessions. Schools have very limited resources in this area and so if a choice has to be made regarding funds, the school social worker's budget is the one most likely to suffer. As Participant 5 reported, "Time and additional resources. Resources just due to the cost. There are some things

out there but our budget is so limited that it is kind of hard to get everything.”

Participants reported having to be very creative with the limited resources they do have.

Spiritual

Participants described the difficulties of overcoming the spiritual implications of how to answer a child's question of where their deceased loved one is now. There are limitations in public schools as to how much spiritual and religious issues can be discussed. School social workers stated that the spiritual aspect of grief, death, and loss, is often an important part of a student's grief and coping, but that they are limited in how much they can discuss this issue. As several of the participants reported,

Participant 6: I think that one thing that is really interesting is the religion aspect and being in a public school. The one way I get around that, is by saying to a child, where do you think your grandma is? I can't share my beliefs with them and I would never try to convince them, but I have said oh, grandma is in heaven, what do you think she is doing up there? I won't discourage their belief, but I think that is the biggest barrier.

Participant 17: Yes, I feel prepared enough, but I also I was always comfortable to talk to the kids about the spiritual part of things. Not that I would guide them with my beliefs system but I wanted to hear about their belief system and I wanted to hear what their family was saying. Were they going to get to go to the funeral, what did that mean to them, what did they think happened to them, now I am talking more about death. There are a whole bunch of levels to spirituality. We always have the separation of church and state and public school people can't deal with that. Well if you deal with that and allowing with whatever is there for any kid. A kid that is from the Jehovah faith is going to respond differently than that of a kid from the Muslim faith, or a kid who doesn't go to church or a kid that goes to a extremely fundamentalist Christian church, there is going to be all sorts of different. I found that kids are open during support times from hearing from each other, being interested and curious and not putting each other down. Sometimes I would find myself saying what is your family belief about that?

School social workers in this study agreed that it was important to honor the separation of school and state, but it was also important for the school social worker to be open to

comments the children themselves might make about religion and where people go after they die. Some participants thought that spirituality was a big challenge for them when dealing with grieving children, especially when that grief was over the loss of a significant loved one like a mother, father, or sibling. Some school social workers reported that it was necessary to deal with spirituality on some level in their jobs.

Privacy

Participants mentioned that there is no private space to meet with students. School social workers often lack private office space where they can meet with students. Confidentiality and privacy are important when meeting with grieving students and making them feel comfortable, and yet there is no private space. As Participant 4 noted, “My office space is a barrier. I don’t really have private, confidential area to meet with somebody who might want to share.” School social workers reported that it is difficult to get children to open up when there is no place set aside for meeting with children in private or for meeting with parents either. This lack of privacy reinforces the parents’ fears that the problems they’re having will not be kept confidential. Almost all the school social workers mentioned that schools need to allocate a special private area where children can meet with them without the whole school being aware of that meeting.

Theme 2: Limitations Placed on How Grief is Defined

Participants discussed students’ grief related to the death of a parent, extended family member, and student. However, participants mentioned that the truth is that children grieve because of all sorts of losses and that it is necessary to keep an open mind about what the definition of grief and loss is to students. School social workers

gave examples of many types of grief and loss that students experience. Almost all participants cited that for children grief is not limited to just the death of a family member either in the primary family or the extended family. Social workers noted that grief can take many forms and can come back again when a smaller, what may seem like a less significant event, occurs. Most social workers noted that the idea of a child grieving should never be limited to a death in the primary or extended family. Children also have grief issues over divorce, sexual abuse, absent parents, developmental transitions, moving, peers, and change. Thus, a child's grief comes in many unanticipated forms. Participants also discussed how an individual student's grief affects their larger school community and peer group. The following statements show how grieving can affect a child:

Participant 16: Yes. Just about even with regard to divorce, when parents have to separate, there is a grieving process that goes along with that. Relocating, coming into a new environment that can cause grieving because they had been moved to a new state for whatever reason, or you have a new student come in and they start making new friends and then they are uprooted again. Grief comes in different shapes and forms. It is definitely essential to have some knowledge to as to know what to do in the situation where there was a loss and it affects students' learning. Because you can't teach math if you have someone in there thinking of, or preoccupied with these intrusive thoughts about the loss. They just can't learn.

Participant 1: I would say that at least weekly, I work with a student who is struggling with grief of some sort. Significant grief like the loss of a parent or sibling is more infrequent. But, I'd say I see kids weekly regularly with grief. Because one thing that happens with grief, I mean in my experience, is if kids are grieving a smaller loss, it triggers grief from an earlier bigger loss. I mean, if their pet dies or their friend's pet dies, all of a sudden I have a group in my office. And then we go back and we have to process earlier bigger losses. It's more than about the pet or their friends. We go deeper and into the past. And the thing about middle school students is they run in groups, and when one group member is affected by something, it seems like the majority of the group is affected. And, they almost take on each other's things because they don't

know how to set boundaries and they don't quite get that independence thing and it gets sort of mixed up. You would think that their friend's grief is happening to them. Especially girls, you know, they especially take it on at their age. It's been interesting.

Participant 15: I've had a few students that are young and were babies when their parents had passed away. So there is that. We have a couple of scenarios like that. [Interviewer: So they might, they re-grieve. So maybe their grief comes up later than now.] Participant 15: Yes, we haven't had any situations like that but we know who the kids are in case they need that help.

Participant 18: In relation to grief, I had students whose father had passed away and he was quite ill so we had started working a long time before. I worked with him individually, I wanted to put him in a group but I didn't have similar enough issues to do that. I did refer him to outside services, as well as his mom to outside services. I have had a lot of kids referred to me with kids that have had pets that have died. So that usually is a few sessions. We had our principal, which had funded the school, retired and then died the following fall, so that was really a big deal in our school. I did a letter to parents on tips on how to address children's grief, also their own grief. People were very connected to him. I did some stories and readings in class and had an open door for a couple of days. We also had a teacher who had left the previous year and committed suicide and he was a gym teacher, so he had worked with all of the older students. So I did a similar thing, sent information home and let them know that the school psychologist and I were available, we did some kind of classroom presentations with kids who would be upset and also had open door.

Participant 8: There is a whole range of things in elementary particular. One kid coming in crying because their pet died last night or they had to put the pet to sleep. Then there is grandparents that may have died, kids that have more tragic. One year there was a father who had murdered a mother and there were 3 boys who were present. So there is this continuum of grief and trauma. I feel I have had experience along that way.

