



University of KwaZulu-Natal students' experiences of loss, grief and bereavement during Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

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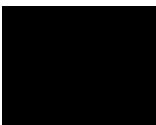
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DECLARATION

I Nkateko Bella Mabunda (student no. 215080763) , declare that

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Signed



.....
Dated: 02 December 2022

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“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”

2 Corinthians 12 vs 9.

I would like to thank God for his grace that has supplied me with the strength to endure even on days that I was considering giving up. To my mother Harriet, thank you for your unconditional love, for believing in me and for the sacrifices that you have made for me along this journey. Thank you for your prayers and for your constant words of encouragement. To my late grandmother N'wamageveni, thank you for your guidance and for the lessons that you have taught me. To my siblings, Tshifhiwa, Rendani and Tendani, thank you for the laughter and for making this journey bearable. To all my family, thank you for your prayers and for rallying behind me.

I would also like to thank my thesis supervisor and the director of UKZN CFC, Mrs Adelaide Nozipho Ndlazi for her patience, contribution, and unwavering support throughout this journey.

To all my participants, thank you for taking time to share your experience with me. This entire thesis would not have been a success without your participation. I hope this research contributes to the betterment of your experiences and other bereaved students' experiences in the university of KwaZulu-Natal.

Abstract

The current COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a great impact in the lives of many people. This is particularly because it has not only resulted in loss of lives, but it has also resulted in non-death losses that left several people bereaved. There are various implemented restrictions that extended to universities and its students to contain the spread of the virus; however, because students come from different backgrounds, their experiences of loss during COVID-19 differ. Despite the existing literature on bereaved university students, there is limited knowledge about the experiences of bereaved university students during COVID-19 pandemic because COVID-19 is a new phenomenon. Furthermore, there is a lack of contextually relevant literature on bereaved students in UKZN PMB campus. It has then become apparent that more research is needed research into the experiences of bereaved students during COVID-19 and for the development of effective bereavement programmes within the UKZN PMB Campus.

The principal aim of this current study was therefore, to highlight the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus (es). This current study then used purposive sampling to recruit five bereaved UKZN PMB campus students

Qualitative interviews were used to interview these students at the UKZN, Child and Family Centre and reflexive thematic data analysis was used to analyze data. The findings showed that several students experienced sudden loss during COVID-19, and this resulted in their intensified experience of differing emotions. Since various restrictions were placed on social gatherings and universities, learning moved online, and this had negative impacts in some students' experiences of loss and their academic performance. Lack of support from friends, family and the death of caregivers played a huge role in the intensity of grief and students' sense of identity within the university. Despite online counselling being helpful, students still preferred contact counselling sessions. They were eager to have someone that they can trust and be able to talk to about their challenges. Suggestions were then made to help improve the experiences of bereaved students on campus.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1. Introduction

Grief affects students in various ways, with concentration being a major concern because it plays a role in why various students fall behind academically (Balk, 2001; Nachmann, 2020). Literature further indicates that some students experience mental health challenges, social isolation, and difficulty in coping with their loss and grief (Cupit et al., 2016; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). In addition to this, the lack of bereavement make-up tests for those bereaved students who miss main tests is also said to contribute to their poor academic performance (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). It is for these reasons that various empirical studies are done on loss and bereavement across the world; however South Africa still has limited bereavement studies that focus on the experiences of university students, let alone during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this gap in literature necessitates the need for this study. This study extends knowledge in some of the available research like the one by Kunene and Makondo (2020); however the context is different in that this current study is nested in the UKZN in South Africa, and it also takes place during a COVID-19 pandemic.

It would be beneficial for students' experiences to be understood and taken into consideration by the university when designing the curriculum or campus support services. Doing so, would benefit the university because taking into consideration bereaved students experiences and suggestions might create a possibility for the reduction of dropouts, absenteeism, mental health challenges and poor academic performance. In addition to this, it can put the university on higher ranking as students stand a better chance of performing well academically. There seem to be limited research on this topic in South Africa or in the UKZN campus (es) as COVID-19 is a relatively new disease that presents diverse challenges that are yet to be fully understood. For research that is available, further exploration is needed to get a better understanding that is both contextually relevant and serve as a basis for further research and improvement of bereaved UKZN students' experience.

The researcher saw that it is significant to conduct an empirical study to adequately provide information on the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main research question, “What are the UKZN students’ experience of loss, grief, and bereavement during COVID-19 pandemic?” guided this study. This chapter highlights the context of the study. In addition to this, since the study is qualitative in nature, students’ experiences of loss, grief and bereavement are highlighted by making use of in-depth interviews.

1.2. Background, Context, and theoretical framework

Death has always been an inevitable part of life (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021). Since COVID-19 has been discovered, the number of people dying every-day has increased drastically. More than 100 million confirmed cases and over 2 million confirmed deaths have been recorded worldwide (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021). As a result, more than 91 percent of university students across the world are affected by such deaths occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic (Miks et al., 2020). Loss of a loved one through death, is the most debilitating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic that students have experienced or continue to experience not only abroad but also in South Africa. Bereaved students during the COVID-19 pandemic are faced with several adverse effects which include mental health challenges, social isolation, loneliness, burnout syndrome, academic challenges (Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This is further exacerbated by the inability to properly mourn their loved ones due to the restrictions that are placed on funerals and hospital visits (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021)

Literature indicates that universities are not very accommodating when it comes to loss (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). There is limited support that is offered by universities to address challenges experienced by bereaved students. As a result, several students continue to face poor academic performance, drop-out, high mental health challenges, inability to cope with grief or adapt to change (Balk, 2001; Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Cupit, at al., 2016; Nachmann, 2020; Stroebe et al., 2005).

Research has been conducted both abroad and in South Africa on grief and bereavement among students, however, not nearly enough is done during COVID-19 pandemic in a South African context. As a result, this study was conducted with students from the UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus in KwaZulu-Natal province. A purposive sampling of the qualitative research approach was adopted to adequately highlight the challenges experienced by these bereaved students. Purposive sampling was decided to be a good fit for this study. This is because it is concerned with the selection of cases that are information rich in relation to the phenomenon under study (Palinkas et. al., 2015; Patton, 1990). The experiences of bereaved UKZN students are, therefore, the phenomenon under study in this case.

The attachment theory by Bowlby and Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory framed the study. Other relevant theories like The Dual Process Model of grief, Elisabeth Kubler – Ross's stages of grief were also discussed briefly as they were useful in understanding how students' academic, career development, their sense of belonging, coping strategies within the university are affected by loss and grief.

1.3. The Problem Statement

The current infectious disease that targets human respiratory system, COVID-19, has drastically increased the number of deaths globally and resultantly, the number of bereaved individuals (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020). For example, Albuquerque, Teixeira and Rocha (2021) indicate that a single COVID-19 death can leave an estimate of nine people bereaved. These kind of deaths and associated impacts are unavoidable (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021). As a result, university students are also impacted by it (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). For example, deaths occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic leave individuals and students with limited autonomy, sanitary restrictions, and lack of opportunity to publicly mourn their deceased (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021). These constraints result in Prolonged Grief Disorder which is characterized by the persistent preoccupation with the deceased, emotional numbness, difficulty accepting the death (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021).

University students are not yet developmentally accustomed to dealing with loss, as a result, they may experience life stage-related challenges in their attempt to make sense

of their loss (Battle et al., 2011, as cited in Roberts, 2016). In addition to this, they perform poorly on their academics because the time needed to study something becomes longer as they lack concentration (Nachmann, 2020).

It is found that regardless of the above challenges and the fact that the mental health burden in South Africa is higher than other countries, there is lack of investment in the mental health of bereaved individuals because of limited adequate psychological interventions (Albuquerque, Teixeira & Rocha, 2021). This extends further to university because there is still limited support that they offer to address the problems faced by bereaved students (Kim, Nyengerai & Mendenhall, 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Where there is psychological support, students find it hard to make use of such services because of fear of stigmatization (Burns, Dagnall & Holt, 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Therefore, this creates more vulnerability towards mental health problems as they are still at an age where they are forming their sense of autonomy, meaningful relationships, and careers (Cupit et al., 2016). In addition to this, some cultures do not embrace expression of feelings and the mental health of young adults, they are then at a higher risk of experiencing cumulative grief (Demmer, 2006; Nachmann, 2020).

Some countries are gradually starting to lessen the lockdown restrictions, and some university students have started to return to campus (Mahase, 2022; Marris, 2020). This adds to students' already existing responsibilities. This means that students will have to find balance between their new roles as bereaved young adults and as university students. Literature proves that although studies have been done on university students, the challenges experienced by bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic are not well documented. Therefore, this study was conducted to address this gap and to find out the kind of support that UKZN students require to help them navigate their loss and adapt to change. In addition to this, this study is aimed at providing relevant information that will influence the development of bereavement programs within the UKZN campus (es).

1.4. The purpose statement

The purpose of this study is to highlight the challenges experienced by bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 with an attempt to influence the development of adequate bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus (es). To adequately achieve this, a qualitative approach was adopted which is characterized by the study of a phenomenon in its complexity as it occurs in its natural setting (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Phenomenological research design is one example of a qualitative research design that has been used in this study. Phenomenology is all about “a person’s perception of the meaning of an event” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 139). Phenomenological study on the other hand, is about gaining an understanding of people’s perspectives, perceptions, and understandings of a particular situation (Leedy & Ormrod. 2005). Participants in this study design describe their “lived experiences” (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic is said to alter the experiences of loss, grief, and bereavement (Mortazavi et al., 2020). As a result, using this study design has enabled the researcher to study students’ expressions of their lived experiences of loss, grief, and bereavement of UKZN students’ as they occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the above-mentioned scope of the study, this study was nested at the University of Kwazulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus)

1.5. The research questions and aims

1.5.1. Research questions

It is important that the challenges experienced by bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 are identified to influence the development of bereavement programmes to improve their university experiences, mental health, and academic performance. Therefore, this was facilitated by the following research questions:

- (1) What kind of losses have UKZN students experienced since the start of COVID-19 pandemic?
- (2) What are the grief experiences of bereaved UKZN students since COVID-19?
- (3) How did the grief experiences affect the academic life of these students?

- (4) What other mental health challenges did UKZN students experience associated with the loss?
- (5) Are there possible suggestions for intervention for grieving students at UKZN?

These research questions enabled the researcher to explore the challenges that UKZN students experience by studying the different ways that loss, grief, and bereavement affected students.

1.5.2. The aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to highlight the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus(es).

