

***Death of a Parent: Its Effects on Students' Psychological Well-Being and Academic Resilience***

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**Abstract**

The study attempted to find out the effects of parental death on students' psychological well-being and academic resilience, where majority of them obtained average levels of psychological well-being and academic resilience. The correlation for both variable was found. From the sixty respondents from ages 7-21, majority of them were male, have male deceased parent who had terminal illness as cause of their death, and were ages 7-12 years old when their parents died. Majority of the respondents grief expressions in affect, cognitive and behavioral category were sadness, denial and preoccupation with deceased parent, acting out and crying, respectively. The perceived differences of the effects of parental death based on the gender of the student and the deceased parent/s and the developmental level of student when their parent died were also analysed. Coping strategy used was mostly by getting support from loved ones (a problem-focused strategy). Since grief requires understanding from significant adults (such as relatives, guidance counselors, teachers), this study will be beneficial in catering bereaved students through the Counseling programs and services.

Keywords: parental death, psychological well-being, academic resilience

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## Introduction

Death or dying is a natural and unavoidable process that all living creatures will experience at some point in life, whether it is own death or the death of a close friend or family member. Along with the experience of death comes the process of grieving - the dealing and coping with the loss of the loved one. Unfortunately in the Philippines, children are likely to live with two parents (who could be biological parents or stepparents).<sup>1</sup> Eighty-five percent (85%) of children in the Philippines live with two parents, whereas the remaining fifteen percent (15%) Filipino children had solo parent, either due to parental death of the other parent or separation. Filipino's culture of close-family ties and collectivism has been salient characteristics in the country and that the void of a family member, especially a parent, may create not only an internal turmoil but also a developmental hazard to a child's well-being. This has been a concern since the minority of children conflicted with having only one parent affects their emotional, personal and social lives. This initiates a period of substantial change and redirection in the way children view themselves, their relationship with others, and their perception in their place in the world.

<sup>2</sup>In Macabulos' study, it tackled Filipino children's concepts of death where it found out that the development of concept of death among Filipino children was not a single construct and requires understanding the different concepts of irreversibility, universality finality and causality of death. Grasping these concepts would require understanding of non-corporeal continuation, dysfunctionality, all-inclusiveness, unpredictable, inevitable, immobility, and insensitivity. Children would understand that sickness, tragedy or accidents and personal conflicts are conditions that really do or can bring about the death of a living thing. Filipino children's other concept of death lies in their belief in the divine providence and old age. The concepts of death among Filipino children could be regarded as either concrete or abstract and many evolve towards maturity through socialization, personal experiences and observation in the environment.<sup>1</sup>

Bereavement may also have both a short-term and longer-term impact on an individual's academic undertakings. A longitudinal study by Scales et al. (2006) found that higher levels of resiliency traits are strongly correlated with higher grade point average. Referring to the ability to succeed in school despite adverse conditions, academic resilience includes components such as confidence, a sense of well-being, motivation, an ability to set goals, relationships/connections, and stress management.

With these, this study attempted to investigate the effects on the students' psychological well-being and their academic performance due to the disruption of the parent-child bond because of parental death. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: 1.) How are the students described in terms of their gender, gender of the deceased parent/s, age of the students when their parent/s died, nature of

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<sup>1</sup>From the table of percentage of children living with two, one, and no parent in the Philippines' living arrangements in World Family Map full report, 2017 in <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org>.

<sup>2</sup>See "Concepts of Death among Filipino Children" by M.N.A. Macabulos, 2015, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, pp 42-48, ISSN: 2319 – 7714.

<sup>3</sup>From "The Role of Developmental Assets in Predicting Academic Achievement: A Longitudinal Study" by P.C. Scales, E.C. Roehlkepartain, M. Neal, J.C.Kielsmeier, & P.L., Benson, 2006. *Journal of Adolescence*, 29(5), 692-708.

death of parent/s, and expressions of grief? 2.)What is the psychological well-being level of bereaved students? 3.) What is the academic resilience level of students with deceased parents? 4.) What are the differences on the effects of parental death to students in the basis of the gender of the parent/s who died and the gender of the student and the developmental level of the students when their parent/s died? 5.) Is there a significant relationship between students' level of psychological well-being and their academic resilience? 6.) What are the coping strategies used by the students on their parental loss due to death? 7.) What are the implications of the study to Counseling Psychology?