Participant 14: It's sudden, unexpected losses a lot of the times. Or with some of my more EBD type kids, the violent, the other night, the shooting in Brooklyn Park, that was two of our girls' cousins, just to give you an idea. So there is always, somebody knows somebody.

Many of the school social workers mentioned that peers are impacted by the grief that their friends experience and so it is important for the school social worker to carefully observe how others around the grieving child are being affected by that child's

grief. School social workers also noted that all grief is difficult for children and the best thing that they could do was to pay attention to any child who is grieving over any situation. Sometimes as one participant noted, the grief could have occurred a long time ago, but a current experience can awaken that grief in the child again. School social workers reported that they needed to be aware of any grief that a child might be experiencing and to help that child deal with that grief the best way possible.

Theme 3: Social Workers' Wide Range of Preparation for Dealing with Grief and Loss Issues

There was a wide range of preparation for dealing with grief and loss issues. Some school social workers had a tremendous amount of background, training, and preparation, and others had almost none. Some social workers learned entirely on the job and learned through trial and error. There was no standard of education or training that social workers received regarding grief and how to help grieving children. Often, social workers that had a personal interest in the topic of grief and loss took it upon themselves to seek out education and training on the subject. Most did not receive specialized training in grief and loss issues, but rather choose to take elective courses or trainings on the topic. Grief and loss was not a required topic in their social work training.

Special courses

Several of the school social workers noted that they took special interest in taking courses to help that deal with grieving children because they believed that their graduate training had not placed enough emphasis on helping grieving children. The following passages point out how these participants filled in the gaps in their training:

Participant 20: Initially the graduate program I was in, we were only allowed 3 choices of electives. I still wish that I had had this as an elective. I initiated a lot because I had already had been in a study group for 6 years and knew I needed more. Fortunately I had some experience with groups, but even when I started out as a social worker at this end, I had a lot of great mentors. That I really sought the help that I needed. As a professional we need to know what we can't do and what we can. I think that I am better prepared now; I don't think you can ever be 100% prepared for these issues because every issue is so different and unique. I do reading, I talk to my colleagues, I go to conferences, and we do follow ups, especially right after the holidays because that is when a lot of the loss is felt.

Participant 19: I wouldn't say that grad school prepared me to work with grieving kids. Some of my other training has. I have a certification in Alcohol and Drug Counseling, and that program we did a lot of counseling training and learned a lot about the process of providing empathy, true counseling skills. I've also gone to a couple of grief workshops and done some research on working with kids with grief.

Participant 14: I think that just because I have had a long career, that has helped. I remember one of my favorite classes that I took at St. Kate's, in the graduate course, it was through Dot Landis, I took her death, grief and loss class. I purposely did because in those days, I was still working with the Hennepin County Home School and I had several of my clients murdered. Because they were gang involved. I took that class and she broke it all down, so I felt that I had that and I have gone to various conferences. I have been trained in crisis response and I get a lot of it at the hospital too, a little extra training. I try to attend the training through the Prayers St. John and there next November 6th is on grief and loss. It is at the Hopkins Performing Art Center. The only issue I have is that, a lot of times I don't learn anything new.

Participant 10: I did go through the TLC Institute for working with kids with trauma. That was more trauma- based. It was a continued education thing. It was in the community, and they do kids who experience trauma, for little kids. It's really nice there are workbooks where they get to kind of draw about what happened or talk about what happened. So not specifically grief but still grief. I may have been to training on working with kids dealing with grief but nothing that I can remember specifically. I feel prepared enough to do what I can do to support them in school, but is it enough for them totally to address their grief issues, absolutely not. I see it more being what do I need to give you so you can be successful here? The goal would always be is some kind of external.

Little preparation

At least half of the school social workers reported that they had little preparation for dealing with grieving children. Some said that they don't deal with grief that often. These participants expressed their anxiety over dealing with death and reported that they were unsure of how to cope with a grieving child. The following statements represent how unprepared these school social workers felt.

Participant 7: I feel like the Jack of all Trades, the master of none. You feel like you know just about enough about everything but you are not a master of any. I feel like I am a master of the death, hard of hearing, but like all of these other issues that come up with kids, I might deal with once in a while. I try to look at conferences, like I had a couple of students that had GLBT issues that I tried to go to a conference on that. Ms. W tries to have a wide range of topics when you go to their conferences. So when I go, I will find some resources here or there on different things, including on how to work with grieving students. We touched upon it when I got my master's degree. It's never been a real interest of mine, because I never feel that I am very good at it. I haven't had a lot of experience about it. I have gotten much better at it, because I have had to deal. The more you deal with it the better you get at it. If I was in elderly care, this would be a much bigger thing for me, where I would want to get more training in. I do think that I do need to stay up on it, because when it does happen I want to be prepared. The bottom line is being empathetic, being there for them, and meeting them on where they are at. It is general social work philosophy that you use over and over again no matter what situation. If people know that you care things go pretty smoothly. Just admitting that I don't know what to say, I don't know what the best thing to do is but I will be here and help as I can. I don't think that you feel totally prepared.

Participant 19: I just don't think that going to grad school prepared me.

Participant 18: I feel that my education was much generalized. I feel like that I am constantly learning. And constantly open to learning and seeking out learning opportunities. Initially I would say so, so, very limited, but as I get more experience and read more and take more classes it is getting better. I think that with my work it's more the relationship and the support and the validation of feelings, and a little bit of education on what is grief and what to expect, this is natural. As in terms of doing any deep therapeutic work around grief, I don't feel competent to do that.

Participant 11: I am trying to think back to grad school. My mom worked at a hospice while I was growing up so I kind of an idea about that. Some personal experiences. I can't remember taking any classes. I think that I would like to do more with it and prepared wise I would do research. Like this mom who died, I figured out what she had and looked it up. I just do what I can do so I am aware of it and have more information. Or like this mom who has a terminal illness and will eventually die, I called the cancer support and said would you give me information to work with these kids, so I know what to be doing and what to be saying. I try to do things to be proactive, so I know for myself. I guess life experience.

On-the-job experience

Two participants said that they had learned how to deal with grieving children through on-the-job experience. They too had not received training so they had done what they could when presented with the problem. They had also taken it upon themselves to learn what they could on their own because they recognized the seriousness of grief for children. The following statements represent those who learned through experience:

Participant 21: I have had on the job training, workshops on grief and death, I have 3 books that I am reading, one is on cultural differences and how they might look at grief and death. I feel more prepared now than when I started as a school social worker.