The objectives of this study are to:

- (1) To examine the kinds of losses experienced by UKZN students since onset of COVID-19 pandemic.
- (2) To highlight the grief experiences of UKZN students since COVID-19.
- (3) To investigate how grief experienced affects university students' academic lives
- (4) To examine additional mental health challenges experienced by these students in association with their loss
- (5) To compile recommendations from students about the proposed suggestions for intervention

There is a relationship in all these research questions in that the kind of loss that a student experiences is associated with certain grief experiences, academic and mental health challenges. Furthermore, the suggestions for intervention that are provided by students, provide an adequate and relevant ways of addressing problems experienced by bereaved students. Providing the opportunity for students to share their experiences and to voice out their concerns or suggestions to address their challenges, it is an adequate step towards achieving the study aim and maximizing the reduction of challenges experienced by bereaved UKZN students.

1.6. The study rationale

A rationale refers to how the researcher developed an interest in the chosen topic and their justification for conducting that research (Maree 2010, as cited in Chabangu, 2014). The researcher of this current study developed an interest in understanding bereaved students' experiences of loss and grief during COVID-19 pandemic, after the realization that there is an existing gap in literature about the experiences of bereaved UKZN students, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature highlights that there is still limited support that universities offer to address the problems faced by bereaved students (Kim, Nyengerai & Mendenhall, 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Noting this, the researcher got interested in identifying suggestions from the students that will assist the university to develop programmes that are relevant to students' needs. In this respect, the researcher chose to employ a phenomenological design of the qualitative research method to better understand the lived experiences of the bereaved UKZN students during the COVID-19 pandemic and to find out about their suggestions for intervention

Considering that a qualitative research approach was employed, the researcher used purposive sampling techniques to sample the study participants. This is because this form of sampling technique involves the selection of information rich participants (Palinkas et. al., 2015; Patton, 1990). As a result, the use of this technique ensured that the study participants have a greater chance to answer the study questions. According to Bryman (2012) qualitative research values the perspectives of its study participants. This research approach was then decided to be a best fit for this study because it provides an opportunity to explore in detail, the experiences of the individuals under study as they occur in their natural setting. In addition to this, Bryman (2012) indicates that qualitative research is invariably unstructured, therefore making it appropriate for this study because the researcher gets to adopt interview styles that are open ended. Furthermore, this created an opportunity for flexibility and to obtain detailed information from the students.

In consideration of the above, qualitative research method was chosen because of its capability to allow the researcher to identify and highlight students' losses, grieving experiences, associated mental health challenges and the ways in which loss and grief affects their academic life. This was guided by the study research questions namely; (1)

What kinds of loss have UKZN students experienced since the start of COVID-19 pandemic?, (2) What are the grief experiences of bereaved UKZN students since COVID-19?, (3) How did the grief experiences affect the academic life of these students?, (4) What other mental health challenges did UKZN students experience associated with the loss?, (5) Are there possible suggestions for intervention for grieving students at UKZN?.

1.7. Significance of the study

The study research questions served as a foundation towards the contribution to the body of knowledge concerning loss, grief and bereavement that has been experienced by UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the highly limited number of empirical studies on bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19, this study builds on those few studies that exist on loss, grief, and bereavement particularly the study by Kunene and Makondo (2020); however, the context is different in that this study is nested in the UKZN, and it is also done during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided a different lens of looking at the experiences of bereaved students, which then means that the solutions to all the challenges that bereaved university students experience are now different considering the changes in education and personal life brought by the pandemic.

This study will contribute towards creating awareness and making information readily available to assist the UKZN in their quest to improve the experiences of bereaved students on campus. This study will also be of great significance in the research field and to other universities in South Africa because there are not nearly enough empirical studies on loss, grief, and bereavement experiences of university students most specially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study will serve as one of the studies for point of reference when designing bereavement programs and when designing curriculum that is inclusive and flexible for bereaved students on campus. The recommendations provided by students on this study, can serve as guidelines for developing and maintaining successful, inclusive, and relevant on campus social services/ bereavement programmes; and curriculum within the UKZN campus (es).

1.8. Research methods

1.8.1. Qualitative research

This research study was aimed at highlighting the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus(es). “Considering the aims to explore the perceptive experiences and theoretical framework based on the variation of individualized experiences, this study is qualitative in nature” (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009, as cited in Packery, 2015, p. 57). It was concerned with how the world is understood and how meaning is constructed from personal experiences that students have (Chabangu, 2014). As a result, quantitative research approach was the least appropriate approach of study because it focuses on the relationship between variables, and it has a static view of social life that is independent on people’s lives and experiences (Bryman, 2012).

Studying how events unfold overtime is a common practice in qualitative research approach and it affords the researcher with an opportunity to genuinely understand the world as the participant sees it (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, this accommodates the study research questions which seek to highlight the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research is open to the idea of close contact between the researcher and the participant (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, this facilitated the study’s successful investigation of bereaved students’ experiences because the researcher could probe and get clarity of the discussion and the student could do the same if they did not understand a question.

1.8.2. Sampling technique and sampling process

The target for this study was to sample UKZN students, hence recruitment of five participants was done from UKZN specifically PMB campus. Purposive sampling technique was utilized for this study because of its concern with the selection of participants that provide rich information (Patton, 1990). To better narrow and focus on similarities between participants, a homogeneity sampling design was used (Palinkas et. al., 2015). Participants were students who shared similar experiences that are associated

with loss, grief, bereavement. Considering the current COVID-19 era and how technology is widely used, it was considered fit to recruit participants virtually from UKZN social media platforms like Facebook and UKZN LEARN 2022. To ethically recruit from these platforms, a request from the registrar's office to conduct the study was obtained (See Appendix 1)

1.8.3. Data collection

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted to collect data that is rich and detailed. Interviews in a qualitative study are different from those in a quantitative study because they are rarely structured and lengthy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). A semi-structured interview guide was used, and it comprised of open-ended questions allowing the researcher to get more information by probing and asking more questions guided by participants responses. In addition to this, it ensured that all important issues, bereavement experiences as well as challenges that students face while at university are highlighted (See appendix 4). Furthermore, every participant was asked questions guided by the interview guide and this led to the discovery of themes in the study findings. A semi-structured interviewing instrument was used for its ability to be flexible throughout the data collection process (Gillham, 2005, as cited in Packery, 2015). This enabled the researcher to thoroughly attain detailed experiences as articulated by the bereaved students.

Face to face interviews were used in this study and the COVID-19 restrictions, all regulations including social distancing, wearing face mask and hand sanitizing was practiced. These interviews were conducted at the Child and Family Centre (hereafter referred to as CFC). The CFC is a mental health service centre based within the university of KwaZulu-Natal (Upton, 2013). It provides psychological services to the least privileged community members who cannot afford private services (Upton, 2013). In addition to this, it informs programme development through research conducted on child and family mental health (Upton, 2013). Participants chose the most convenient date and time for them to be interviewed. These interviews were recorded to ensure that the information is easily transcribed into a word document to reduce the probability of missing out on important information. This increased the credibility of the study. Participants were

informed about the above and a written consent was obtained before the interview (see appendix 3).

1.9. Definition of concepts

In relation to this study, the following definitions were adopted:

Loss: Refers to a person's deprivation of something or someone that they have previously been attached to (Doka, 2002, as cited in Drenth, Herbst & Strydom, 2013).

Bereavement: Is the actual deprivation state which is caused by loss (Pillay, 2009)

Grief: Is the "emotion elicited by involuntary loss" (Gharmaz & Milligan, 2006). It is associated with difficulty in concentration and disorientation. The intensity of grief can vary from one person to another.

Mourning: It is characterized by processes which a person goes through to cope with their loss (Pillay, 2009).

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): It is the current infectious disease that targets human respiratory system (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020). Because of its infectious nature, countries worldwide put in place several regulations to reduce it. This includes social distancing, isolation, lockdown, wearing a mask, regular handwashing, and hand sanitization.

Pandemic: It is a new infectious disease that spreads over a large geographical area and has a variation of organism (Morens, Folkers & Fauci, 2009).

Mental health: It is defined by the World Health Organization as a state in which an individual can realize his/her own abilities, can work productively, and is able to cope with the normal stresses of life (Galderisi et al., 2015)

Bereavement programme: Services designed for and offered to bereaved individuals to help them cope with their loss.

Homogenous sample: It is characterized by participants that have similar characteristics or traits (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

Purposive sampling: It is a sampling technique or strategy that involves the selection of information rich participants (Palinkas et. al., 2015; Patton, 1990).

ACRONYMS:

CFC: Child and Family Centre

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019

UKZN: University of KwaZulu-Natal

1.10. Assumptions, limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations

1.10.1. Assumptions

The assumptions that were present in this study are:

- That this study will make a great contribution in knowledge within the UKZN campus(es). This is in consideration to the fact that since COVID-19 is a relatively new phenomenon, the available empirical studies on bereavement experiences of students is limited.
- There is an assumption that the findings accurately represent the current experiences of bereaved UKZN students. This is because the sample is homogenous in nature, therefore, making all the study participants those who have experienced loss, grief, and bereavement.
- That the loss and grief experiences during COVID-19 negatively affected the students' academic performance

1.10.2. Limitations

It is important to identify the limitations that the methodology and the research design presented during the study, to make necessary recommendations to other researchers who might be interested in replicating or advancing this study. While identifying students for data collection purposes, the study presented the following limitations:

- Qualitative research allows for the use of a small sample; hence this study sample was small and the limitation of this is that no generalization of the study findings can be made beyond UKZN students. However, having a small sample also presented the study with an opportunity to obtain thorough information on the experiences of the bereaved students that were part of the study. Given that COVID-19 is of global concern and deaths occurs on a global scale, more students are more likely to relate to the experiences of bereaved UKZN students.
- As the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study only made use of in-depth interviews as a means of data collection. Triangulation through using multiple data sources like using focus groups, was not carried out. The researcher however ensured that they conduct thorough literature on similar studies and made effort on building rapport so the participants can provide detailed and trustworthy information.
- The researcher's aim was to recruit ten participants however only five participants were recruited and interviewed. Recruiting participants online required more time and effort. The researcher made the advertisement to be attractive and informative for the potential participants. Multiple online platforms to advertise and recruit the study participants were used.
- The sensitive nature of the study made some students reluctant to participate, particularly male participants. The study sample then ended up having only female participants. This limitation then prolonged the data collection period as the researcher had to ensure that any participant that participate in the study was sure about their decision and were not coerced in any way.

- There were some inconsistencies in the information provided by two participants. The researcher highlighted such inconsistencies in the findings.