## Conclusion

### *Profile Summary of the Respondents*

Majority of the respondents were male bereaved students with male deceased parent; most of the respondents were in the late childhood stage or under the bracket of ages of 7 years old to 12 years old when their parents died; majority of the respondents had parents who were terminally-ill in which their death were anticipated or made known to the respondents before they died; in expressing grief in the affect category, majority of the respondents claimed that sadness were their main expression of grief. In the cognition category of expressing grief, most of the respondents answered that they had disbelief or denial on the death of their parent and preoccupation with their deceased parent. Lastly, in the behavioral manifestations of grief, most of the respondents stated expressing grief through acting out and crying.

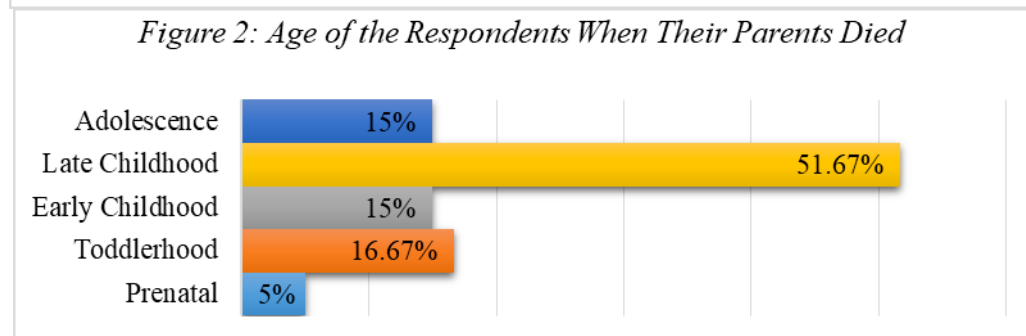
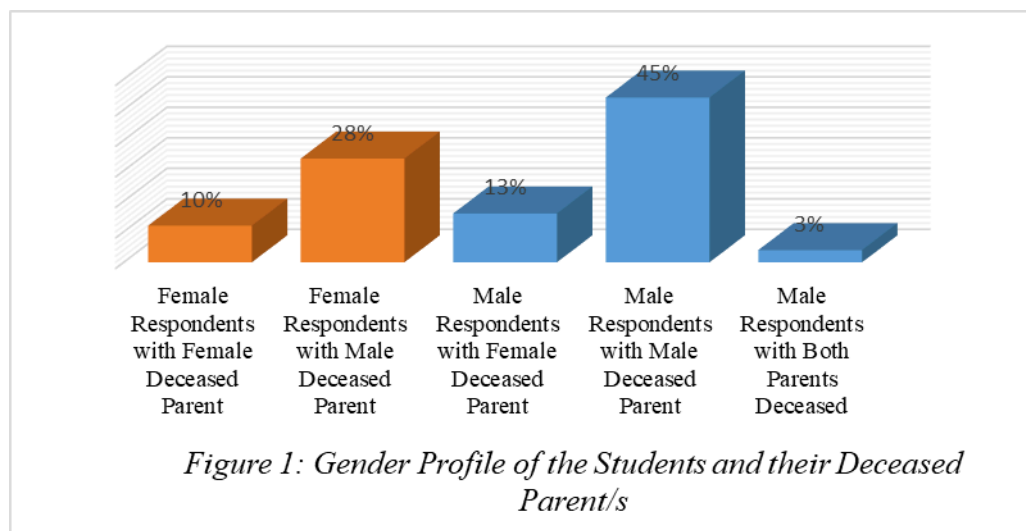


