Research on the Application of Grief Counseling Model for Parents Who Lost Their Only Child

Feng Yu, Chiang-Hanisko Lenny, Jinping Li, Yijin Zheng and Guilin Yu

ABSTRACT

Objective: Exploring the mode of sadness counseling for parents who have lost their only child, and further understanding the significance of applying this grief counseling mode to them. Methods: A grief counseling group was set up to discuss the intervention model of grief counseling. Through phenomenological search methods, 12 bereaved individuals who received grief counseling were interviewed in depth, and the data were analyzed by using Colaizzi7 seven-step analysis method. Results: Four themes of grief counseling model were set up, namely group theme, one psychological spring festival gala and three individual themes, including caring and protecting oneself, four life styles, and better tomorrow. Through the analysis of interview materials, it is found that the themes of grief counseling experience for those parents who have lost their only child are self-renewal (learning four ways...

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with their child and rebuilding their lives) and the cultivation of family ties (opening their hearts and understanding their roles). Conclusion: we should pay attention to the grief response of the people who lost their only child and give them appropriate grief counseling, which can help the people who lost their only child rebuild their lives and also add benefits to the society.¹

**KEYWORDS**

Shidu family; Grief counseling; Interview;

**INTRODUCTION**

Shidu family refers to the kind of family where both parents have not given birth or adopted children after the death of their only child [1]. Loss of the only child is the most serious emergency event in life, which will lead to continuous grief, repeated pain and serious impact on the physical and mental health and normal life of the persons who lost their only child. Some studies have shown that there is a general traumatic reaction among the family losing the only child, which appear a higher proportion of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms than other kinds of cases. About 7 % - 42 % of the bereaved family will suffer from depression to varying degrees, while more than 60 % of the bereaved parents suffer from moderate and severe depression[2]. At present, there are 76,000 newly-increased families without family independence in our country. As of 2012, there are more than 1 million families without family independence in our country [3]. Grief counseling refers to professionals assisting bereaved or deceased patients to produce normal grief within a reasonable time so that they can start their normal life again. At present, grief counseling is mainly carried out in the form of personal psychotherapy, peer support intervention, group support intervention and so on. A team of art therapy volunteers joined hands with a community to organize the Psychological Spring Festival Gala for 32 families who lost their independence on the eve of the Spring Festival by using traditional Chinese festivals. Twelve Shidu people were selected to continue their personal grief counseling [4]. This study is aimed at providing practical basis for improving and shortening the grief process of Shidu parents. The practical results are reported as follows.
OBJECTS AND METHODS

Objects

Among all Shidu families in a community to participate in the “XX Psychological Spring Festival Gala”, 12 Shidu people were selected by the convenient sampling method. The criteria for inclusion are: the only child died within 3 years and there is no family plan for giving birth and the age is less than 60 years old, and voluntarily and willingly consent to accept the individual grief counseling in an integrated art therapy project group. The exclusion criteria are as follows. Those who have major physical or mental diseases and have language communication disorders are excluded. The sample size of the study depends on the repeated appearance of the data of the interviewees in their personal psychotherapy, and the analysis of the data does not reveal any new topics. In this study, 12 Shidu patients were numbered by the letters A ~ L, 8 were female, 4 were male, aged from 45 to 58 (50.92±4.52) years old. The situation of the objects of educational background: 1 case in primary school, 2 cases in junior high school, 3 cases in senior high school / technical secondary school, 3 cases in junior high school, and 3 cases in undergraduate and above. The time from the loss of the only child to attending the Psychological Spring Festival Gala is 4 months to 2 years and 1 month. Among them. Besides, 2 cases of the loss of the only child were definitely diagnosed as depression and were in a stable period, while 1 case of the loss of the only child had sought psychological counseling once.

Methods

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL GRIEF COUNSELING GROUP

The members of this study are mainly from art therapy volunteers, mainly to finish the analysis of those who have lost their only child and to set the theme of grief counseling. Each individual grief counseling consists of a professional grief therapist, two teaching assistants and a researcher. The theme is set in consideration of the theory of “five stages of grief” of those who lost their only child, including five stages of refusal, grief, bargaining, depression and acceptance[5]. The theme of each grief counseling is set up according to the psychoanalytic theory of depth psychology and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The psychological techniques applied in the counseling process include empty chair technology, role-playing and ceremonial activities.
DATA COLLECTION

This research has been reviewed by the ethics Committee of the unit where it is located. Phenomenological research method is adopted. Starting from the psychological spring festival gala, people are familiar with the interviewees and build trust. Under the premise of the informed consent of the interviewees, time and place for personal grief counseling are reserved (e.g., home, community, coffee shop, etc.). Each patient who lost their only child intervene 4 times, 60 ~ 90 min each time. At the end of each grief counseling topic, the researcher would conduct semi-structured interviews with those who lost their only child. According to the outline of the interview: ① what is your greatest perception or gain in this grief counseling? ② How will you view the meaning of your life through this tutorial? ③ After counseling, what changes did you find?