1.10.3. Delimitations

The delimitation set by the researcher are as follows:

- The geographical area was delimited to only UKZN PMB campus. This was done to ensure that a homogenous sample comprising of bereaved UKZN students is recruited into the study. In addition to this, to ensure that the findings thoroughly highlight the bereavement standing of UKZN students to adequately influence the development of bereavement programme(s) within the university campus (es).
- There was delimitation in terms of conducting interviews face to face at the CFC. This is because not all university students were back on campus and some students did not know where the CFC was located. Regardless of this, Conducted the interview at the CFC helped the researcher to improve rapport, to avoid challenges that comes with online interviews and improve the credibility of the data. Advertising the study online increased the visibility of the study to students. In addition to this, the researcher provided the students with directions to the CFC.

1.10.4. Ethical considerations

The researcher ensured that ethical clearance was obtained and approval to recruit UKZ students was also granted by the UKZN registrar before data collection. Once these were obtained, the study was advertised on the UKZN online platforms (Facebook and UKZN LEARN 2022). Those participants that were recruited, were then consented. Participants were informed about the study, audio recordings, available social support at the CFC or online and their rights as study participants. Interviews were conducted at the CFC during a day that was convenient to the participant. The researcher ensured that the interview room was closed during the interviews to protect the confidential information of the participants. During the interviews, participants wore protective masks, sanitized hands, and kept safe distance. Considering the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher provided a R50 airtime incentive to enable the participants to contact the CFC should they realise after the interview that they require social support. Since the ethics

committee was not informed in the initial proposal that participants will be reimbursed, and that the interviews will be conducted at the CFC, deviation reports and amended ICF was then submitted to ethics.

The ethical considerations will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

1.11. Summary of chapter one

Chapter 1 of this research report provides an outline of this study. Where loss, grief and bereavement are concerned, it is evident that research studies were more focused on the general population and less attention was given to bereaved university students particularly UKZN students. Loss, grief, and bereavement during COVID-19 pandemic presents university students with several challenges. This includes mental health problems, social isolation, poor academic performance, dropping out and even substance abuse (Balk, 2001; Cupit et al., 2016; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). This is seen to be worsened by COVID-19 and the restrictions that come with it. That is, social distancing, inability to visit loved ones in hospitals, restrictions on attending or arranging burials and the way funerals are held (Mortazavi et al., 2020; O'Mahony, 2020).

Stigmatization associated with accessing social services and the lack of adequate bereavement programs within the university campuses is indicated to have an impact on bereaved students (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). All the above-mentioned challenges affect university students both abroad and in South Africa. This has led to this study to highlight the loss, grief, and bereavement experiences of UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic with the aim of providing information that will influence the development of bereavement programmes for university students. A qualitative research approach was then adopted to answer the research questions. Participants that were purposefully sampled were then interviewed at the CFC and the data was transcribed and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Focus groups could not be used because of the current infectious COVID-19.

The following chapter, which is chapter 2, will provide a critical view of the literature that exist on loss, grief, and bereavement of university students. This literature review will look at loss, grief, and bereavement on a global and local scale. The four theoretical

frameworks that were chosen to better understand the existing literature will also be discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

Death is an inevitable phenomenon that has been part of life and will continue to be part of life (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Death is experienced by everyone whether they are adults, young people, or children (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). Even though this is true, it is still a challenging and thought-provoking experience (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). This is because death is a kind of loss that deprives an individual of an interaction or further engagement with a person that they are attached to (Doka, 2002, as cited in Drenth, Herbst & Strydom, 2013).

The natural human response to loss is grief (Buglass, 2010). Grief can be experienced after a loss of anything that is significant in a person's life (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). These losses can be through a loss of a job, divorce, separation, loss of a friendship, relocation, retirement or even through a failure to achieve set goals (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). However, experiencing a death of a significant person like a parent, sibling, friend or relative is potentially the most disruptive life event that leaves individuals bereaved (Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013; Balk, Walker, & Baker, 2010, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat and Noppe, 2012; Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). Literature by Buglass (2010) also found that several people experience bereavement. This is more so since the start of COVID-19 because of its highly infectious disease that has led to the death of large number of people across the globe (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020; Miks et al., 2020).

COVID-19 started in the late 2019 in Wuhan province, China and it spread across several countries in a matter of months (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020).). By October 1st, 2021, the United States of America had the highest COVID-19 cases and deaths across the nation. South Africa was not exempt from this. South Africa later became the African country with the highest COVID-19 cases (Schroder et al., 2021). The highest death rate being among the older people and patients with comorbidities; Therefore, leaving various young adults bereaved and with the responsibility to deal with many losses and consequences brought by COVID-19 (Aristovnik et al., 2020).

Various researchers indicate that a loss through death, particularly death of a parent is the most debilitating kind of a loss for university students because it triggers other different kinds of losses for example, change in their personal and academic life (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Lutzke et al., 1997, as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Santos et al., 2021). Furthermore, they lose their dependency because they now must take on the role of a breadwinner in their household (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This is evident in several cultures in South Africa because there is an assumption that young adults have reached an age where they are able to navigate the world independently (Smith, 1999 as cited in Pillay, 2009).

The expectations that are placed on young adults end up affecting their mental health, which then affects their academic achievement (Allodi, 2010; Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Gustafsson et al., 2010; Maelan et al., 2019, as cited in Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). Consequently, those students with poor mental health are more likely to drop-out of university (Holen et al., 2018; Schwab, 2018; Wango & Gatere, 2019, as cited in Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). On this account, mental health problems that affect the behaviour and students' achievement must be considered if academic success is to be achieved (Chabangu, 2014). In addition to this, bereaved students' personal experiences and suggestions need to be explored in detail for universities to implement useful bereavement programmes.

To begin this chapter, the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic will be highlighted as well as the losses that students experience as the result of COVID-19 pandemic. Following this, the evolution of the grieving processes will be described to understand how the grieving processes have evolved because of the pandemic. According to Bavel et al. (2020) COVID-19 pandemic places significant psychological burden on people, therefore, this chapter will also highlight as indicated in literature, the mental health problems and coping strategies that bereaved students use to cope with their burdens. Different support systems available for bereaved university students will also be highlighted. The last section describes in detail the theories that were adopted in this study.

2.2. Literature review

2.2.1. Introduction

University years are a season of transition or change, where students also experience death and non-death losses that cause grief (Sirriner, Kliner & Gollery, 2021, p. 4). According to Doka (as cited in Drenth, Herbst & Strydom, 2013) loss can be experienced when someone is deprived of anything that they have previously possessed, or they were attached to. Literature indicates that loss of identity, control, independence, social life, rituals, jobs, financial stability, educational delivery, and loss of connections to others are some of the non-death losses that university students experience (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Sirriner, Kliner & Gollery, 2021).

Death losses include a loss of any significant person from family members to peers (Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013; Balk, Walker, & Baker, 2010, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat and Noppe, 2012). Non-death losses are sometimes considered to be less significant than losses that are due to death; however, these non-death losses are also important to understand because people who experience non-death losses have similar grief responses as people who experienced death losses (Cooley et al., 2010, as cited in Sirriner, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). A loss through death, particularly death of a parent is the most debilitating kind of a loss for university students because it brings about changes in their personal and academic life as well (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Lutzke et al., 1997, as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Santos et al., 2021). As a result, there are various students who struggle with grief at one point in time hence bereavement is more prevalent in university campuses than many people including the bereaved students realize (Balk, 2001). For this reason, studying the extent of students' losses is important to devise relevant bereavement programmes to assist bereaved university students.

Death is an inevitable phenomenon that has been part of life and will continue to be part of life (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). COVID-19 as the highly infectious disease has caused a significant increase in the death rate across the globe, affecting everyone including university students (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020; Miks et al., 2020). These losses make university years difficult for students (Sirriner, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). Literature proves that studying while grieving affects students' concentration, performance and

some even drop out of the university (Balk, 2001; Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2007, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016).

Caution and restrictions were put in place as a way of mitigating the spread of COVID-19 and the associated deaths (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). However, these restrictions also changed the way bereaved people or students live, bury, and mourn their loved ones (Santos et al., 2021; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). These drastic changes imposed on social gathering increases the chances of experiencing mental health problems and complicated grief because students can no longer interact with their peers, access campus counselling services, have traditional funerals and bid farewell to their loved ones like they did before COVID-19 (Santos et al., 2021; Mortazavi et al., 2020). Therefore, the mental health problems that affect the behaviour and achievement of students must be considered if academic success is to be achieved (Chabangu, 2014)

It makes sense why universities engage systematically to assist bereaved students because such acts also increase student graduation, retention, and long-term alumni support (Balk, 2001). "Students who are bereaved are often geographically distant from their envisage regular support system" (Kunene & Makondo, 2020, p. 3). It is for this reason that Mthlane, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021) suggests that instead of only providing social support services via video conferencing as suggested by Naidoo and Cartwright (as cited in Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021), student counsellors can maximise access by also providing the mental health self-help materials via podcasts, webinars, paper-based counselling resource packs and by having a toll-free student counselling hotlines or SMS call-back options. The rationale for this, is that counselling support will remain available during the COVID-19 times regardless of financial and physical circumstances (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). These are important and valid suggestions however to be effective, they need to be relevant. Therefore, bereaved students' personal experiences and suggestions need to be explored in detail to make services more effective.

The studies that were surveyed for the purpose of this literature review were conducted both abroad and in Africa on grief and bereavement among students. A large amount of this literature was conducted in the United States of America (Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). As far as South Africa is concerned, not nearly enough studies

have been conducted on loss, grief, and bereavement particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, this study sought to focus attention on loss, grief, and bereavement experiences of South African university students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter attempts to synthesise findings from different authors who have already studied loss, grief, and bereavement among university students in relation to COVID-19 pandemic. To begin this chapter, the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic will be highlighted as well as the losses that students experience as the result of COVID-19 pandemic. This section serves to contextualize the entire literature review and to make it easier to understand the next section which will be about loss through death and the evolution of grief, focusing specifically at before and during the pandemic. Following this, the evolution of the grieving processes will be described to understand how the grieving processes have evolved because of the pandemic.

According to Bavel et al. (2020) COVID-19 pandemic places significant psychological burden on people. This chapter will highlight as indicated in literature, the mental health problems faced by university students and coping strategies that they use. Different support systems available for bereaved university students will also be highlighted. The last section describes in detail the theories that were adopted in this study.

2.2.2. The emergence of COVID-19 and associated losses

The Coronavirus disease 2019, which is caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was initially transmitted from animals to people (Huang et al., 2021; Jacob, Abigeal, & Lydia, 2020). It is an unprecedented public health crisis that originated from Wuhan province, China during December of 2019 (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020; Huang et al., 2021). Since then, it has spread drastically around the world in a matter of months and subsequently the World health Organization declared it a pandemic on the 11th of March 2020 (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020; Jacob, Abigeal, & Lydia, 2020). As of 30th April 2020, the United States alone reported above 1 million cases (Schroder et al., 2021). Compared to United States, African countries were experiencing low infection rate. As of 7th May 2020, African

countries had 53 609 cases (Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). Even though South Africa was not the first African country to confirm the COVID-19 cases, it had reported 3153 COVID-19 cases by the 7th of May 2020, and this made it an African country with the highest COVID-19 cases (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020; Schroder et al., 2021). COVID-19 continued to spread even more. According to the World Health Organization (as cited in Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020) on the 20th of May 2020, there were 4761559 confirmed cases across 216 countries, areas, and territories. This clearly indicates that COVID-19 is a fast-growing virus that affect everyone in the world.

