

**SOCIAL WORK ANALYSIS OF DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGES OF THE FAMILY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Life generally is a dynamic continuum characterized with season and time. Every living being passes through birth and eventually die, thus completing a life cycle. The impact of death and bereavement creates a structural dislocations in the family system and society. This void is often experienced by the bereaved and close associates of the dead, in terms of socio-economic valuations. The way people mourn or grief and respond to death relatively differs from culture and background with accompanying socio-economic effects. Every individual is aware of the inevitability of death, even though, the subject matter is often evaded and mostly ignored. Death is seen as evil and bad omen, but its reality is certain. The attendant socio-economic effects must be brought to the front burner to provide effective support system to the family through rehabilitation and adjustment processes. This paper therefore is a descriptive research meant to examine the socio-economic changes in family system, and the place of social work profession as a moving force in social engineering to help the family to achieve a balance, adapt and adjust to the new changing roles and responsibilities placed on them. The paper conclude that death is a natural phenomenon and society, individuals and family need to create good interpersonal relationship and interactions that would ultimately promote healthy living and homeothesis. The study therefore recommend amongst others that social work profession must be alive and responsive to provide support mechanism for effective rehabilitation and adjustment.*

**Key words:** Death, bereavement, adjustment and Rehabilitation, Social Work

**INTRODUCTION**

Generally, life is a dynamic continuum characterized with seasons and times for every mortal under the heavens and every mortal creature passes through birth and death. These are natural characteristic determinants and are responsible for how people react to the ever changing situations of life and when death occurs in the family. The impact of death, grief and bereavement on the immediate family system creates a structural void that requires homeostatic adjustment and rehabilitation on the part of the individual, family, and society in general. The way and manner the upsurge of these events has altered the way we view and relate to one another in the societies is mind mapping and often time distressing. Death intrinsically motivates us to seek support via our networks of family, friends and community to enable us adapt to the prevailing situation and also find ways to cushion the effect.

Death is a subject that is evaded and mostly ignored and derided by our youth worshiping progressive – oriented society (Macionis 2013).The Biblical quotation about “times and seasons of birth and death” characteristically portray two basic facts about human existence;“birth and the inevitability of death”. Dying

and death have always been critical human experience that involves ones spiritual and cultural belief. Barnum (2013), observed that death bring pain, threat to self and one's existence and fear of the unknown. It is this phobias that makes death a mystery. More so, the cultural and spiritual value attached, places one on the side of grief. Death throughout human existence and in all societies, is seen and tend to be a more remote experience, that removed one from everyday life (Kastenbaum, 2012).How these experiences affects us in some way, throughout the world is often unexplainable.

Death is inevitable part of life and the way we view death is intimately tied to our notion of self of reality, interaction and growth. Death is the final stage of growth and growth is an integral part of an index of death because physiological changes occur in term the span of life building up to death. Emile Durkheim in Haralanbos, Holborn and Heald (2004), Giddens (2006), in his study of suicide maintained that death is inexpiable and inevitable and can best be understood in social and economic context. That is, it places demand on the family and society and that its economic effect is so important and enormous when considered in the realm of social relations, (Macionis, 2013; Corden, Hirst and Nice, 2010); Haralambos et al., (2004). Therefore death has different meaning to different people and comes in different forms. Some react with intense yearnings for their loved ones, anxiety, guilt, fear, or other painful emotions. (Bonanno, Wortman and Nesse, 2014).

Steinberg, Bornstein, Vandele and Rook (2011) defined death as an inevitable conclusion of the journey that begins with birth and has important place in understanding life span development in its entirety. Steinberg et al (2011) defining death, noted, that death occur when a person's heart stopped beating, when breathing cease and when the individual fail to react to environmental stimuli. It is this stoppage of bodily functions and respiratory functions that is considered as death. It is an irreversible state involving no response to stimulation, no movement or breathing no reflexes and no indication of brain activity.

Some religious or biblical theologians believes that death is actual transformation from the physical bodily form to soul and spirit or eternal realm. Considering the level of pain, emotions, grief and reactions, it is important to note that death itself is clearly among the biologically normal phenomena and the changes which are inseparably connected with the passage of time. Therefore, according to theologians death fits into the divine creative plan for human existence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concept of death**

Death is a universal, national, persistent inescapable unavoidable and undeniable fact of life:.. The Central Intelligence Agency (2018) noted that there is 7.8 death per a thousand population globally in 2017, and there are a number of algological reason factors accurse the world that responsible for people dying per day. These factors ranges from murder, homicide, drug, natural and manmade disasters, illness and disease, accidents, emotional and physical trauma. Garrish & Barley (2018) opined that, people grief for death of their loved ones in varying degree, therefore different meaning could be created for the losses and its possible coping and honesties the strategies. Some may experience their grief in anger, and anxiety. Death of a family member can have sustained financial, economic and social recite on the bereaved, the family, group and society. As Corden, Sainburg and Slpper (2011) observed, the socio-economic implication lane received hers attention them the emotional and psychological experience.

