

EXPLORING COPING STRATEGIES USED BY PARENTS TO COPE WITH THE DEATH OF THEIR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at exploring and understanding coping mechanisms of parents who have lost a child. Losing a child is one of the worst and most painful events that an individual may experience (Rando, 1986). It is a life changing event that impacts parents throughout their entire lives. The presented study was conducted in Albania. Twenty-two parents were interviewed for the purposes of this study, fifteen of them females and seven males. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the findings of the study. Interviews were first transcribed and then coded. After this process, codes were organized into themes and further explored by the researcher. Several themes were identified that describe coping mechanisms in parents after the loss of the child including *coping through religion, working as a coping mechanism, relationship with children and nephews*. Many of the parents used religion to deal with the death of their child. Believing in God was helpful for some of the interviewed parents because it facilitated the acceptance of the death of their child, gave them hope of joining their children in the afterlife, and helped them during the process of giving meaning to the loss. The relationships with the surviving children or nephews/ nieces helped parents cope because they feel the responsibility to care for them and as a result parents involved themselves in acts of care and kindness toward their children. Another coping strategy used by parents in coping with the pain of grief was through focusing on their work. The study supports the theory of the dual process model that describes grief as an oscillatory process where bereaved individuals move from focusing on the elements of loss to the restoration process (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

Keywords: Coping mechanisms, grief, bereaved parents.