In response to this COVID-19 pandemic, several guidelines or regulations were put in place by various governments (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). Social restrictions and quarantines are some of the swift and public health emergency measures that were put in place to cope with the rapid spread of COVID-19 (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020). These measures were mainly for using public transport, shopping, visiting hospital and attending burials (Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). Moreover, this were not the only measures put in place, national and international travels were banned, various nonessential businesses were shut down and there were also orders to “stay at home” for all those individuals who were characterized as non-essential workers (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). These guidelines and restrictions were necessary given the fact that the virus was spreading fast.

Although social distancing measures were put in place to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and to save lives, various studies found different reactions to these measures. According to O’Mahony (2020) Several Western families followed the COVID-19 regulations during their grieving processes. The opposite is true for Non-Western countries. South African families or people ignored the COVID-19 recommendations (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020; Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). For some people, their reason for doing so was the lack of necessities, unstable home environment and even the desire for normal life as they know it (Gittings et al., 2021). In Eastern Cape province, 80% of the infections are said to have resulted from burial ceremonies (Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). This indicates how much people attending burial ceremonies do not practice social distancing and contribute to high infection rate and ultimately deaths. Amongst those who do not practice social distancing, are young people. Amsalem, Dixon and Neria (2020) indicates that young people hardly practice social distancing when they are

on their spring break. It is further indicated that the most severely affected by COVID-19 were elderly people and those with co-morbidities (Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020). However, this does not make young people immune because COVID-19 affects all age groups (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Therefore, Jaja, Anyanwu and Jaja (2020) point out that a large-scale outbreak will be devastating for young people. This indicates clearly that young people can also be infected and affected by COVID-19.

Strict measures were put in place because COVID-19 pandemic is highly infectious and there were no available vaccines to prevent the infection from spreading when it started in 2019 (Jaja et al., 2020). Research and necessary steps to develop a COVID-19 vaccine were adapted by various countries because they saw that “the benefit of developing an effective vaccine is very high, and even greater if it can be deployed in time to prevent repeated or continuous epidemics” (Graham, 2020, p. 1). On the 16th of March 2020, the human clinical testing for COVID-19 vaccine started (Le et al., 2020). On the 8th of April 2020, there was a total of 115 vaccine candidates with most of these developments happening in North America and Africa serving as one of the regions focusing on manufacturing capacity and regulatory frameworks (Le et al., 2020). The same way as the spread of the virus, the attempts to develop the COVID-19 vaccine was fast paced.

Normally, vaccine developments take on average ten years (Graham, 2020; Le et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021). As far as COVID-19 vaccine is concerned and considering the urgency and the infectious nature of COVID-19 pandemic, it did not take long to approve the COVID-19 vaccine. The Gam-COVID-Vac Lyo was the first vaccine to be approved while the BNT162b2 became the most widely licensed and used vaccine (Huang et al., 2021). Graham (2020) indicates that the primary goal of vaccines is safety, however the public still has concerns. Various researchers indicate that the public is concerned that the development of the COVID-19 vaccine is unprecedented as it was developed and approved in a short space of time (Graham, 2020; Huang et al., 2021; Le et al., 2020). Therefore, negating the idea by Graham (2020) that the COVID-19 mortality rate is unacceptably high because people are naïve to COVID-19 but instead, it is because people do not trust the efficacy and the long-term safety of the COVID-19 vaccines, hence the opinion that real-world effectiveness data on vaccines is yet to be gathered (Huang et al., 2021).

COVID-19 and the enactment of lockdowns, development of vaccines, implementation of social distancing, wearing of masks and washing or sanitizing of hands, has changed the way people interact, socialize and generally the way they live (Jaja, Anyanwu & Jaja, 2020; Aristovnik et al., 2020). One example of this is the fact that the mindset and habit of people have changed, and this shows by the increased attention given to personal hygiene and taking care of own health and that of relatives (Aristovnik et al., 2020). This might play a positive role in the fight against the virus and ultimately reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic and the measures put in place also impacted the education system and the way students are taught globally (Schroder et al., 2021). In a study conducted by Serrine, Kliner and Gollery (2021) on 162 undergraduate and graduate university students, approximately 85% of these students reported that COVID-19 has significantly impacted their educational experience. Similarly, Miks et al. (2020) found that COVID-19 impacted more than 91 percent of students worldwide. This is more so as governments across the globe closed institutions of learning (Grange, 2021; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). To support this, Jacob, Abigeal and Lydia (2020) point out that North-East Asia closed its schools in February 2020 and African countries like Nigeria followed thereafter. The South African government together with the role players in education also made the same difficult decisions to close not only childcare, primary and secondary schools, but also to close institutions of higher learning (Grange, 2021, Schroder et al., 2021). The extent of the impact on education and students' lives in a South African context still needs further research, hence this study is focused attention on the experiences of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The closure of institutions of higher learning led to the disruption of academic calendars, which then created teaching and learning gaps (Jacob, Abigeal and Lydia, 2020). One of the ways that the university routines were disrupted was through the cancellation of several annual conferences (Grange, 2021). This limited the learning experience for students, which has lifelong social and academic implications (Desmond et al., 2020, as cited in Gittings et al., 2021). This may be particularly so for young people from low- and middle-income countries because these young people are expected to find ways to deal with the effects of the pandemic (Gittings, et al., 2021). This may be further challenging

considering the sensitive nature of the developmental stage of these young people (Desmond et al., 2020, as cited in Gittings et al., 2021). This means that dealing with loss or finding ways to deal with loss that resulted from COVID-19 may be a challenge for students, hence this study was also concerned with finding out if students had suggestions that universities will use to develop bereavement programmes so the burden of dealing with the death of loved one does not fall on the individual student.

Online learning was adopted by institutions and students because they were committed to studying, teaching, and engaging in academic research (Grange, 2021). Lectures consisted of written communication (Chats and forums), video recordings and real-time video conferences (Aristovnik et al., 2020). The swift transition from face-to-face lectures into online learning had its negative impact on learning and it also created several stressors and losses of social aspects of university life (Laher et al., 2020, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021; Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). For example, university residents were closed which meant that students lost their sense of independence as they had to move back home (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Added to this, it created an inability to meet with university colleagues, friends, relatives, no parties or even travelling (Aristovnik et al., 2020). This is what this current study explores further, that is, both negative and positive experiences of bereaved university students during the pandemic era.

There are various non-death losses that are experienced by university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. As found by Aristovnik et al. (2020) students who were working while in university lost their jobs. Sirrine, Kliner and Gollery (2021) noted that loss of connection to others, unemployment, loss of financial stability, loss in educational delivery, loss of internships and loss of ritual or ceremony are some of the non-death losses that university students experience. In addition to this, Brown and Christiansen; LaGrand, Paul and Brier (as cited in Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021) points out that university students also experience loss of friendships, loss of identity, loss of status and of control. In simple terms, university students lost their sense of normalcy (Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021).

2.2.3. Death and the evolution of grief

Death is another form of loss experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). Although Kunene and Makondo (2020) indicate that death is an inevitable phenomenon that will always be part of life, the intensity of death during COVID-19 was never anticipated. Since COVID-19 was first discovered in 2019, the death rate has increased drastically (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). According to Amsalem, Dixon and Neria (2020) a total of 317529 COVID-19 related deaths across 216 countries were reported on the 20th of May 2020. The highest death rate being among the older people and patients with comorbidities (Aristovnik et al., 2020). Research indicated that to avoid infection, people postponed collecting life-threatening treatment from health facilities and as a result, other causes also played a role in the high number of deaths during the pandemic (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). These are realities that faced several countries, communities, and university students every day. Therefore, this increase in loss of lives greatly intensified the need for mental health care within the affected communities (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020).

The increase in death tolls led to the increase in the number of bereaved people (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). According to Verdery et al. (as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 2021) if 190 000 people die from COVID-19 then approximately 1.7 million people become bereaved. The loss through death within the university setting, is most common for undergraduate students (Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). It is indicated that in the year 2010, approximately 39% of university students who were between the age of 18 and 23 experienced loss through death (Balk, Walker, & Baker, 2010, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat and Noppe, 2012). These can be a death of any significant person like peers and family members (Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). Aristovnik et al. (2020) adds to this by indicating that young people are not in the specific risk groups that are more likely to be infected with COVID-19 but evidently, they are a population group that has experienced the drastic effects of COVID-19 by having a great number of their older family members dying during the pandemic. Since there is still limited research on bereaved university students, the current statistics, and the extent of the effects of COVID-19 deaths have on university students, is yet to be fully understood.

2.2.4. Factors impacting young adult's grieving experience and resulting consequences

2.2.4.1. Relationship with the deceased

The closeness to the deceased individual has an impact on the grieving process and its intensity (Bugen as cited in Cupit, 2016; Nader & Slloum, 2011, as cited Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This can be a close friend, sibling, or a parent (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Various researchers point out that the death of a parent is in most cases, the most stressful life event which affects three to four percent of young people (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Santos et al., 2021). This kind of loss results in severe acute grief reactions that may causes complicated grief in the future (Eisma & Tamminga, 2020, as cited in Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). This is particularly because these relationships are characterized with strong bonds and attachments that when they are disrupted through death, the young adult's grieving process is affected (Buglass, 2010).

The loss of a significant person leads to despair, loss of appetite and social withdrawal (Buglass, 2010). This is associated with the fact that most young adults still regard their parents as central pillars of family life (Kaiser, 2015, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Furthermore, they experience challenges because when they lose their parent(s) through death, they are faced with immediate increased levels of responsibilities and pressure to act mature (Mthalane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021; Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This is a burden to young adults and even a greater burden for those young adults who experience death of both parents (Mthalane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This is because responsibilities fall on them abruptly. For example, studies by Mthalane, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021), and Palmer, Saviet and Tourish (2016) found that young adults who lost their parent(s) had to manage their parent's funeral, estates, finances and they had to take on the role of a breadwinner and head the household.

The loss of parents is likely to create role confusion as they are at a stage where they are also dealing with increased academic demands (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016; Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). These responsibilities that come with losing a loved

one do not only result in a loss of family livelihoods but also in the loss of individual lives for these young adults (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Gittings et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2021).