DATA ANALYSIS

Recording the whole process of counseling content. After the counseling is completed, audio will be transferred to the text in time. And then the data will be read, analyzed, reflected, classified, refined and summarized by Colaizzi [7] analysis method[6]. The specific steps are: ① systematically reading the detailed information of the interviewees; ② carefully analyzing and systematically summarizing important statements; ③ orderly encoding and carefully recording the repeated viewpoints and thoughts; ④ classifying, assembling and summarizing the coding viewpoints to form the main theme of this research; ⑤ the description of the expression should be as detailed, complete and organized as possible; ⑥ carefully distinguishing similar viewpoints; ⑦ the data will be valid only after the two researchers confirm their agreement. During the analysis, trying to avoid adding the researchers' own theories and experiences, following the information provided by the original materials, and continuously reflecting, experiencing and finding the topics in the materials.
Table I. GRIEF COUNSELING TOPICS AND TRAIN OF THOUGHT OF SETTINGS FOR THOSE WHO LOST THEIR ONLY CHILD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequence</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Main goals</th>
<th>Main ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Psychological Spring Festival Gala</td>
<td>Family ties link, foundation establishment</td>
<td>Given Spring Festival is the most important traditional festival in China. At this moment, the loneliness experience of Shidu families would be strongest. Accompany and dance together in the form of spring festival gala, establishing the foundation for subsequent psychological assistance.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Caring and body protection</td>
<td>Physical and mental recovery, longevity and well-being</td>
<td>Given the common health problems of those who lost their only child. Taking music therapy as the background, the foundation is laid for establishing correct cognition by starting with healthy body and adjusting body and mind through the explanation of traditional Chinese medicine massage, health care exercise and healthy food.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Four ways of life</td>
<td>Recalling life and expressing emotions</td>
<td>Based on the common psychological state of the deceased, understanding the experience of the deceased, and guiding the deceased to “thank, apologize, show love and say goodbye” in a quiet way with music therapy as the background. Through free painting, drawing the story of life, expressing emotions, experiencing growth, and guiding those who have lost their only child to improve their self-image, self-esteem, self-identification and social skills, so as to realize a better tomorrow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Better tomorrow</td>
<td>Relationship reconstruction, behavior sublimation</td>
<td>Through free painting, drawing the story of life, expressing emotions, experiencing growth, and guiding those who have lost their only child to improve their self-image, self-esteem, self-identification and social skills, so as to realize a better tomorrow.</td>
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**Theoretical basis**

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Refusal and loneliness</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Grief</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Depression and acceptance</td>
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**Theme Setting of Grief Counseling**

Through discussions among members of the volunteer team, starting with the establishment of initial trust in the link with the those who lost their only child, paying attention to their physical and mental health, making good distinction from the deceased, and then setting up four themes from the rebirth of life. Seeing table 1 for the theme and thinking of grief counseling for those who lost their only child.
Results of Grief Counseling of Individuals Who Lost Their only Child

Under the traditional cultural framework of China's traditional reception, losing only children is the greatest disaster and trauma for Chinese families. Angry, grief, and hard-to-release pain cause families to accumulate a large number of negative experiences and also bury a great deal of uncertain crisis. When those who lost their only child were asked to talk about the harvest of grief counseling, the significance of change and life. After four themes of grief counseling, they were mainly summarized as two themes of self-renewal and the cultivation of family ties.

SELF-RENEWAL

It can be summed up in the following two sub-themes: ① Learning to talk to the child in four ways: there are 8 cases of those who lost their only child that they feel sorry for the child's death, that they need inner support to express their feelings and get rid of repeated grief, and case B: "Recently I have been regretful that I shouldn't be so serious about the child and always keep a straight face. Thank you very much for telling me that this is the way the child reminds me to leave, no matter who has love to express, thank you for my baby. I am always loving my baby. Of course I also want to say goodbye to my baby, farewell is not farewell. Reconstruction of life: most people who lost their only child said that when they saw children of the same age as their dead children, they would feel sadder. Case H: “when they saw children of the same age before, they felt that heaven was punishing me. If they felt guilty, I would not dare to look up at those children. During the process of free painting that day, I found that apart from sadness, I also had myself. My own life should have strength. Now I think that children are reminding me to live well. Those children on the road will come to see if I have a good life for my son.” Case A: “I was sick for a while. My son's classmate came to see me. He said he had a dream at night. XX rebuked him for not seeing my mother. I also began to feel that I must take good care of my body before I could live up to my son's care. Now I am practicing Baduanjin every day, and I am planning to travel to Japan to watch my son's favorite cartoons.” Case I: “I have been sleepless for a long time, especially living near the school. Hearing the child's voice everyday makes me unable to sleep. After studying four times that day, my heart felt that the child must forgive me, so I slept that day.”