According to the world, death and bereavement is affected by religious and spiritual beliefs and even previous death experience. Therefore discussing about death could sometimes be apprehensive (Carmack and De Groff, 2016). However, this may be the expression and experiences of grief differs from individual to individual and largely following cultural and psychological origins. These experiences offers explanation to changes and adjustments in the families that experienced death. The bereaved person is viewed in the context of the family system and the family system is also viewed in the context of the family community – world system (Bowlby, 2008). The adjustment to the void is partly determined by the bereaved persons, depending on the phase of grieving they are experiencing and the way bereavement is perceived by the family members. The choices of adjustment may create trans-generational dysfunction consequences.

### **Bereavement:**

Macionis (2013), noted that death end the suffering of a dying person, but not those left behind. The surviving family members and close associates and friends may likely experience grief and anguish following the death of a loved one. Macionis (2013), further observed that the way people react and behave after losing a loved one is what is considered as bereavement. This usually follows patterns of stages, through denial, anger, negotiation, depression and acceptance. People meet different reactions and experience sorrow, hopelessness, intense yearning for their loved one, anxiety, guilt or other painful emotions (Rubin and Malkinsin, 2011). Videka and Shema (2012) assert that the individual from hearing of death news, first react by denying the reality of impending death. This may likely be followed with anger and despair to people around him/her, feeling that it is not fair that the death occurred and may eventually response and express hostility or even resentment toward family members, friends and others close to him/her.

The relations of the dying expression “promise to” by asking God to allow them time to live and do well to society. They may promise to be better persons if given the opportunity again and even became more faithful in religious services. Their reaction most often is depression and anxiety mixed with fear of the unknown. In most cases, the reality of death set in and deep feeling of loss and sadness follows, especially considering the closeness and attachment of the dying and the individual if not properly managed can result to depression. Also, the fact that death has indeed occurred, afterward, the reality manifest, through acceptance. Eventually, anxiety, depression and resentment gives way to reality and acceptance of the fact that the individual is dead. During this stage, the individual may withdraw from all except their family member, friends and caregivers (Videkan and Sherman, 2012). Rubin and Malkinsin (2011), assert that parent losing a child often experiences numerous forms of psychological stress such as depression, despair, anxiety, guilt, anger, hostility and hopelessness and may even react with more adverse health behaviors.

### **Death and socio-economic implications changes on the family system**

It is not difficult to picture changes especially income changes for the bereaved families especially, if the deceased was the breadwinner. The death of a family member generally influences changes in household socio-economic status and income. Following the death of family member, financial demands perceived as particularly urgent include payments for funeral obligations, meeting housing cost, settlement of debts, long-term budgeting adjustments covering buying food, utility bills, home maintenance, transportation costs, and fulfillment of traditional and customary financial obligations (Corden and Hirst, 2013). In some circumstances, loss of spouse or partner may trigger behaviours that lead to crisis, or outright dejection causing the surviving partner to discover his/her economic vulnerability. Jones, Shier and Graham (2012) observed in a research in Canada that death of a spouse and inadequate support and resources to deal with grief became a downward spiral for some men that led to homelessness.

It is equally, important to note that, some roles and responsibilities among survivor’s changes, following the death of a member of the family. The inherent supportive roles of intact families suddenly metaphase to single parenthood with all its stress (Carr, House, Kessler, Nesse, Sonnega & Wortman, 2010)). The death of a bread winner rocks the dynamics between, parents, siblings and wider family and in some circumstance; children go on without parent’s to meet their needs and care. Modern workplace and work role also disenfranchised grief (Bento, 2014) with economic cost to business and financial risk to working people. Happer (2010) noted that the emotional shock experienced in the event of death can disrupt work routine and there may be little support in the work place, loss of concentration and productivity, taking time off and eventually leaving a job is known to be a huge burden among parents. Also bereaved parties and individuals often face new household task, or gaps in home management, as practical problems and their financial implications become profound.

### **Adjustment in the family systems**

Death is a “dysfunctional end of life” which creates imbalances in the family system, exact needs adjustment. Jackson (2008) noted that, after the a death in the family a new structure with a new hemostats takes shapes

and often time the individuals have no awareness of how the change is affecting them and may appear to become victims in the process of adjustment. Corden and Hirst (2013), equally noted that this change is capable of destroying existing relationship and personal effectiveness, it is this changes on the relationship an persona effectiveness that create avoid in the socio-economic pathways of the family.