The psychological function of grief is to release the bereaved from the bond that they have with the deceased by working through their loss (Buglass, 2010). However, losing a significant person leaves young adults with several responsibilities and little space to deal with their loss. This has negative effects on their wellbeing because “the person who is bereaved needs to take time to grieve and should work towards developing new roles, identities, and relationships (Stroebe et al., 2004, as cited in Buglass, 2010, p. 46)

As young adults take over from the deceased role, they may also need to navigate celebrations like engagements or weddings (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This can result in mixed feelings. For some bereaved young adults, this milestone makes them to acutely feel the absence of the deceased (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Therefore, causing them confusion and sadness instead of happiness (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). As Stroebe and Schut (2016) indicates that loss orientation can be experienced through reminiscing about the deceased, these young adults are therefore at a risk of experiencing loss orientation as they reminisce about the deceased instead of celebrating the current happy event.

Losing a significant person and the associated responsibilities, thereafter, creates various challenges for the young adults. That is, they may have difficulties in concentration and learning (Currier, Holland & Neimeyer, 2007, as cited in Palmer, Soviet & Tourish, 2016). They often struggle with academic demands to a point that they perform poorly, fail, or even drop out of the university (Kunene and Makondo, 2020; Servaty-Seib & Hamilton as cited in Cupit, 2016). Furthermore, they end up experiencing lower competence in career planning and educational aspirations (Santos et al., 2021). Similarly, Brent et al. (as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017) found that unlike non-bereaved youths, bereaved youth who experienced unexpected deaths were less competent in areas of work and in planning for their future education. This current study was therefore conducted with the hope of devising relevant suggestions that will aid in the development of bereavement programmes that will help students to cope with their loss, the pressures of differing roles and to maximise their competency as university students.

2.2.4.2. The level of development during the time of loss

Young adults who are entering the university or returning to university are at a transitional stage where they value autonomous life or self-discovery and as a result, they are very explorative and it is not uncommon for them to engage in risky behaviours that in most cases delay their grieving process (Balk, 2001; Cupit, 2016; Herberman Mash et al., 2013, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). For example, they may engage in risky or destructive behaviors like using drugs, alcohol, tobacco and having unsafe sex (Herberman Mash et al., 2013, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). These behaviours may seem normal to young adults because they are at a developmental stage where they desire autonomous life (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This autonomous life may even be more intense for young adults who are grieving (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). However, it is important to note that all of these are maladaptive coping strategies that most bereaved young adults adopt (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). It therefore becomes imperative to contribute to the development of programmes that help young adults to adopt healthy coping strategies.

Peer groups and social relationships are highly influential in the lives of young adults, and this is evident in the way young adults are more open to talk to peer groups than family members (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Even though these young adults are at a stage where they start to pull away from their family to spend more time with peers, when faced with grief, their social relationships can be impacted (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). According Herberman Mash et al. and Kaplow et al. (as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016) young adults end up experiencing challenges at a heightened level and inability to recover from their loss . Palmer, Saviet and Tourish (2016) supports this by indicating that those young people who do not receive any form of support to understand their loss end up experiencing intense stress and grief (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016).

Young people experience intense grief because they are isolated, lonely and this causes them to experience powerful grief reactions that result in a chronically debilitating distress which both disrupts development and prevents restoration of routines (Herberman Mash et al., 2013; Kaplow et al., 2010, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This then affects their identity within the university and within their social setting.

Indicating that despite their desperate efforts to appear autonomous, they need help to untangle their emotions and the grieving experience (Morgan & Roberts as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Helping young adults to understand common aspects of grief experience then plays a major role in normalizing grief experiences (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016)

2.2.4.3. The influence of Ethnicity and environmental characteristics

Ethnicity has a potential of affecting how one mourns (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). In addition to this, literature indicates that culture as well as the society that an individual lives in affects or shapes their verbal expression of grief, duration, how they cope and their reactions to grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1998, as cited in Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). Grief reactions are extremely painful emotions such as a feeling of shock, loss of control, extreme sorrow, and denial (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). It is for this reason that loss, grief, and mourning may both be experienced and expressed differently by each individual young adult (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016).

“An individual’s specific understanding of the concepts of loss and death play a fundamental role in the subjective experience of loss” (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016, p. 276). This is influenced by numerous grief rituals that takes place in various cultures because during this time, there is expression of feelings, thoughts and emotional support that is provided (Gross, 2016; Ozel & Ozkan, 2020, as cited in Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). Hence, it is not a surprise that some young adults may have different reactions to loss even though they experienced similar types of loss (Nader & Salloum as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). It was therefore imperative for this study to be more holistic in understanding young adult’s grief experience.

Grief reactions may change as the individual develops further and their concept of loss and death take new meaning (Nader & Salloum, 2011, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). For this reason, bereaved young adults are likely to face new experiences of grief as they develop further (Balk, 2011, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016).

2.2.4.4. COVID-19 restrictions

COVID-19 has become another factor that has played a role in shaping people's grieving experience (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). This is because since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been several restrictions that made it difficult to perform grief rituals and this has left individuals to grieve alone (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). For example, restrictions were placed on hospital visits which made it difficult for family members to see their terminally ill family members (Santos et al., 2021; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). These restrictions extend further to funerals or burials. There are rules that were enforced to hold funerals remotely or to curtail them where only a few people can be present (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). Even worse, funeral services for individuals with COVID-19 were strictly prohibited; therefore, making it difficult for family members to say farewell in accustomed ways, which then means that bereaved persons end up experiencing grief alone (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021; Santos et al., 2021; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). This situation is also said to increase grief reactions and result in complicated grief because attending ceremonies is important because it makes it easier for grieving individuals to cope with their loss (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021).

Young adults with insecure attachment styles are more likely to be isolated during their grieving process (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999, as cited in Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005). This is so because they avoid seeking support from others or the expressions of distress (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999, as cited in Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005). This intensify the feelings of guilt and anger that is then directed at people they interact with or even the government (Mortazavi et al., 2020). These show that closing of cemeteries, prohibiting religious gatherings and other worship events leave people pre-occupied with feelings of loneliness, regrets, anger, and loss of control as they are unable to express or deal with their loss in the best way they know how (Santos et al., 2021; Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). For the loss to be real and final to every bereaved individual, ceremonies and funerals need to take place (Santos et al., 2021). Allowing these events to take place, affords the bereaved to share their feelings about the deceased and to also be closer to their social support network (Santos et al., 2021). However, this is challenged by the presence of COVID-19 and its restrictions. Therefore, researchers need to study and understand bereaved students' reactions after

experiencing loss to find better ways to help them to express themselves in a healthy way and to prevent violence within the universities.

2.2.4.5. The cause of death or circumstances around the death

Since COVID-19 restrictions cause changes in the individual's grieving processes and the way they mourn their loved ones, it is then no surprise that those individuals who have lost someone due to COVID-19 are said to report severe acute grief reactions compared to individuals who lost someone to natural causes (Santos, et al., 2021; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). Losing a close person through a COVID-19 viral infection or from any other causes during the pandemic makes the experience significantly different from any other types of bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). This is because such deaths are unexpected or sudden (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). Therefore, as university students are not yet developmentally accustomed to dealing with loss, they should be given enough time to grieve because grieving for them is a dynamic process as they are still developing (Battle et al., 2011, as cited in Roberts, 2016; Santos et al., 2021).

2.2.5. The mental health of bereaved university students

University years is the time where young students are negotiating the competing demands of university, forming identities, and developing a clear sense of direction (Balk, 2001; Cupit at al., 2016). According to Mthlane, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021) these university years are therefore, one of the factors that cause stress for university students. Furthermore, when faced with grief, students' identity formation can be challenged, increasing the chances of developing several other mental health problems (Balk, 2001; Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Cupit, at al., 2016). These mental health problems are most prevalent among grieving students because they are struggling to make sense and meaning out of their death loss (Neimeyer et al., 2008, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012). These mental health problems and negative social outcomes are found to be more prevalent during close losses, with female students presenting more mental health problems when the deceased is closely related to them (Walker, Hathcoat & Noppe, 2012). As a result, this study was conducted with the hope of influencing the

development of bereavement programmes that will help students make sense of their loss and ultimately reduce associated mental health problems.

It is indicated in Walker (as cited in Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012) that older adolescents are more likely than younger adolescents to experience grief adjustment challenges due to their increased complexity in making sense of the loss. These emerging adults are going through a process of developing individualized value systems which makes them differ from traditional age juniors in dealing with grief (Arnett & Jenson, 2002, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012). This is the reality for countless grieving students, and it can be more debilitating than this. For example, those bereaved university students who struggle to cope with their loss may adopt maladaptive coping strategies like using mood altering substances (alcohol and drugs) as a way of dealing with their loss (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Santos et al., 2021). This further exacerbate the intensity and duration of their grief, causing them to doubt their ability to retain a sense of balance (Balk, 2001). Those who further drop out of the university may manifest behavioural problems such as intravenous drug use and conduct disorders (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021).

Outbreaks like COVID-19 presents a greater risk of psychological fear-related responses in several people (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020). Fear related behaviours like excessive avoidance of social contact which then exacerbate the risk of developing mental health problems (Amsalem et al., 2020).

In 2020 a study was conducted in China, and it focused on examining the prevalence of mental health problems and found that 1 month into the COVID-19 pandemic, there were high rates of depression (48,3%) and anxiety (22.6%) amongst 4872 adults and some had a combination of the depression and anxiety (19.4%) (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020). "This anxiety is amplified by media reporting on the increasing number of deaths" (Jiang et al., 2021, p. 4). Added to this, it was found that people with increased use of social media were twice as likely to experience depression and anxiety (Amsalem, Dixon & Neria, 2020). Moreover, literature indicates that anxiety and depression are prevalent in individuals who have lost one or both parents (Christ et al.; Gray et al.; Lutzke et al.; Nickerson et al.; Worden & Silverman, 1996, as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017). This overwhelming anxiety can therefore deflate students' academic performance

(Jiang et al., 2021). This study has helped in identifying the emotional state of bereaved UKZN students and how that affects their experiences as university students.

According to Jiang et al. (2021) online learning has different impact on students than social media does. It is found that online discussions and communication can improve the quality of students' online learning as they influence engagement, retention, and motivation (Jiang et al., 2021). Even though this is the case, various higher education students still experience several psychological impacts caused by the transition into online learning which also compromises student learning (Olawale et al., 2021; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This is because some students do not have access or the availability of online resources to be able to keep up with their studies (Dhawan, 2020, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021). The study by Aristovnik et al. (2020) found that almost half of its respondents did not have a quiet place where they could study, and they also did not have access to printers. Jiang et al. (2021) and, Mthlane, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021) add to say that students, particularly those from rural areas experience increased psychological impact because of the challenge that they have regarding limited coverage or lack of network coverage. Aristovnick et al. (2020) go on to say that of this students, African students are amongst those who then reported lowest academic performance as a result. This current study then focused attention on the UKZN students to provide data from students of diverse backgrounds.