Figure 3: Nature of Death of Parents

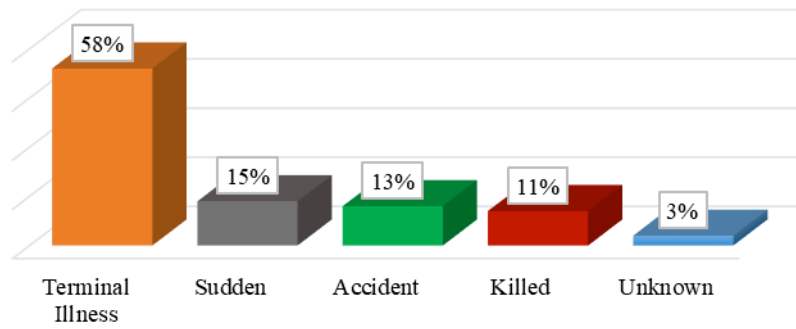


Figure 4: Expressions of Grief- Affective Category

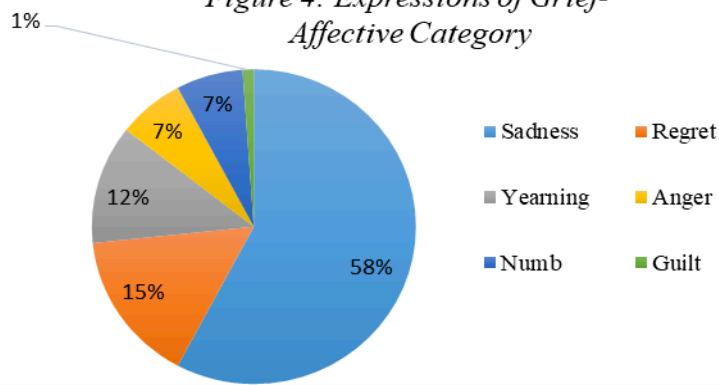


Figure 5: Expressions of Grief- Behavioral Category

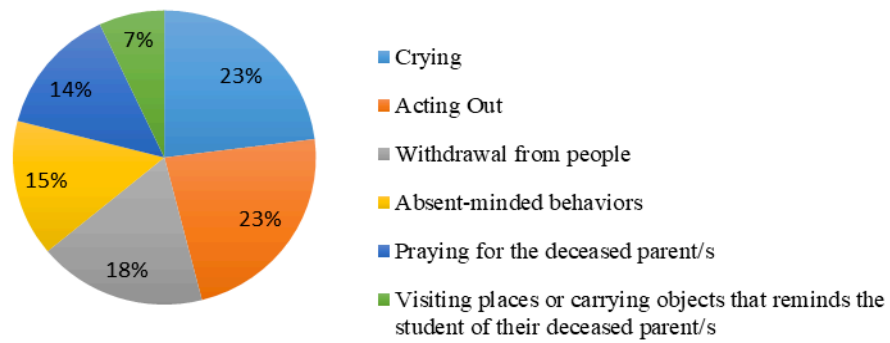
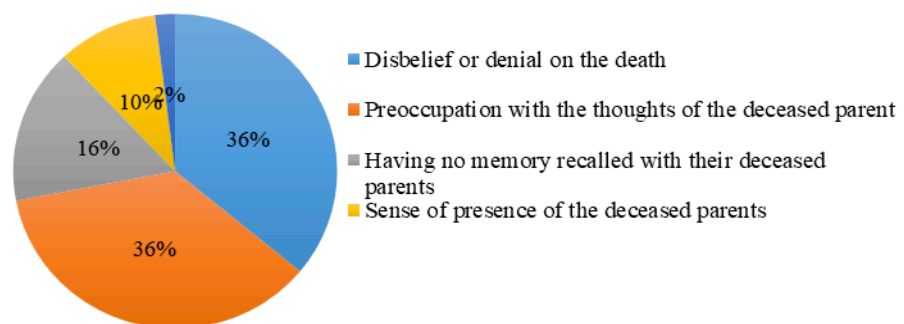
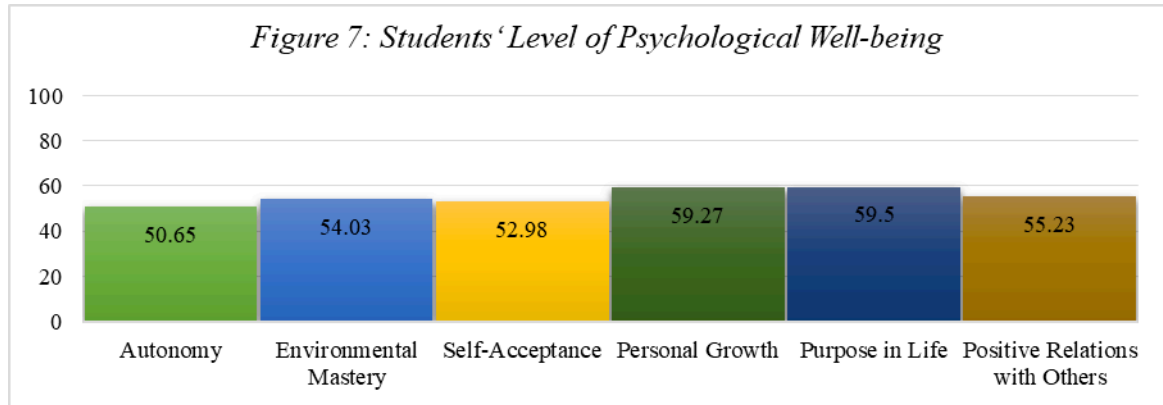