FIXING FAMILY AFFECTION

It is mainly manifested in the following two sub-themes: ① opening the heart: some people who lost their only child would regret having only one child at the beginning and terminating the second pregnancy in order to keep their jobs. Case C: "since that happened, I haven't spoken to my husband for a year and a half. I have been living in my family and attending the Psychological Spring Festival Gala. I feel that the family is best together. I also remember that the child used to like to spend
weekends with her father. I think she wants to see her father and mother together, and I can't be immersed in my pain all the time. This also affects the health of my parents, "I went back to live with my husband, and I brought my painting back to him. He said that the color was like the red brick house of the factory at that time and immediately thought of when we first worked in the factory, we wanted to go back and look at it together, and then we went to the river side for a walk." ② Role cognition: some loners closed themselves up to avoid negative evaluation of social interaction. Case E:" if it weren't for this spring festival gala with the theme of loneliness, I wouldn't want to go out. Looking at them dancing, I felt that life was filled with color and I needed your help. "

DISCUSSION

Attaching Importance to the Grief Response of Those Who Lost Their only Child and Giving Appropriate Grief Counseling

Grief is the emotional experience that everyone who lost their family members will experience, especially for those who experience the death of their children, which is unpredictable for most parents. Therefore, those who have lost their only child will have different levels of grief, anger, sadness, and pain that cannot be relieved. These make families accumulate negative emotions. Some studies show that those who have lost their only child will lead to various forms of grief because of the superposition of various negative emotions, such as depressive grief, resentful grief, regretful grief and etc. [5]. At the same time, they will complain about the unfairness of the national one-child policy and resent the government's unsound pension policy for the elderly who have lost their only child. That is to say, in recent years, group petitions, family breakdown, suicide, depression and so on have greatly troubled special families and related functional departments. Some studies show that 40 % of people suffering from the loss of their only child cannot establish a new world view after 6 months of bereavement. Therefore, it is especially important for the united community to screen the bereaved people for grief[8]. This study was conducted by a professional team in conjunction with the community to provide grief counseling to the bereaved. Two of them were definitely diagnosed as depression. After grief counseling, the meaning of life was rebuilt. One of them opened the heart door with her husband and the other was preparing to teach in remote mountainous areas to realize the meaning of life. A large number of studies indicate that grief counseling can help bereaved people to reduce their grief response, promote their acceptance and adaptability to life, and reduce psychological and behavioral problems[9-10].
Improving Self-Awareness of Those Who Have Lost Their Independence and Help Those Who Have Lost Their Independence out of Sadness

Self-awareness refers to the individual's understanding and understanding of one’s own physiological, social and psychological attributes and their states. Among them, emotional self-awareness includes identifying emotional and cognitive advantages. Identifying emotions refers to correctly identifying emotions when they firstly appear, and understanding the role of positive emotions and the negative effects of negative emotions. This ability is the basis for good interpersonal communication, self-emotion management and responsible decision – making [11]. Therefore, for those who have lost their only child, they have certain the self-awareness ability. When they improve their self-awareness ability, they can inspire those who have lost their independence to come out of grief. Research by Li Xiu et al shows that the process of grief counseling is not only a passive experience, in which the self-awareness of the lost alone is an important factor in the process of grief counseling[12]. In other words, only when they realize that they cannot get out of the pain without change can they readjust themselves and have new opportunities for development.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on psychological theories, this study integrates grief counseling in palliative treatment to help those who have lost their only child to start with the establishment of a family-like link, then changes their cognition to improve their health level, uses four ways of life to gradually accept the reality that their beloved children have passed away, and at the same time uses artistic treatment to break down their emotions in order to help those who have lost their independence to rebuild their meaning in life. However, the grief process of those who lost their independence is complicated and diverse. In order to better solve the grief response of those who lost their only child, more researchers need to participate in solving these problems in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author(s) received a financial support from the funding of the National Social Science Fund, the number is 17BSH119.

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