### **Social work intervention mode on deaths**

Grief is the painful emotional response of the loss of a loved one. Grief can vary from to time and from person to person. Progressively, grief subsides and becomes more manageable (Corden, Sainsbery & Slopper, 2011), and adapt with the situation and learn to live with the loss. The feeling of grief are subjective, different people are affected in different ways and assessing the impact of grief is to consider assessing the severity of the loss and by delving into people's grief journey through past trauma histories coping mechanism and their capabilities to reach out in times of despair and confusion. Therefore social workers must extend support to enable them cope and adjust meaningful (Ebue Uche & Ali, 2019).

This bring to fore the need and the reason why social workers must explore and be familiar with the way people grief and avoid a one-size model fit all approach in dealing with grief and bereavement. The experiences of grief can however, of shock and disbelief; but can actually be the beginning of the recovery process. The way one learns about death and dying or experience it, determines a pathological or a healthy outcome. When examining the impact of loss and grief on communities, social workers must be transparent about professional roles and capacity in re-building communities. The culture and belief pattern of the people must be respected and avoid self-cultural imposition and over stepping of boundaries and creating more angst to the already fractured individual, group or communities.

According to scholars, normalizing the reactions of people's grief is empowering and helping them to have a better understanding of the biopsychic-social impacts of loss in their lives. Therefore Karen (2013) noted that the social worker must ensure that the client receive support that will enhance homeostatic (Bowlby, 2008); Gerard, Petter and Johan, 2012; Janis, 2017). The recovery process of people in times of tragedy is very crucial and social workers and allied health practitioners must ensure their safety and recovery process. The emotional impact of grief creates extra-layer of complexity, resources may be scarce due to a number of factors, such as people living in remote, rural areas and therefore hard to reach in term of emergencies. Social workers must through technology and social media help those feeling alienated in their grief to connect with others in the privacy of their own homes. This presupposes that, social workers must create an online community forum to reach out to people who are limited in their resources and ability to seek face-to-face counselling. Sharing of grief literatures as well as encourage people to access support and interact with others experiencing the pains of grief and loss.

### **THEORETICAL APPROACH**

In the social work analysis of death and bereavement in the socio-economic changes of the family, the Linear stage theory: by Atchly (1983) was used as background. The theory posit that bereavement and death follows pattern of stages. However, others had argued that death and bereavement can be unpredictable, therefore do not follow a sequence, because death can occur spontaneously and throw the family into pains and grief. Bereavement involved profound grief and social disorientation that persist for some time. The way death is accepted by people affects their level of bereavement. That is the bereavement of is less intense for someone who accept deaths of a loved one and feels that the relationship with the dying persons has reached a satisfactory resolution. That death of a loved one most especially the bread winner is capable of tabulating the fortunes of the bereaved family economically and socially. This because it deprived them to a large extent of relieving or obtaining substantial benefits or support. Death when death occurs, the support that used to be given or extended to the family ceases automatically, this creates a gap in the family situation which may as well affects, them nutrition, education clothing.

Atchley1(983), noted that talking opportunity to put appropriate closure in the relationship with the dead or dying person, allows family and friends to better comfort one another after death. And acceptance of death

invariable enable one to cope and adjust to the changing role and responsibilities as well as the economic challenges posed as a result of the death.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. In older adult hospital appointments, church, laundry and as other social events meant relying on other people for assistance.
- ii. Social worker must provide timely and helpful financial advice not only to ease economic transition, but also develops strong positive influence on emotional experiences.
- iii. Social workers providing support backing, especially dealing with older person must necessarily ensure networks that promote interactions as well as strong social insurance or assistance.
- iv. Also, social workers must ensure and encourage people to take responsibility for the financial impact in the event death in the family. This however depends on enabling awareness, understanding and opportunity.
- v. Social workers should proudly ensure that people (bereaved) are supported by creating awareness support in the workplace to enable them maintain link with employment.

### **CONCLUSION**

The nature of death and its painful effect on the bereaved family in particular and the society in general makes social work interventions expedient and quintessential. Social work is a profession designed to help the needy and those not able to put to use their potentials without assistance. Thus, social work intervention at the level of bereavement or death of a member involves counseling, awareness creation and to some extent guidance on how the bereaved can cope with the loss of a member. Social work intervention is also necessitated by the need to reduce the pains of death since it must happen to all mankind. Hence, social workers in practice with individuals in the society is to make them understand the phenomenon of death as a transition that does not require the bereaved family to suffer much pain and distress.

On the need to address the myriad of financial expenditure and other obligations involved in funeral obligations which tend to be burdensome on the bereaved family, social workers can engage diverse intervention modes to cushion the effects. Whatever, the mode of interventions, the social worker uses scientific knowledge and skills to solve and resolve the problems. It is against this background that this paper examines social work analysis of death and bereavement and its socio-economic implications on the family and the society.

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