Figure 6: Expressions of Grief- Cognitive Category



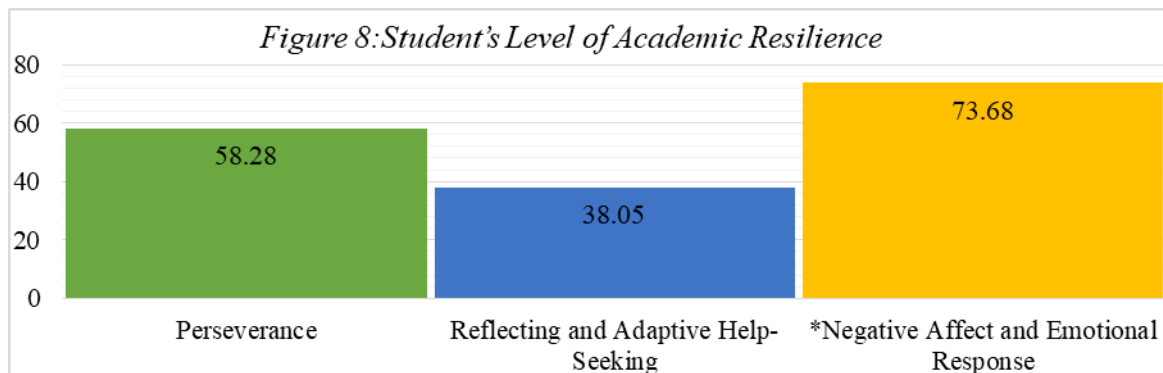
### *Students' Level of Psychological Well-Being*

Purpose in life obtained the highest mean in their level of psychological well-being in the intrapersonal aspect, followed by personal growth, then succeeded by environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and autonomy. In the interpersonal aspect, the respondents obtained an average mean in their interpersonal aspect, specifically their positive relations with others.