Online learning has a negative effect on engagement between lecturers and student. This is highlighted in the work done by several researchers, who indicate that some students in their studies found online assessments too complicated and confusing but failed to seek clarification because they did not have face-to-face interaction with the academic staff (Dhawan, 2020, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021)Therefore, it becomes critical for lecturers to be available to answer E-mails and calls from students (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). Resultantly, Jiang et al. (2021) suggests that administrators provide all the necessary support to ensure that online learning is accessible.

2.2.6. Coping strategies used by grieving students

When learning moved online due to the COVID-19 restrictions placed on institutions, students were then left with the pressure of finding new and effective ways of coping with their studies and the effects of the pandemic (Burns, Dagnall & Holt, 2020). These pressures created unparalleled amount of stress for some university students considering that they had to balance the pressures of learning from home and life in lockdown (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). Apart from using alcohol and drugs, research indicates that university students also use avoidance and spirituality to cope with their loss.

Avoidance is often used as a coping strategy. For example, there are reports that students who experience multiple losses are likely to have more negative coping reactions that are characterised by avoidance of conversations about the deceased or anything that reminds them of the deceased person (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Surrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). Furthermore, when these individuals experience multiple losses at the same time, they often end up experiencing a loss of control and therefore, they take longer to progress through their grief (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Mercer and Evans, 2006, as cited in Surrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021).

An exception is indicated in the study by Surrine, Kliner and Gollery (2021) who found that students who were highly spiritual, had lower levels of loss of control and avoidance. "These findings indicate that spirituality may be a protective factor in guarding against maladaptive reactions to loss, especially during a pandemic" (Surrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021, p. 14). Regardless of this, there are still several students who may develop prolonged grief disorder that is a disorder that is characterised by persistent and disruptive yearning (Spuij et al., 2012, as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017). Therefore, this study was interested in influencing the development of bereavement programmes that will help students navigate their loss and to adapt positive coping strategies that works for their circumstances.

2.2.7. Available support for the bereaved students

2.2.7.1. Support from the peers

Walker, Hathcoat and Hoppe (2012) indicate that peers show an increased support for bereaved students however this level of support diminishes over time. This is further exacerbated by the presence of COVID-19 and the associated regulations which restrict contact among students. Mthlale, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021) explain this by indicating that it is challenging for peers to continue to build relationships and to achieve a sense of belonging because of lack of contact and even though online environment is accessible, it is for a limited time. Sometimes, these peers do not support bereaved students because they do not know how to comfort them or are afraid to act and this leaves bereaved students feeling isolated (Balk, 2001; Cupit et al., 2016; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). These feelings of isolation then cause bereavement complications (Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012). This literature clearly highlights that young adult peers are not always a very reliable source of support for bereaved students; therefore, other means of support is crucial.

2.2.7.2. Support from the university

The university is generally perceived to be one institution which is open to diversity and fosters connectedness among undergraduate students, hence it is said to be an important context for facilitating positive bereavement outcomes (Balk, 2001; Pike, 2009, Summers et al., 2009, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012). In addition to this, Balk (2001) indicates that universities are communities that are obligated to offer compassion and care to students. However, a study done in eSwatini, , shows that some universities have limited processes and services that cater specifically for the needs of bereaved students, for example, there is lack of bereaved makeup tests (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). According to Battle (as cited in Roberts, 2016) since college students are not yet developmentally accustomed to dealing with loss, they may therefore, experience life stage-related challenges like performing poorly on their academics because they lack concentration (Balk, 2001; Nachmann, 2020). To ensure that bereaved students do not fall behind academically, Balk (2001) then suggests that course instructors should allow students to write makeup tests or exams and to also submit work

later than the stated deadlines. This kind of study findings highlight the extent to which universities should be more flexible so they can accommodate bereaved students on campus.

Literature indicate that senior students converse more with their professors about their grief or challenges and don't rely much on religious or family support (Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012). Despite of the above and of all the attempts made by institutions to offer moral support to students' needs, there is an indication that the complexities brought by COVID-19 pandemic makes this task hard (Mncube et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2021, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021). Resultantly, Kunene and Makondo (2020) then conclude that the support offered by universities to address the problems faced by bereaved students is then very limited.

Burns, Dagnall and Holt (2020); Kunene and Makondo (2020) found that where there is psychological support, students find it hard to make use of such services because of fear of stigmatization. Therefore, universities should re-evaluate its efforts. To assist with this, Tedrick Parikh and Servaty-Seib (2013, p. 654) indicate that "Developing interventions aimed at increasing the informal support offered to grieving students by the nonbereaved peers could be an efficient and effective way for institutions of higher education to address the needs of grieving students". This current study, however, was dedicated to devising various other ways to support students that is, influencing the development of bereavement programmes by highlighting students' innovative solutions or suggestions.

2.2.7.3. Support provided by the campus student support services

Student support services which include counselling services, is a highly valuable and important part of the university (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017). It benefits both students and the university at large. This is shown by its globally recognized a role in promoting holistic student development, assisting with personal and psychological difficulties, and ultimately improving academic retention within universities (Botha et al., 2005, as cited in Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017). Regardless of this, there is limitation to its scope. There is not much contextually relevant literature that indicates if and how the South African student support services aim to address challenges faced by bereaved students.

Change is inevitable and it can come about because of a loss, pandemics, politics, social life shifts, or even due to the level of development. The research by Naidoo and Cartwright (2017) in its quest to highlight the progress that has been made thus far by the South African universities when it comes to providing counselling services to students, found that student support services in South Africa has been developed and adapted overtime. For example, the university of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus (known then as the university of Natal) was the first to have implemented the student support services and it was followed by the UKZN Durban campus (Joubert,1988, as cited in Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017).

Other South African universities like the University of Pretoria followed the footsteps of the UKZN (De Jager, 2012, as cited in Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017). The University of Pretoria and several other universities implemented the student support services to use it to reduce the high failure rates among White students (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017). Even though this was the initial reason for developing and implementing the student support services, literature proves that universities were open and flexible enough to adapt and advance the scope of student support services (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2017). Therefore, this current study was dedicated in contributing towards the advancement of knowledge that will improve the experiences of bereaved students on campus.

There are different kinds of changes that were implemented in the student support services. The changes included an addition of psychotherapy, personal counselling, academic support, career, and curriculum planning (Naidoo, 1997, as cited in Naidoo, 2017). Furthermore, as South Africa was becoming more democratic, the student support services scope was modified to ensure that personal, emotional wellbeing, career, social needs, and overall adjustment of all registered students are taken care of (De Jager, 2012, as cited in Naidoo, 2017). Naidoo and Cartwright (as cited in Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021) suggested that because of the existence of COVID-19, community-based service providers and counselling services should be facilitated via online using videoconferencing platforms such as Skype, Zoom or MS Teams platforms. It is no surprise then that some universities decided to strengthen or implement online counselling services (Jiang et al., 2021). As much as there is proof that student support services undergo evolution in response to emergencies, there is still limited literature to signify that the student support services place much focus on bereaved students. As a

result, this study is hopeful that its findings will be of great use when the student support services or university attempts to make necessary changes to accommodate bereaved students.

It is in the best interests of the universities to develop and implement a variety of interventions that are effective in assisting bereaved students (Balk, 2001). As a result, several suggestions are provided by researchers. De Jager (as cited in Naidoo, 2017) suggest that attention can be placed on preventative and developmental interventions. Moreover, it is said that these interventions should be specific in their approach so that they can address the specific needs and wants of bereaved university students (Balk, 2001). Balk (2001) elaborate further by suggesting three ways that this can be achieved, that is, universities should firstly equip bereaved students with information about what normal grieving entails so they can avoid thinking that they are going crazy. Secondly, interventions should be placed within the university and should exist solely to support bereaved students (Wrenn, 1999, as cited in Balk, 2001). Lastly, the university should ensure that the interventions assist students with adjusting to a university environment that seem changed by the death (Balk, 2001). To ensure that the findings for this current study were relevant and could serve the specific needs and wants of bereaved students, this study gave the bereaved students an opportunity to express themselves and voice out their opinion regarding the kind of support that they received as bereaved students.

2.2.7.4. Support from the Family

In some cultures, there is little evidence or no evidence of working through patterns of their grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). To elaborate further, Demmer (2006) and Pillay (2009) point out that while some cultures support young people's feelings other cultures disregard them. This is a clear indication that there are cultural differences in supporting young people who are bereaved. For example, it is the tradition for the Moslem community in Egypt to immerse themselves in tragic tales and expression of sorrow when a person has died (Stroebe & Schut, 1998).

The opposite is however true for the Zulu culture in South Africa, which only encourage crying during the funeral but after that the individual is expected to be strong and to move on with their lives (Demmer, 2006). This is because in the Zulu culture or various other

South African cultures, the expression of feelings is not part of the terms and conditions of mourning, as a result communication about death or the emotional support for young people is not normalized (Drenth et al., 2013; Demmer, 2006). This is particularly so because grieving has traditionally never been a well discussed topic (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Therefore, indicating the limited support provided by certain cultures to bereaved students.

Young people are often kept in the dark and do not know what is happening in the family following a loss (Demmer, 2006). However, inclusion is of most importance as another form of support that the bereaved young people need. This is what is emphasized in Santos et al. (2021) that the inclusion of all family members in decision making about the funeral, family rituals and visitation of the cemetery is crucial as it helps in the grieving process and reduces the perceived lack of control. Therefore, young people should not be excluded from this process, however the degree of involvement depends on their developmental stage, religious customs, and culture (Santos et al., 2021). Lack of inclusion of young people is more prevalent in rural areas as Western ideas have not yet influenced their traditional and cultural beliefs (Drenth et al., 2013). Inclusion of young people in decision making is a matter that still needs further exploration.

Lack of support to young adults may be related to what Balk (2001) found, that there is an expectation for young people to be able to handle all the problems that may arise while grieving because of the developmental stage that they are in. This is so because there is an assumption that young adults have reached an age where they are able to navigate the world independently. However, these leaves a sense of confusion and the inability to accept loss and to move on with life (Smith, 1999, as cited in Pillay, 2009). Those students who are not receiving family support, don't perform well and fall behind on their academics (Balk, 2001). Families indeed play an important role in supporting young people's academic outcomes (Mthalande, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). Santos et al. (2021) indicates that one protective factor in the bereavement process is to establish family routines, but this may be problematic because of the COVID-19 measures that puts restrictions on movements and social gatherings. Therefore, leaving young adults with very limited support. As Amsalem et al. (2020) suggests, social media can be used to enhance connectedness and social support amongst family members

and relatives. This study focused more attention on the UKZN support without disregarding students' developmental stage when analysing the study findings.