Participant 16: I feel comfortable. I have been around awhile. If I can't help, I feel really good knowing that there other places that this child can get help that they need.

Theme 4: Referring Grieving Students to Outside Resources

When the school social workers encountered a child who needed more help than they were able to provide them during the school year, they turned to referring the child to outside agencies or they themselves spent time with the child outside the school

day. All the school social workers recognized that because of the many barriers they faced in helping these children they needed to go beyond what was considered their responsibility.

In choosing referral services, the school social workers tended to choose ones where they were familiar with the resource. Some referred children to camps, while others referred children and their parents to counseling centers. Whichever service the school social worker chose was the one they had the most experience with so that they could be sure that the child would get the needed help. It is also important to take note that most school social workers had spent a great deal of time researching services where other languages besides English were spoken. Some of the referrals were to church-led groups. The participants said that they try very hard to match the student with the service because they know that the child really needs help. In looking at outside referrals, the participants said the following:

Participant 11: Camp Amanda, I've used because I became from Des Moines where Camp Amanda was created. So when I was there that's a big thing and it is such a great concept. I feel that it is great service. Youth Grief Services in Burnsville and the offer support groups. Healing Quilt that I get information from, I am on there newsletter, so I get it every so often. I don't think that there is anything in our immediate area, unfortunately. And there should be, I think that there is a need for it, but everything is further away. And families would like quicker access to things and they would utilize it more if it was somewhere that they could get to easier.

Participant 22: Summer school, Center for Grief, suicide hotline where different languages are spoken. It's hard to find services for students who speak a language other than English.

Participant 20: I refer a lot to the Center of Grief, because we created a partnership over the years and I have known that program for 9 years and really respect what they are doing. Sometimes I would refer individuals, if I know that

there is an individual out there that specializes on this topic. When I might do it, it goes back to that time issue, if I am not able to address all of the needs or it is evident that they need additional support, I can't give all the support. The more support you have the easier it is to go through that healing process. I believe that the more support that you can add, the more it helps that student.

Participant 5: I always let parents know that there are some resources out there, because my part is only 30 minutes, say a week for 6 weeks time, where there are on going services out in the community. We have Camp Amanda, where children can go, which is great. The hospitals, the churches, and a lot of the churches will send us their brochures. When I start working with the children, I send that information home to the parent.

Participant 10: What I do is tell parents to go through their primary health care provider, because they never, I don't even understand it myself, even when I need to go somewhere myself, is it covered or not? I will write a letter a lot of the times so just in case a parent can't articulate specifically what they need. Then they will take that letter with them. Then they will usually refer them to whatever behavioral health services that they have in their systems. I have had kids go to Aspen, River City, and Wilder. I can't say that I have kids go anywhere I said that was really great. With kids with sexual issues, we refer them to Path Finder and they do really good work. A lot of time with outside providers they are dependant on parent report and if you talk to the school social worker and the parent you might have extremely different points of view on what is going on. I have had kids in my self-contained setting, who will be suspended 3 times in a week and were taken out by the police because the assault was so extreme and then I will read case notes from their therapist where mom is saying that school is going really well. That is why I would always send a letter with them just so they had what was happening in school. Mostly I would have parents sign a release of information and then we can talk more freely.

Why Outside Referrals Are Needed

Participants stated that outside referrals are needed for a variety of reasons.

First, there are not enough resources or time in the educational system for school social workers to deal with grief issues that are long term. Second, as mentioned previously, some social workers do not feel prepared enough to deal with all of the issues of grief because their graduate courses either did not include information on grief counseling or

they had only minimal training. Third, some students need family therapy in order to cope and recover from certain types of grief and loss, and family therapy is outside the scope of the school social worker's job description. Fourth, it is clear that there are just not enough school resources available, especially when it comes to finding enough time to have individual counseling. Thus, all of the school social worker participants said that outside referrals are a necessity, and that is why they spend much time looking at referral programs. These school social workers all expressed that they take the responsibility for helping these students seriously, and while they have very little power in setting a budget for their work at school, they can be actively involved in other ways with helping these students. They recognize that they cannot be with these students all the time; school social workers are not available in the summer and they are only at some schools on some days. They recognize that often there is an urgent situation with a child that needs to be addressed immediately and cannot wait until normal school hours. As two participants reported:

Participant 21: On that one, the why would be if kids were not able to function in school, having difficulty in not attending? The where for me is what the language is, and what I could find for services? The student who was suicidal issue, and she didn't speak much English. It took me 2 days to find a Spanish-speaking suicide hotline.

Participant 22: Time is an issue. I am not here in the summer. You never know in the summer if the kids are going to attend or not. Weekends are important also.

Summary

There were four themes that emerged from the interviews with school social workers. The interviews showed that school social workers play an important role in

helping children cope with all types of grief. They face barriers that they have to overcome to help these children, however. Sometimes the barrier comes in the form of other people, like parents and teachers who are not sure that the service the school social worker provides is what the child needs. These participants all reported that it is very important to build a relationship with parents and teachers so that they all can work effectively together for the good of the child. The other barriers that the school social worker face, such as a lack of time, resources, and privacy, are a bit harder to overcome, and often it requires a great deal of creativity on the part of the school social work to make the system work.

All those who were interviewed reported that the definition of grief encompassed much more than grief over the loss of a family member. Grief for children comes in all shapes: sometimes it is about the loss of a pet; sometimes it is over parents divorcing; sometimes it is grief over a friend's grief. Whatever the form grief comes in, these school social workers reported that it was important to acknowledge that child's grief and to find a way to help the child cope with the sad feelings being experienced.

Additionally, all the interviewed school social workers recognized that they could not be on the job 24 hours a day and so that it was necessary for them to have good referral resources—places that are able to help in the grieving process—where the entire family could get help or where the child could be with other children going through losses. The participants all had developed relationships with outside agencies in order to ensure that when they themselves were not available for help, that the child and the family would still have somewhere to turn to for help.

And finally, the interviews showed that school social workers are not always getting the type of training that is necessary in schools today. Those interviewed reported that they sought out courses themselves or looked for books to read on how to help a child overcome grief. They also reported that they learned while on the job and that even if they had had special courses in college, they probably still would not have been as prepared as they should have been. For most of those interviewed the real learning occurred for them through job experience.