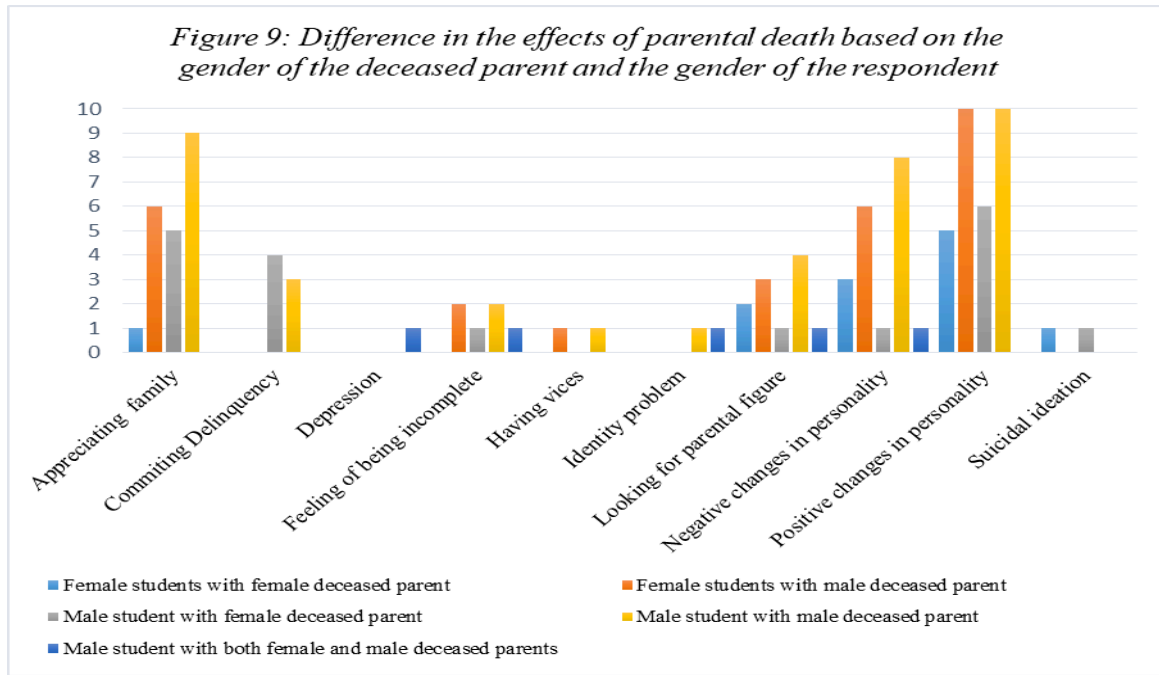
### *Students' Academic Resilience Level*

Respondents' with deceased parents obtained average level of perseverance; a low level of reflecting and adaptive help-seeking; and a low negative affect and emotional response but with high academic resilience in this domain. Overall, the respondents obtained an average academic resilience level.



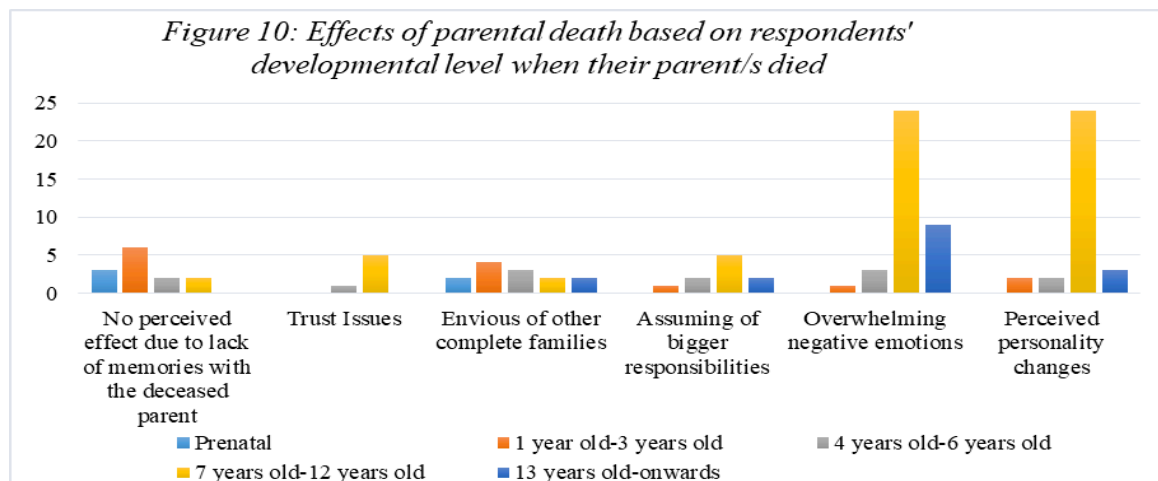
### *Differences in the Effects of Parental Death on the Basis of the Gender of Students and the Gender of their Deceased Parent*