2.3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundations that are employed when dealing with grief and bereavement are essential in helping the practitioner to better understand students' reactions and symptoms that they manifest in educational, psychological, physical, and social outcomes (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). In this regard, theoretical foundations were used in this study to enable the researcher to understand bereaved students' experiences of grief, how it affects their academic life, their mental health and how they deal with it.

There are various theories on loss, grief, and bereavement. To better understand the literature that exist on this current study topic, three theories of grief will be discussed. The first theory is Bowlby's attachment theory, the second theory is the Dual Process Model of grief, and the third theory is Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's theory of the five stages of grief. Another theory that will be included is Erikson's psychosocial theory which looks at the different stages of psychosocial development (Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978). Bowlby's theory of attachment, and Erikson's developmental theory framed this current study. All these theories are discussed in detail below.

2.3.1. Erickson psychosocial stages of development

Erikson's psychosocial stages of development stress that personality of any person progress from birth until old age through eight prearranged sequential stages of psychosocial development (Maree, 2021). These stages are as follows, stage 1: Basic trust vs mistrust, stage 2: Autonomy vs shame and doubt, stage 3: Initiative vs guilt, stage 4: Industry vs inferiority, stage 5: identity vs role confusion, stage 6: Intimacy vs Isolation, stage 7: Generativity vs stagnation and stage 8: Ego integrity vs despair (Maree, 2021; Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978). According to this theory, the identity of a person develops continuously as they navigate these developmental stages, with consolidation happening in adolescence (Kerpelman & Pittman as cited in Maree, 2021). In this theory, Erikson further point out that the form and sequence of personality development is influenced by the regularities of a person's psychosocial experiences. This makes a

person's experiences very important. At the core of this theory, is that all people should successfully work through the eight stages of development for them to lead meaningful, integrated and fulfilled lives (Erikson as cited in Maree, 2021).

Regardless of the stage that the person may be going through, they may experience psychosocial crises that can negatively affect their personality development (Kroger as cited in Maree, 2021). Various authors elaborate on this by indicating that people who fail to adequately resolve any of the eight stages of development experience identity crisis which affects their career identity development, vocational identity, or career-life identity (Hartung; Maree; Savickas; Super as cited in Maree, 2021). This is because "the resolution of each stage creates the foundation for the next crisis and defines the likelihood of coping with it" (Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978, p. 10).

Considering the purpose of this study, the focus of this study was then placed on stage 5 (Identity vs role confusion) and stage 6 (intimacy and isolation). This was particularly so because university students are usually between the ages of 18 -24, in transition from adolescence to young adulthood. For example, when Erikson talks about the identity vs role confusion he, posits that for children to become more independent and to adequately achieve a sense of self, they need encouragement and support from significant people in their lives (Maree, 2021). In support of this, Kunene and Makondo (2020) found that university students in eSwatini who lacked regular support of their peers, struggled with bereavement expectations and academic demands. Moreover, the focus was placed on the identity stage after noting how other theorists have extended the Erikson's identity stage to include traditional university years (Chickering & Keniston, 1969, as cited Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). This stage was then seen to be relevant and important to explore the kind of support that bereaved students have or do not have and how that positively or negatively influence their sense of self and independence as grieving students.

The identity vs role confusion stage is said to be marked by tension between self and society, with university years providing a testing ground (Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). It is for this reason that there is an indication that an entrance into university can bring about identity issues and issues of trust, autonomy and industry which all causes an individual to regress to prior stage even if they had successfully resolved it. This

means that several returning university students may need to re-examine their identities as the university environment may present new and different demands (Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978). For this reason, this stage seemed relevant in understanding how students deal with the challenges that they experience in university and the pressures to re-examine their identities as now, bereaved individuals.

According to Smith (as cited in Pillay, 2009) because most young adults in rural South African communities are considered capable of navigating the world independently, they are expected to take on the role of a parent when their parents pass away. This means the responsibility to care for their siblings falls on them as older siblings even though they are still grieving and trying to make sense of the loss themselves. Smith (as cited in Pillay, 2009) further elaborate that the expectations and responsibilities placed on these young adult siblings creates confusion, inability to accept loss and to move on with life as they have not yet successfully resolved the "Identity vs role confusion stage" (Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978).

During this stage, young adults are eager to be recognized as adults; therefore, how their parents and family members treat them plays a huge role in their development. When parents treat young adults as children and sometimes as adults, this may interfere with their grief and identity as they are constantly expected to alternate between the two roles that are associated with differing responsibilities. In situations where this stage has been successfully resolved, the young adult is more equipped to deal with responsibilities as they possess the willingness to take on culturally prescribed roles of adulthood (Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978).

The intimacy vs isolation stage is characterised by early and emerging adults that are between the age of twenty to forty (Maree, 2021). During this time, these emerging adolescents are in need of people they can trust to establish intimate relationships (Maree, 2021). Garchow (1998) adds to this by indicating that intimacy results when one is able to fuse their identity with that of another with trust and love at the core of the relationship. This stage of development was also chosen to inform the study because the participants are at an age where they are in pursuit of intimate relationships. According to Erikson (as cited in Widick, Parker & Knepelkamp, 1978) the bonds amongst individuals, withstand conflict and are sustained by the amount of devotion to one another.

It is however important to note that the sense of self can sometimes be intertwined with intimacy or can even concurrently exist. Women may establish their identity around close relationships, for this reason their identity can be altered by changing roles (Douvan & Adelson, 1996, as cited in Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). Understanding this stage will enable the researcher to make sense of the students' relationships, how they affect their identity and their grief experience.

This theory was employed because it provided an opportunity to achieve the study objectives in a more sensible way without disregarding students' background, developmental stage and providing the researcher with the opportunity to further understand how that contributes to the uniqueness of each students' experience of grief and how they navigate the next stage of development

2.3.2. Bowlby attachment styles

Childhood experiences play a major role in how an individual reacts to loss (Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005). Bowlby's attachment theory was therefore used as they look at the kind of attachment style a bereaved person has with the deceased to better understand their grieving process. According to Buglass (2010) this attachment theory recognizes the way individuals make strong affectional bonds with those closest to them and it also acknowledges that there are different emotions that are experienced when these bonds are broken. These emotions include loneliness, numbness, sadness, and helplessness (Buglass, 2010). All these experiences are important to understand when studying bereaved students' experiences.

According to Bowlby (as cited in Stroebe et al., 2005) there are four attachment styles. Which are Secure, Dismissing, Preoccupied and Disorganized. They go on to indicate that it is easy for secure adults to get close to others while those who subscribe to dismissing, preoccupied and disorganized find it difficult. In addition to this, they avoid seeking support from others and the expressions of distress (Kennedy-Moore & Watson as cited in Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005). These three attachment styles are classified as insecure attachment styles. Buglass (2010) indicates that the severity of bonds and attachments affects the emotional reactions of individuals. As a result, Stroebe et al. (2005) predicts that after a death of an attachment figure, a person's attachment style

will influence the intensity and way they grieve and their oscillation process. For example, it is indicated that those persons who are securely attached are more likely to show moderate expression of emotions of grief as compared to those persons who are insecurely attached and in addition to this, they avoid oscillating towards loss-orientation, resulting in absent, delayed, or inhibited grief that end up increasing their level of depression (Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005).

Bowlby's attachment styles are important and considered helpful because they provide an opportunity to understand the extent to which students' childhood experiences influence their grieving experiences as young adults who are in university. This theory further allows the researcher to understand how a students' experience of grief is affected, particularly when they have lost a person or something that they are attached to while at an age or stage where they are still figuring out their identity as young adults in university.

2.3.3. Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement

The third theory that was chosen to inform the literature review of this study is the Dual Process Model (DPM) of Coping with Bereavement, which was developed by Stroebe and Schut in the year 1999 (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Stroebe and Schut claim that this model is less prescriptive as it goes beyond understanding the essence of grief by incorporating bereavement coping processes (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). It is also a theory that is culturally sensitive to the point that its components have been incorporated into complicated grief model designed for the use in a South African context (Buglass, 2010; Drenth, Herbst & Strydom, 2010, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 2016). This makes it more applicable to understand literature that exists on young South African adults who are bereaved.

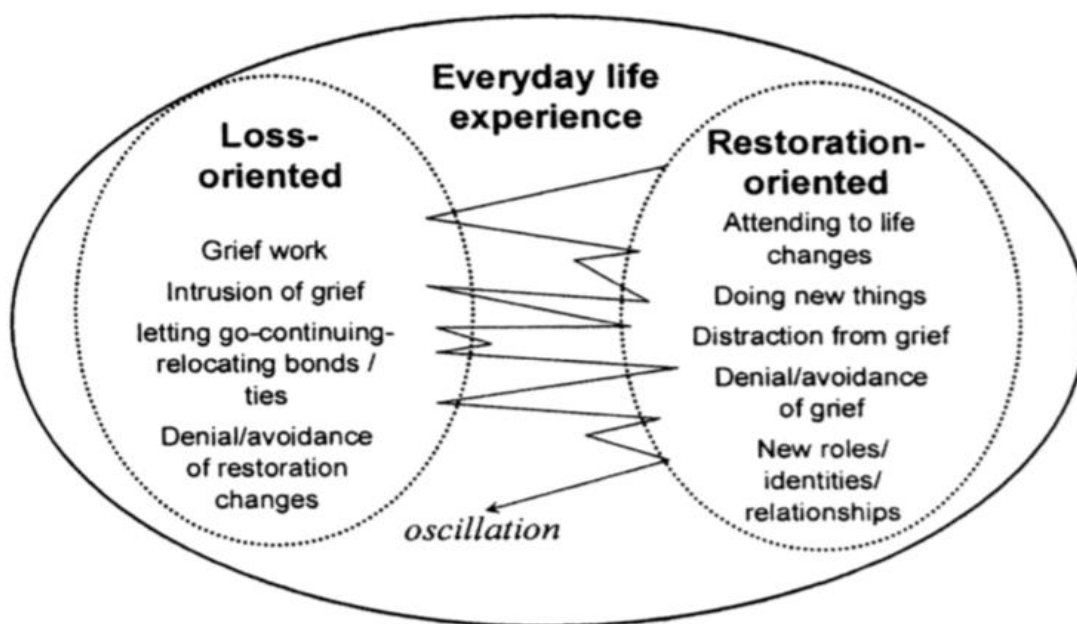
The concept that the DPM represents, emphasizes that bereaved individuals oscillate between different coping behaviours which have two orientations (See figure 1) (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, as cited in Buglass, 2010; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). The first orientation is loss-oriented factors which focuses on the loss of the deceased or the person's pre-occupation with death, experiences of sadness, guilt, anger or yearning for the deceased person (Buglass, 2010; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). In addition to this, a person who is

experiencing these factors may dwell in their sorrow by listening to music that triggers it, looking at photos or visiting the grave to feel close to the deceased (Buglass, 2010; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). Because the pain of grief may be emotionally overwhelming for the bereaved, taking “time out” is important and this leads us to the second orientation which is restoration.