The interviews showed that school social workers were highly committed to their jobs regardless of the many barriers they faced. They recognized the importance of the jobs that they had and did whatever was necessary to help the students at their schools.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

Summary

This was a qualitative exploratory study that was intended to fill the gap in research on grieving children. This two-part qualitative study was used to collect data about school social work with grieving children. School social workers from the Twin Cities were invited to participate in (a) a preliminary, six-question, e-mail survey and (b) a 60-minute, in-person interview. Approximately 105 school social workers were sent an invitation via e-mail to participate in both parts of the study. School social workers who agreed to participate in the preliminary e-mail survey did so. Those who agreed to participate in the second part of the study were interviewed in-person for approximately 45-60 minutes. The sample included not only both urban and suburban school social workers, but also social workers who work at all levels—elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools.

The interviews were transcribed and later entered into a qualitative software program for analysis. The four themes that were developed through analysis were: (a) barriers to helping grieving students, (b) limitations placed on how grief is defined, (c) social workers' wide range of preparation for dealing with grief and loss issues, and (d) referring grieving students to outside resources. Each of the themes had subthemes as well. In the next section each theme and its implications will be discussed.

Conclusions

Theme 1: Barriers to Helping Grieving Students

Participants reported many barriers to their helping a child effectively through the stages of grief. Some of the barriers were reported as minor, such as parents being

difficult to reach because of working, but most of the barriers reported were considered major and had an impact on the school social worker's ability to help the grieving child. Those major barriers were parents, teachers, not enough time, not enough resources, religious barriers, and no space to meet with groups of students for counseling.

School social workers were most concerned with the lack of support they often experienced from parents and teachers. Some parents did not want the school social worker helping their grieving child because the parents were concerned about keeping family matters private. Teachers were often resentful if the school social worker took the grieving student out of class instructional time in order to work with the child. Teachers felt as though it was more important for the child to remain in the classroom. Because teachers face pressure to make sure that all their students do well on high-stakes tests, teachers become reluctant to lose valuable class time regardless of the reason.

School social workers also reported that there is not enough time in their schedules to really help these children. For the most part each school social worker has many students for whom they must provide services. These school social workers reported that time is a real barrier to helping grieving children; they also said that when there is time there is no space. School social workers often do not have their own office, so they often have no real space to meet with these grieving children in private or in a small group. School social workers also reported that there are not resources available for helping these children. Often the school social worker spends his/her own money to buy the things necessary for helping the child because the school district did not allocate

sufficient resources for the school social worker to have the equipment needed to help the grieving child.

All of these barriers made the school social workers' jobs more difficult. They often had to fight parents, teachers, and budget offices in order to help these children. Often the school social worker had to be creative in finding the time and resources needed to help these children.

Theme 2: Limitations Placed on How Grief is Defined

Participants discussed students' grief related to the death of a parent, extended family member, and student. Most telling, though, was the fact that school social workers found that children grieve over more than a death in the family, and the grief that they suffer is very similar to the grief they experience when someone they love dies. Additionally, school social workers reported that one child's grief often affects grief level in their friends and classmates.

Social workers also noted that grief can take many forms and can come back again when a smaller, what may seem like a less significant event, occurs. The social workers noted that the idea of a child grieving should never be limited to a death in the primary or extended family. The school social workers suggested that children also have grief issues over divorce, sexual abuse, absent parents, developmental transitions, moving, peers, and change. Thus, a child's grief comes in many unanticipated forms, and often the child's grief has a ripple effect on others around them.

Participants reported that a narrow definition of what grief is causes school districts to underestimate how many resources need to be set aside to deal with grief.

Modern life has made it more likely that a child might experience some type of grief that requires assistance so that the child can cope.

Theme 3: Social Workers' Wide Range of Preparation for Dealing with Grief and Loss Issues

School social workers indicated that they have had a wide range of preparation for dealing with grief and loss issues. While some school social workers had a tremendous amount of background, training, and preparation, others had almost none and reported feeling completely unprepared to deal with a child's grief. Some social workers learned entirely on the job and learned through trial and error. There was no standard of education or training that social workers received regarding grief and how to help grieving children. Some social workers reported that they were self-trained in grief counseling because the topic was of interest to them or they had experienced a child's grief in their own life. However, the findings of the interviews showed that for the most part, school social workers did not receive specialized training in grief and loss issues, unless they chose to take elective courses or trainings on the topic. Grief and loss was not a required topic in their social work training.

Hence, the findings in this theme showed that school social workers are not being provided with all the training that they need in order to do their job adequately. School social workers have had to acquire on-the-job experience in order to handle a grieving child.

Theme 4: Referring Grieving Students to Outside Resources

School social workers reported that when they feel unable to help a child, they referred the child to outside agencies or they themselves spent time with the child

outside the school day. All the school social workers recognized that because of the many barriers they faced in helping these children they needed to go beyond what was considered their responsibility. Often that meant that school social workers spent their own money to take the child out to lunch or to a special place so that the school social worker could have the time and the space to talk to the child in private.

The grieving process was so difficult for some children that school social workers would often call the child's parents in and offer to refer the family to an outside counseling group where the child and the family could work through their grief. School social workers said that in areas like sexual abuse and divorce it was important to involve the whole family in grief counseling. School social workers reported that it was important to have these types of referrals available because the kind of grief counseling they themselves could provide was often not enough for some grieving children, especially when the loss has come from a traumatic event.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, the generalizability of the findings in this study is limited because the participants all came from a specific geographical area in a specific state. Minnesota has rules on who can be school social workers, but other states have other requirements. It is possible that in some states a prospective school social worker may need to have formal grief training; in Minnesota there is no such a requirement. Hence, the barriers that these participants face in the execution of their jobs may not be the same barriers faced by school social workers in other areas of the United States.

The small, purposive sample used in this study does not allow the results to be generalized to a larger population (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). However, it is not a goal of this exploratory study to generalize in this way. Despite these limitations, the hope is that this research provides preliminary information about school social work with grieving children. Only those school social workers who belong to the Minnesota School Social Worker Association were included in the study, and therefore results will be limited only to those members. Not all school social workers in the Twin Cities belong to MSSWA.

Second, the study was limited by whether the participants answered the interview questions honestly. It is possible that some answers may have been given so as to please the research or to gain the researcher's approval.

Implications for Practice

This study generates knowledge and better understanding not only of school social work in general, but of the particular nature of school social work with grieving children, especially in the context of how the structure of the school and social work roles shape the nature of the work of school social work with grieving students.

This study will serve to inform schools about school social work services with grieving children. It identified a population, grieving students, that is often forgotten. It brought to the forefront the issue of school social work with grieving students, which has been ignored in the past. It may assist school personnel in helping grieving students maintain school performance.