In the basis of the gender of the parent/s who died and the gender of the student, female students with female deceased parent, female students with male deceased parent, male students with male deceased, male student with female deceased parent, and male students with male deceased parent - most of them perceived their positive changes in personality as an effect to them of the death of their parent. The two male students with both female and male deceased parents, they stated perceived feelings of being incomplete, having vices, identity problem, loss of motivation in life, looking for parental figure, and perceived negative changes in personality as effects of parental death.



*Differences in the Effects of Parental Death Based on the Developmental Level of the Student When Their Parent Died*

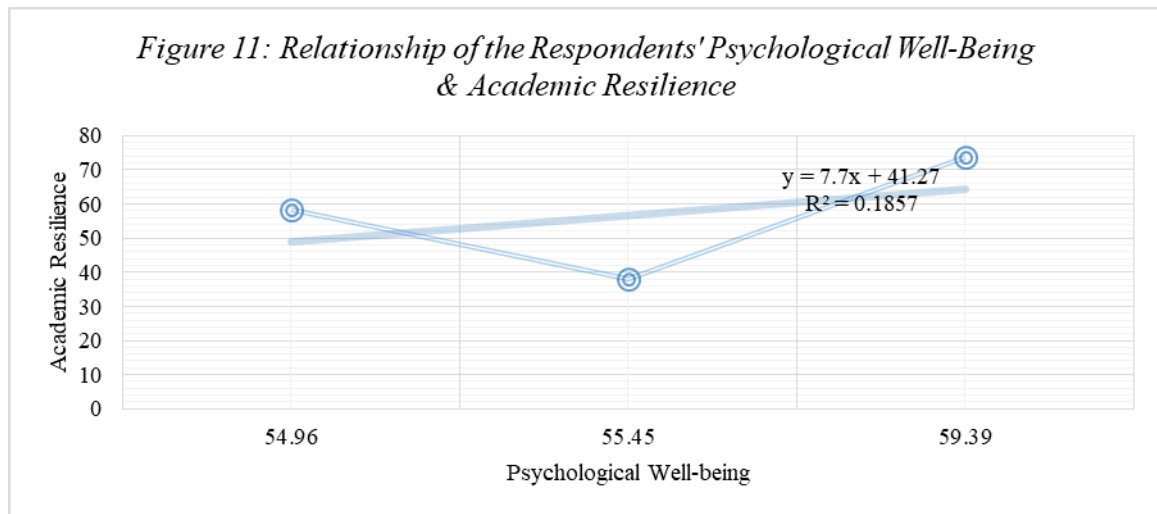
Respondents both at the prenatal stage and ages 1-3 years when their parent died were not affected due to lack of memories with the deceased parent. On the developmental level of 4-6 years old, respondents whose parents died in this stage stated that being envious to other families who are complete and having overwhelming negative emotions were their perceived effect of their parental loss. On the level of 7-12 years old, majority of the respondents had overwhelming negative emotions and perceived changes in their personality as the top effects of parental loss. Respondents on the level 13 years old- onwards when their parent/s died had overwhelming negative emotional feelings as the effect of parental loss.



*Relationship of Students' Psychological Well-Being and Academic Resilience*

Results of Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being and Academic Resilience Scale-30 obtained a correlational value of 0.19 which denotes weak or little relationship between the psychological well-being and academic resilience of the respondents.