This study serves to inform school social workers what services are available in other schools and may perhaps inspire some school social workers to advocate for

increased services for grieving children. It may help school social workers recognize a forgotten population of grieving students, and help them identify whether there is a lack of services for this group. School social workers may become more interested in this topic and ask their supervisors if they can identify, assess, and provide services to grieving children. In turn, school social work services for grieving students may increase. Or, if services do not increase, more social workers may recognize the need to refer grieving children to other resources in order to receive support.

The findings from this study could also inform parents and guardians about whether students receive support in school for their grief. This could assist parents and guardians of grieving children in deciding whether they want to obtain additional support for their children when they experience a loss. The results of this study, if communicated to parents, could remind parents to inquire whether there is support for grieving children in schools, and not simply assume that there is support. If parents find out that there are little or no services for grieving children in schools, they may choose to contact a professional outside of the school to provide support and counseling to their grieving children.

This study informs social work degree programs about whether some school social workers feel prepared to work with grieving children. This may reveal whether grief and loss is a topic that should be covered at greater depth and length in BSW and MSW programs and what knowledge and skills are needed in the social work curriculum.

This study informs social workers in the community about what resources and services certain schools provide and which they lack. This may help social workers

who are working with grieving children to understand what services grieving children are receiving in these schools and which they are not. Social workers in the community and social workers in the school could communicate with one another about their roles in helping grieving children, and this could help decrease duplication of services. This could mean a more efficient way of organizing and utilizing resources and services.

Based on the findings in this study, the following implications for practice are offered:

1. Because many school social workers felt unprepared to help grieving children, there should be more education, information, and training offered to school social workers on grief, especially related to children's grief. This education should be provided in BSW and MSW programs, internships, and professional school social work continuing education courses. Instead of a grief and loss course being elective, BSW and MSW programs should make a course mandatory. Because there are students who experience grief, there needs to be minimum standards created for school social workers regarding this issue.

2. In view of the fact that grief is not limited to just a death of an immediate family member, school social worker programs should include courses that look at the types of grief that can be experienced by children. These courses are especially important in light of the fact that violence in schools has become commonplace, and the grief and loss of innocence that can occur in children who witness these events needs to be addressed. School social workers should be provided specific training in how to deal with these types of grief. As Allen-Meares (2004) reported, because of the many

problems faced by children today, it is important that school social workers focus on the individual child more than has been done previously.

3. School districts need to reconsider the budget lines that they allot to hiring school social workers and the resources that they need. Children today are greatly impacted by the violence that surrounds them in their homes, neighborhood, and their schools and they need a place they can go to and talk about their experiences. Huxtable and Blyth (2002) reported that school social workers are funded primarily because of legislative initiatives and in the past have spent their time providing services only to disabled students. Huxtable and Blyth suggested that school social workers need to be empowered to achieve their own vision of goals and objectives. School social workers should have their role expanded in schools so that they can respond to the increasing, new, and emerging needs of grieving students.

4. Because school social workers lack the time to assist grieving children, there needs to be more social workers hired in schools. School social workers who help grieving children often help them in a group setting. However, if they had more time they could also spend more time working individually with grieving students, which is also important. School social workers need more time to meet with grieving students. Occasionally spending twenty or thirty minutes with grieving students is not always enough time to help. If there were more school social workers, the role of helping children cope with life's stresses like grief could be primary, rather than secondary to the child's academic performance (which it is now). Also, if there were more school social workers, fewer referrals outside the school would be needed. Children could get the help they need in school, with people with whom they are familiar and comfortable.

They are more likely to follow through with appointments in school than in the community, since there are some barriers to receiving assistance outside of school.

5. School social workers need increased financial resources so they can purchase more resources to assist grieving children. Books, games, and other grief resources and supplies help grieving students, but school social workers usually have little if no budget to buy these items. Some social workers purchase these items with their own money, but they should not be expected to do so.

6. Schools need to have private spaces where students and school social workers can meet. Currently, there is a lack of privacy in many schools, and there are no spaces where private meetings can be held. Confidentiality and privacy are important when meeting with grieving students and making them feel comfortable. Private spaces are also important when school social workers meet with students' parents.

7. Teachers should be educated so they understand school social work roles and how students' life stresses and environment affect their academic performance. Teachers should understand the positive influence school social workers can have on students' emotional help and life stresses and therefore how school performance can improve. And, teachers need to be educated that if students are struggling with grief or other life stresses, and do not receive help, it could negatively affect academic performance. There should be interdisciplinary team building so that school social workers are seen as teachers' allies and part of the team. If teachers are educated about school social workers skills and abilities and what they have to offer, teachers may be

more supportive of school social work services and taking children out of the classroom to meet with a social worker.

8. Parents need to be educated about school social work and how school social workers can help students and their families. Parents are sometimes hesitant to allow their children to meet with social workers because they may view social workers negatively and because they are worried about privacy. They need to be provided information about the positive ways that social workers can impact children's lives. Parents should be reassured that privacy and confidentiality will be upheld (with a few exceptions).

Future Studies

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made for future studies:

1. Researchers should survey school social workers in all 50 states to investigate what special training in grief counseling that they are required or not required to have before being licensed in their state.
2. Researchers should study how the role of the school social worker varies from state to state to see what the commonalities among states are so that recommendation can be made for standardizing the role of the school social worker.
3. It would be beneficial to look at the various higher education curriculums for school social workers to better understand how school social workers are being trained across the nation.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities – E-mail Survey

IRB Code Number: 0806P35682

Dear School Social Worker,

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. You are invited to participate in a study about school social work with grieving children.

You were chosen to participate in this study because you are licensed as a school social worker in Minnesota, work as a school social worker in a school in the Twin Cities Metro Area, and are a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association. Your thoughts and experiences will help build knowledge about school social work with grieving children.

This study is being conducted by Lisa Quinn-Lee, MSSW, LICSW, Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work, under the supervision of Dr. C. David Hollister, Professor at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social workers provide to grieving children in schools. For this study, grieving children are defined as those who have experienced a loss through death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend, etcetera). Data from this research will help advance our understanding of the work of school social workers with grieving students.

This research is aimed at uncovering the following questions:

- 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children in Twin Cities schools?
- 2) What services are provided?
- 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize?
- 4) To which community resources do school social workers refer grieving students?
- 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children?
- 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed?
- 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If yes, what services are they providing?
- 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary; your responses will add to the knowledge of school social work. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship. You are not required to participate in this study. It is completely your choice. If you do not participate, it will not affect your relationship with your workplace or the University of Minnesota. If you feel discomfort or do not want to answer a question, you can skip that question and move on to the next question. If at any time during the survey, you want to stop answering the questions, you may stop at anytime. Any information gathered in your survey answers will be completely confidential. Consent is implied when you choose to complete the survey.

Procedures

Participation in this study will consist of a brief preliminary internet survey. From the e-mail invitation, you will click on the link that will take you to the survey. The survey consists of six questions about your work with grieving students. The survey will take you approximately 10 minutes.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. All research data, including consent forms, transcripts, and audio tapes will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the information. All data will be destroyed in three years. In any sort of publication, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

Contacts and Questions

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If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research

Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; 612-625-1650.

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research project. If you have any questions, please contact us.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities – Interview

IRB Code Number: 0806P35682

Dear School Social Worker,

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. You are invited to participate in a study about school social work with grieving children.

You were chosen to participate in this study because you are licensed as a school social worker in Minnesota, work as a school social worker in a school in the Twin Cities Metro Area, and are a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association. Your thoughts and experiences will help build knowledge about school social work with grieving children.

This study is being conducted by Lisa Quinn-Lee, MSSW, LICSW, Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work, under the supervision of Dr. C. David Hollister, Professor at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social workers provide to grieving children in schools. For this study, grieving children are defined as those who have experienced a loss through death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend, etcetera). Data from this research will help advance our understanding of the work of school social workers with grieving students.

This research is aimed at uncovering the following questions:

- 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children in Twin Cities schools?
- 2) What services are provided?
- 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize?
- 4) To which community resources do school social workers refer grieving students?
- 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children?
- 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed?
- 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If yes, what services are they providing?
- 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary; your responses will add to the knowledge of school social work. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship. If at any time during the interview, you feel discomfort or do not want to answer a question, just say "pass" and we will move on to the next question. If at any time during the interview, you want to stop the interview, just say "stop" and we will stop the interview. Anything that you tell me in the interview will be completely confidential. If you choose to participate, you will sign a consent form before the interview.

Procedures

Participation in this study will consist of one 60-minute interview, during which I will ask you questions about your work with grieving students. The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed in order to assist me in my data analysis process.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. All research data, including consent forms, transcripts, and audio tapes will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the information. All data will be destroyed in three years. In any sort of publication, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

Contacts and Questions

Lisa Quinn-Lee, MSSW, LICSW
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School of Social Work
651-208-1350
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C. David Hollister, Ph.D.
Professor
University of Minnesota
School of Social Work
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If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; 612-625-1650.

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research project. If you have any questions, please contact us.

Appendix C: Consent to Participate in the Study

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities – Interview

IRB Code Number: 0806P35682

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study about school social work with grieving children. You were selected to participate in this study because you are licensed as a school social worker in Minnesota, work as a school social worker in a school in the Twin Cities Metro Area, and are a member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association. Your thoughts and experiences will help build knowledge about school social work with grieving children.

This study is being conducted by Lisa Quinn-Lee, MSSW, LICSW, a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota, under the supervision of Dr. C. David Hollister, Professor at the University of Minnesota.

Background Information

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social worker provide to grieving children in schools. For this study, grieving children are defined as those who have experienced a loss through death of someone significant (e.g., parent, sibling, grandparent, friend, etcetera). Data from this research will help advance our understanding of the work of school social workers with grieving students.

This research is aimed at uncovering the following questions:

- 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children in Twin Cities schools?
- 2) What services are provided?
- 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize?
- 4) To which community resources do school social workers refer grieving students?
- 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children?
- 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed?
- 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If yes, what services are they providing?
- 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities – Interview

IRB Code Number: 0806P35682

Consent Form

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary; your responses will add to the knowledge of school social work. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you choose to participate, you are free to not answer any question or can withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship. If you choose to participate, you will sign a consent form before the interview.

Procedures

Participation in this study will consist of one 60-minute interview, during which the researcher will ask you questions about your work with grieving students. The interview will be audio taped and later transcribed in order to assist the researcher in the data analysis process.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study.

Compensation

There will be no compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. Subjects' identifying information will be stored separately from survey responses. All research data, including consent forms, transcripts, and audio tapes will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet. The researcher is the only person who will have access to the information. All data will be destroyed in three years. In any sort of publication, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Digital recordings and data stored on a computer will be stored in a password protected encrypted file.

School Social Work with Grieving Children in the Twin Cities – Interview

IRB Code Number: 0806P35682

Consent Form

Contacts and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Quinn-Lee. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at University of Minnesota School of Social Work, 651-208-1350, quin0183@umn.edu. The student's advisor is Dr. David Hollister, University of Minnesota School of Social Work, 612-624-3695, dhollist@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. SE, Minneapolis, MN, 55455; 612-625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in this research study.

Name _____

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

Interviewer Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix D: E-mail Survey Questions

1. Have you provided social work services to grieving children in a Twin Cities school?
☐ Yes
☐ No
2. If yes, what services have you provided?
3. At which grade level(s) have you provided services?
☐ Elementary School
☐ Middle School/Junior High School
☐ High School
4. What types of death losses are students grieving?
☐ Parent death
☐ Sibling death
☐ Grandparent death
☐ Friend death
☐ Pet death
☐ Other_____
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working with grieving children in schools and the assistance they do or do not receive in school? If yes, please answer below.
6. Would you be willing to participate in an interview to further discuss school social work with grieving children? If yes, please provide your name and contact information below. Thank you so much.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Name of person interviewed _____

Date of interview _____

Time of interview _____

Hello, my name is Lisa Quinn-Lee, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for this study.

As we previously discussed, I am conducting research about school social work with grieving children.

The purpose of this research is to describe and analyze the services that school social workers provide to grieving children in schools. For this study, grieving children are defined as those who have lost a close family member (sibling or parent) through death. Data from this research will help advance our understanding of the work of school social workers with grieving students.

This research is aimed at uncovering the following questions:

- 1) What are school social workers' experiences working with grieving children in Twin Cities schools?
- 2) What services are provided?
- 3) Which interventions do school social workers utilize?
- 4) To which community resources do school social workers refer grieving students?
- 5) How prepared do school social workers feel to provide support to grieving children?
- 6) How and by whom are grieving children identified and assessed?
- 7) Are other disciplines providing services to grieving children in schools? If yes, what services are they providing?
- 8) Do barriers exist in providing school social work to grieving students? If yes, what are they?