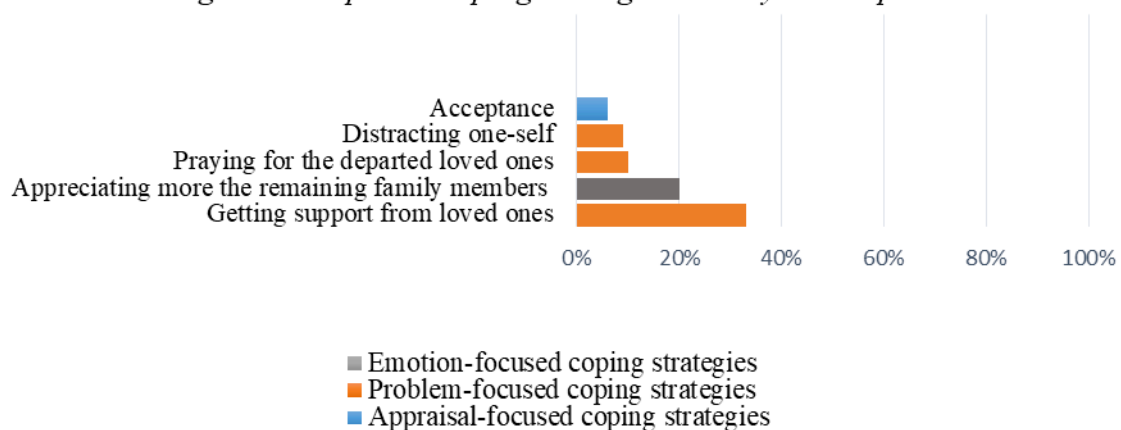
Although technically a positive correlation, the relationship between psychological well-being and academic resilience was weak.



#### *Coping Strategies Used by the Students on Parental Loss Due to Death*

Most of the respondent's way of coping was by getting support from loved ones (under problem-focus strategy); second was by loving and appreciating more the remaining family members (under emotion-focused strategy); third coping strategy was praying for the departed loved ones (under problem-focus strategy); fourth was distracting one-self (under problem-focused strategy); fifth in the ranking was acceptance of death of their parent (under appraisal- focused coping strategy); sixth coping strategy was thinking that the departed parent still guides him/her (under appraisal- focused coping strategy); next were anticipation of the reunion with the deceased parent (under appraisal- focused coping strategy), not forgetting/ reminiscing good memories with deceased parent (under appraisal- focused coping strategy), and managing painful feelings (under emotion-focused strategy); then next were making the deceased parent as inspiration, getting a new parental figure from other relatives, forgetting hurtful memories with the deceased parent , and strengthening faith – all under problem-focused coping strategy. The least were having a positive mindset (under appraisal-focused coping strategy) and focusing on self-improvement (under problem-focused coping strategy). It should be noted that the coping strategies classification used in this study was based on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman<sup>4</sup> (1984).<sup>2</sup>

*Figure 12: Top Five Coping Strategies Used by the Respondents*



## **Implications to Counseling Psychology**

In overall, the study of death of a parent and the effects it brings to bereaved students is vital since it can bring a huge contribution to grief counseling, in knowing the perceived effect of death of their parents to themselves, and to the actual effects of it to their psychological well-being and academic performance. The findings in this study can bring about development of techniques and/or programs that are suitable to help bereaved students in psychological (especially in autonomy- the least average mean result from the respondents) and academic aspects (especially in adaptive and help-seeking, where the respondents obtained low mean average from it) of their life.<sup>3</sup>

## **Limitations of the Study**

The study was entirely focused on the effects of death of a biological parent into respondent's psychological well-being and academic resilience. However, some limitations should be noted. First, in the profile, the gender of the respondents and deceased parents, age of the respondents when their parents died, nature of death of the parent/s and expressions of grief were determined, setting aside the nature and degree of the relationship to the deceased parent/s of the respondents which can be also be a vital factor influencing the effects of parental death to bereaved respondents. Next, this study is only limited in determining the effects of parental death in psychological well-being and academic resilience of the respondents, discounting the state of the respondents before their parents died. Third, the locale of the study was also limited in the five private schools in Tarlac Province in the country of Philippines only.



## References

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