The questions I ask will be about school social work with grieving children in the Twin Cities.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions

1. How many years have you worked as a school social worker in a Twin Cities school?
2. Tell me about your experiences working with grieving children in the schools. (Interventions)
3. Tell me about the support and services for grieving children in the schools. (What support system in the school is in place for grieving children?)
4. What would you like to see done differently?
5. Do other disciplines and professions work with grieving children in the schools? If yes, what services do they provide?
6. How are grieving students in school identified and referred?
7. What kinds of losses are students grieving?
8. Do barriers exist that prevent you from providing services to grieving students? If yes, what are they?
9. How prepared do you feel to provide services to grieving students?
10. When and why do you refer grieving children to community resources?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences working with grieving children in schools?

Thank you for taking the time to help me with my research study. I truly appreciate it. Your answers have been very helpful and informative, and will help expand the knowledge of school social work. I will summarize our discussion and e-mail the script to you. Please read through this and make sure it is an accurate summary of the interview. Please contact me if you have any questions. Thank you again for your assistance.

Appendix F: Number of Answers for Preliminary Internet Questions

Question number	N answered	N skipped
1. Have you provided social work services to grieving children in a Twin Cities school?	58	1
2. If yes, what services have you provided?	56	3
3. At which grade level(s) have you provided services?	56	3
4. What types of death losses are students grieving?	56	3
5. Is there anything else you would like to say about school social work with grieving children?	35	24
6. Would you be willing to participate in an interview to further discuss school social work with grieving children?	29	30

Appendix G: Answers to Questions on the Preliminary Internet Survey

Question number	N answered	Answers
1. Have you provided social work services to grieving children in a Twin Cities school?	55 3	Yes No
2. If yes, what services have you provided?	56	See Table 3
3. At which grade level(s) have you provided services?	42 19 15	Elementary School Middle/Junior High School High School
4. What types of death losses are students grieving?	54 30 46 28 38 20	Death of a Parent Death of a Sibling Death of a Grandparent Death of a Friend Death of a Pet Other (see Table 4)
5. Is there anything else you would like to say about school social work with grieving children?	35	See Table 5
6. Would you be willing to participate in an interview to further discuss school social work with grieving children?	29	Yes

Appendix H: Answers to Preliminary Internet Survey Question 2:
If yes, what services have you provided?

Response #	Responses
1	1:1 counseling; classroom presentations
2	Individual grief counseling and small group support
3	Individual counseling and support.
4	Individual support sessions for the child and the parent/s as well--- referral to grief therapists in the surrounding metro area---research-based literature on grief/loss for parents and child/ren---bibliography of suggested reads on grief for both the child and parent
5	Individual counseling and support, referral for additional grief and loss resources; supportive information, resources, & lending of books to parents and teachers
6	Crisis counseling
7	Support in dealing with the death and also a group setting for the adults to help understand situation. I also purchased books aimed at children understanding death and books for parents to help understand death. The books are part of the Parent Resource Library
8	Community connections, individual time to discuss experiences and gain support, support through communication with teachers regarding when medical emergencies at home interfere with the students ability to complete work, attend to task or attend school
9	Individual and group therapy.
10	Supportive consultation
11	Group, individual support, community resources to the parents/families.
12	Individual counseling/support for child, family; referrals to camp Amanda (grief camp), groups
13	Individual or group therapy
14	Grief group with children who have lost a parent
15	Small group of 4 students for 6 weeks. Individual sessions with individual students when someone close to them died. Phone and in-person consultation with parents
16	Counseling, referral to outside agencies, accommodations in class with teachers
17	Counseling, mental health support, resources, family support
18	Individual support
19	Individual and group counseling to the child, resource referral for families
20	Grief support group
21	One to one counseling, referrals for families, part of the crisis team when a student unexpectedly dies . Four students have died in a school

district during the last two school years.

22 Short term counseling, and support Family referral to community
support/counseling programs

23 One to one direct service

24 Counseling with children who have experienced the death of a loved
one. I also facilitate support groups for children who have experienced
grief

25 Individual and group sessions provided students with resources

26 1:1 Counseling, Group Counseling, Family Support, connected them
with outside services(example: Camp Amanda)

27 Individual counseling as an Elementary School MSW Intern

28 Counseling support for the loss, and some educating on the grief
process

29 Immediate counseling for school-wide, in-home family, and individual

30 Grief groups, one on one in school, parent referrals

31 Grief counseling, talking about death of mother, aunt, grandpa, dad,
and parents divorcing/moving out, and parent in jail/prison

32 It was a one time meeting to check-in with the child and let him know
that if he needs someone to talk to, I was available.

33 Counseling, resource referral

34 Mostly listening, occasionally I've given resource materials to a parent
(for example I've suggested grief groups)

35 Individual counseling and community referrals

36 Individual counseling small group counseling large group counseling

37 Counseling and emotional support

38 Counseling

39 Individual and Group

40 individual sessions

41 Individual therapy, group therapy and have brought in outside
resources to discuss topic with the whole student body.

42 one on one short term counseling, group support, referral to
community resources, parent support

43 Small group and individual counseling

44 Short term counseling

45 One on one counseling Grief Workbook Group work

46 Ongoing counseling and support, outside referral to families, family
support

47 Group support Referrals to group support in the area Individual
counseling Art therapy Journaling

48 Clothing, money, food, and counseling.

49 Individual therapy-on-going, crisis intervention, referrals to Camp
Amanda, grief group

50 1:1 support and small group read books, did activities, had discussions,
played games

51 Individual and group counseling

- 52 Individual counseling and small group support
- 53 Counseling
- 54 Short term, group and individual counseling
- 55 Group and individual support
- 56 I have done small groups as well as individual work with children who
have loss a family member. I also did my clinical research on this
topic. Good Luck!

Appendix I: Answers to Preliminary Internet Survey Question 4: *What types of death losses are students grieving? Responses were listed under the category of "Other"*

Response #	Response
1	Death of teacher
2	Death of principal who had retired the year before, death of previous teacher who had committed suicide.
3	Loss of childhood, loss of safety as it relates to sexual assault
4	Aunts, uncles and cousins.
5	Divorce, homelessness, incarcerated parents, moving to new home/city and leaving friends
6	Classmate
7	Other relative
8	Parent overseas in military service
9	Extended family member
10	Death of a pet, death of a step-parent, a sibling who was stillborn. I have also worked with a few students who have had someone in their family (aunt, uncle) commit suicide. I have also worked with students who have parents who are dying (from cancer) and are very ill (so student is experiencing anticipatory grief)
11	Uncle
12	Other relatives
13	Uncle
14	Death of an extended family member
15	Teacher
16	Loss of childhood, loss of innocence as it relates to sexual abuse
17	Death of a relative
18	Death of a teacher
19	Cousin
20	Aunts, uncles and cousins

Appendix J: Answers to Preliminary Internet Survey Question 5: *Is there anything else you would like to say about school social work with grieving children?*

Response #	Responses
1	I have briefly worked with several students on other areas of loss. When the issues are pretty significant, I talk with the guardian about outside mental health counseling.
2	I have counseled a student who has experienced the murder of a grandparent and another student whose parent was murdered and yet another student whose sibling was murdered.
3	No.
4	It's my belief that many of the issues/concerns that are overtly presented by both children and adults can be directly correlated with unresolved grief.
5	No.
6	I believe that it is critical for these students to have school support. Particularly are situations in which the family member is ill for a long time prior to the death. The lack of predictability and frequency of medical crisis greatly impact and interfere with school functioning for students both academically and socially.
7	Grief is at the core of almost every behavior and emotion that the students at my school exhibit. Many of my students have witnessed multiple forms of violence in their homes and environments. As a result, many of my students are trying to cope with numerous losses. School social workers play a pivotal role in addressing the issue of grief because we witness the impact grief has on student achievement and interpersonal functioning.
8	There needs to be more outside agencies coming into the schools and working with children and families on this specific topic.
9	The work is complex and impacts children on so many levels. They are struggling with amazing amounts of loss that impacts their learning daily.
10	During the school day is probably not the ideal time to hold a grief group for grieving children. I would have preferred to hold this group after school but then transportation becomes an issue.
11	Each child is unique; depends on developmental stage; group seems to help children because they learn from each other that they are not the only ones and that other kids have some ideas that can help them. Grief groups
12	Grief is different for every person. It is hard to sometimes find the right intervention for every person. The more training for me, the better.
13	Grief groups are effective, also there is a free camp for those that have

suffered a loss...

- 14 It is important to work with the child at school. It would also be helpful to be able to work with the family to help them understand the child's grief process and to assist them in knowing how to help the child at home. This isn't always possible in a school setting.
- 15 I am finding this is a greater need than years ago. Many more of my students have family members who are dying violently.
- 16 It is important to educate school staff about what is most helpful in supporting students with their grief. I also meet with parents/guardians in these types of situations, to suggest ways they can support their child, provide education, books, and community resources.
- 17 I am sure that there are more children that are grieving, but I don't always know unless the family or teacher lets me know.
- 18 Often friends don't know how to respond to a friend who is grieving. I believe it's important to address that issue also with students.
- 19 The school setting allows for intervention throughout the school year and the ability to observe and monitor the child's coping/behavior, and how the grief is impacting their daily functioning. It also allows the social worker to make connections and build trust with the child's family, which often helps if a referral for individual therapy of a grief group is warranted.
- 20 It tends to be short term due to time constraints and yet grief is more of a long process.
- 21 Often times we are the initial contact and the first to find out. The child/family knows us and comes to us for support. We are also the communicator between the family & school.
- 22 I am surprised, even in my small district, by how many students have lost a parent.
- 23 It is something that comes up occasionally.....
- 24 Most all children are grieving at some level or another, dependent upon their loss. Children grieve moving, loss of friends, moving to a new school, family separation and divorce.
- 25 Grief plays a huge role in the lives of the youth I serve. It impacts every student in our school. Grief work either directly or indirectly filters into the work that I do with students & their families.
- 26 Different kids have different needs; some kids are much more resilient than others; as school social workers we get involved the more this grieving interferes with their educational success.
- 27 It would be helpful to have some curriculum on this for school social workers to use.
- 28 I think we are in a unique position to offer excellent support, small groups, etc. in an environment the child trusts
- 29 There are very limited evidence-based interventions offered.
- 30 No.
- 31 SPPS has a crisis team that goes out to buildings where a death has

taken place-staff, student, parent of student etc. We give on-site emotional first aide. My preference is to have any grief work conducted in school be supported by a community based provider as we often do not have the amount of time needed to do this work thoroughly.

32 I receive the bulk of my referrals from teachers. Sometimes teachers do not see that the child could benefit from school social work services regarding grieving because the student may function fine in the classroom. Sometimes teachers are uncomfortable asking about help with grieving.

33 Group services sometimes meet through Children in Change curriculum.

34 I wish more outside agencies, ex. hospice programs through health systems, would come in and do more focused and consistent work with these students.

35 I think this topic is very important and often times get pushed aside either because of the adults being uncomfortable or not understanding that children really do grieve.

**Appendix K: Demographic Data of the 22 Subjects who Participated
in the In-Person Interview**

Participant	Years as school social worker	Grade Level	Types of grief worked with this year
1	8	6-8	Grief over loss of animal or other smaller losses
2	1	9-12	No experience
3	10	K-5	Grief over parents' divorce; death of a student's parent; death of a student; death of a pet
4	9	K-5	Sudden death of a student's cousin
5	14	3-5	Student's parent was murdered; death of student's parent from an illness
6	9	K-5	Student's baby brother drowned; death of a student's mother from cancer
7	9	K-12+	Student killed in car accident
8	14	K-5	Student's pet died; student's parent was murdered and it was witnessed by the family
9	8	7-8	Student killed in a bicycle accident; death of a student's father
10	11	9-12	Death of a student's mother
11	9	K-5	Death of a student's father from heart attack; death of a student's pet
12	8	K-5	Death of various students' primary family members
13	12	K-12	Murder of a student's boyfriend while student was in the car; two sisters were shot
14	6	High School	Death of students, including murders and

		for 18-21 year olds	accidents
15	5	K-5	Student's father died first, and then mother died months later
16	4	K-9	Student died in fire; death of a student's family member from violent crime
17	37	Birth -25 years	A child in the student's family died; a student's parent died
18	7	Half time in K through 5; half time in early childhood special ed.	Death of a student's parent; death of a student's grandparent; suicide of the gym teacher
19	9	K-5	Two children had parents who died; two students had grandparents who died; one student had an uncle die
20	6	9-12	One of the students was murdered
21	17	9-12	Student's mother died and child had no housing
22	8	K-12	Student's mother died; student's sister completed suicide; Students' parents shot by gangs