Restoration-orientated factors are concerned with figuring out what needs to be dealt with and how matters can be dealt with to cope with everyday life (Buglass, 2010; Stroebe & Schut, 2021). The bereaved person may adjust lifestyle changes, build new relationships, find a job to cover the deceased lost income (Stroebe & Schut, 2021). Understanding this orientation provides ground for understanding how bereaved students in existing research adjusted after they lost their loved one.

Figure 1

Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement



Note. This model was produced by Stroebe and Schut in 1999. From “Overload: a missing link in the Dual Process Model?,” by M. Stroebe and H. Schut, 2016, *OMEGA Journal of death and dying*, 74(1), p. 98 (doi:10.1177/0030222816666540). Copyright 2016 by M. Stroebe and H.Schut

When the bereaved individual shifts from loss orientation to restoration orientation they start to build new roles and form new identities and this is possible for university students because as Erikson indicates, they are at a level of development where they are starting to form lasting identities (Stroebe & Schut, 2021; Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). This highlights how much of a critical importance the Dual Process Model is in understanding young adult's experiences of grief. As a result, DPM was chosen for this study to understand how returning and traditional aged students oscillate between loss and restoration orientation to come to terms with the loss and how they take necessary steps to adjust after loss. Understanding both these orientations was important for this study because Stroebe and Schut (1999) indicate that they play a role in helping the bereaved to come to terms with their loss and to move on with life and avoid severe health consequences.

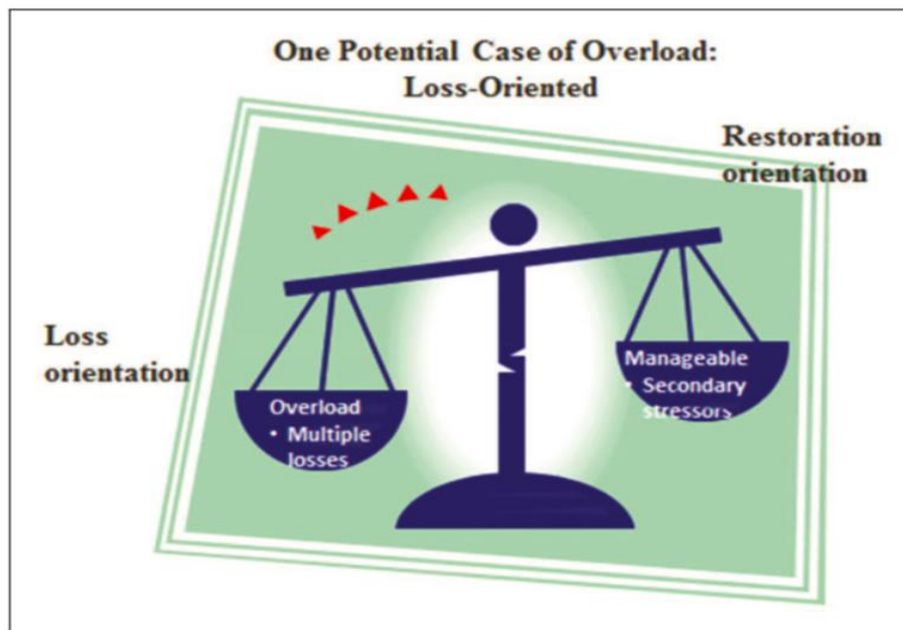
The bereaved may oscillate between loss-orientation and restoration-orientated domains at different times and at different intensity depending on a person's gender, age, cultural background and even circumstances around the death or the traumatic nature of the loss (Buglass, 2010; Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Stroebe & Schut, 2016). As a result, the DPM takes into consideration that some individuals may experience stress overload. This is when a bereaved individual experience more loss or more restoration orientated stressors than they feel they can manage or they may experience conflict when they attempt to deal with the stressors (See figure 2) (Stroebe and Schut, 2016).

"If more than one bereavement occurs simultaneously or in quick succession, it may be difficult to grieve for the different losses at the same (Stroebe and Schut, 2016, p. 102). At such times, the overload is said to lead to burnout in bereaved individuals as they are likely to feel extremely fatigued, distressed and inability to deal with demands and the pressure that comes with the loss (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008, as cited in Stroebe and Schut, 2016). Considering the developmental level of young adults and the demanding university years, this concept of stress overload was then considered useful in this study as it provides an opportunity to pay attention to all the stressors that comes with transitioning from being an adolescent to young adulthood while being a bereaved university student during COVID-19 pandemic

Stroebe and Schut (2016) indicate that during stress overload, it is important for an individual to gain control over the stressors if they are to reduce their impact. This can be done by exercising openness. That is, the bereaved individual should inform others about what happened, how it made them feel, the type of support that they received and how others can best support them (Dyregrov & Dyregrov, 2008, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 2016). In so doing, they are educating the next person on how to support them in dealing with their loss or the stressors. In addition to openness, it is indicated that empowerment, formal and informal support systems can also help in coping with stress and in reducing overload (Uchino, 2006; Neimeyer, 2012, 2016, as cited in Stroebe & Schut, 2016). Therefore, this theory was useful in understanding what existing literature found about the openness of bereaved young adults. Furthermore, using this theory as a basis for understanding literature on students' experiences, makes it possible to better understand at which stage of grief each student is at and whether that stage is orientated towards their loss or is associated with taking necessary steps towards restoration. Furthermore, it ensures that information about how the bereaved young adults can be supported is attained.

Figure 2

Overload case: Loss-Orientated



Note. One potential case of loss-oriented overload. From “Overload: a missing link in the Dual Process Model?,” by M. Stroebe and H. Schut, 2016, *OMEGA Journal of death and dying*, 74(1), p. 101 (doi:10.1177/0030222816666540). Copyright 2016 by M. Stroebe and H.Schut

2.3.4. Kubler-Ross five stages of grief

People who experience death of a loved one, go through different stages during their grieving process. Kubler-Ross summed up the stages into five. These are Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance (Roth et al., 2019). These stages were initially used to describe the experiences of dying people and later used with individuals who have a sick relative or individuals who are bereaved (Buglass, 2010; Valliani & Mughal, 2022). There is no linear way to experience these stages but instead, an individual goes through them in a different order and sometimes they even go through them more than once (Roth et al., 2019). These stages are discussed in more detail below.

2.3.4.1. Denial

Change can be difficult to accept, and people are usually resistant to it (Valliani & Mughal, 2022). It is then no wonder that Kubler-Ross and Wessler (1972) indicate that various people are often denial of the fact that their next of kin have passed away. When this occurs, a person is going through a denial stage. Denial stage is most likely the first stage of grief that an individual goes through. This is characterized by shock and denial of what is happening (Roth et al., 2019). Denial is a defence mechanism that people use to avoid processing more than what they believe they can handle (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in Roth et al., 2019). This stage is important in this study because it is clearly associated with involuntary reactions that people go through in their early stages of loss.

2.3.4.2. Anger

Once a person has accepted their reality, they are then confronted with anger that can be directed to doctors, friends, family members and even God. This stage is said to play an important role in the healing process; hence it should not be suppressed (Kubler-Ross as cited in Roth et al., 2019).

2.3.4.3. Bargaining

During this stage, the bereaved tries to search for a way out of their grief (Roth et al., 2019). People who are grieving usually turn to friends and relatives or conduct spiritual ritual or pray for healing (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in Roth et al., 2019).

2.3.4.4. Depression

Bereaved individuals experience this depressive stage after the realization that it is not possible to negotiate the death of their loved one (Roth et al., 2019). These individuals usually feel trapped and helpless (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in Roth et al., 2019). As a result of multiple deaths that are being reported globally, there might be numerous people getting stuck on this depressive stage (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in as cited in Valliani & Mughal, 2022). Employing this theory then makes it possible to understand bereaved students' mental state during their grieving process.

2.3.4.5. Acceptance

This stage is about accepting the reality, the consequences and making new plans to continue with life (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in Roth et al., 2019). However, this does not mean that everything is normal for the bereaved individual (Roth et al., 2019) but it is only an acknowledgement of the feelings and emotions like fear, anxiety, anger, and sadness that one might be experiencing (Valliani & Mughal, 2022). After experiencing loss, it may take an individual 24 months to achieve this stage (Kubler-Ross & Kessler as cited in Valliani & Mughal, 2022). However, this is only an approximation. Valliani and Mughal (2022) point out that everyone can cycle around the stages of grief at the own pace and time. This is an important factor that this study embraces, the uniqueness of every students' grieving experience. Uniqueness in terms of how long a person grieves in consideration of their cultures and tradition.

When a person starts to accept their reality that is when their healing process begins (Roth et al., 2019). These stages provide foundation for understanding the healing process for the bereaved young adults. They are also linked to the DPM because some of the stages of grief are more focused on loss while others are more focused on orientation. Using both these theories makes it possible to better understand what literature found regarding the emotions that grieving young adults go through.

2.4. Summary of chapter two

It is evident that COVID-19 has brought with it various kinds of losses. Some of these losses can also occur at the same time which might create complications in the grieving process and delay a person's ability to adapt, heal, and recover (Valliani & Mughal, 2022). For example, some university students who have experienced a loss of a loved one, have also experienced a loss of normalcy, lifestyle, financial crisis and decline in financial system (Valliani & Mughal, 2022; Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). Therefore, the stages of grief are important because they provide a platform to understand the progress of the bereaved students' grieving process. That is, whether bereaved student is in denial or has come to terms with the existence of COVID-19, the losses associated with it and most importantly the loss of their loved one during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since people are different, every student who have experienced the bereavement of a significant relationship will likely react different to other students depending on their culture, age, gender, developmental stage, socio-economic background, and the level of family support (Barnard et al., 1999; Christ et al., 2002; Harrington & Harrison, 1999; Humphreys et al., 2010; Mallon, 2011, as cited in Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). Therefore, noting this allowed the researcher to take into consideration students' diverse background and cultures which is important considering how diverse the UKZN student population is.

The theories that were discussed were chosen for their great contribution in understanding the students' experiences of grief. Understanding that human beings become attached to significant individuals in their lives and once this attachment bonds are broken through death, there is a sense of disruption in a person's life. The researcher was then able to understand how the extent to which the sense of self or identity is developed and challenged by grief experience.

The next chapter, which is chapter 3, highlights the methodology of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to highlight the challenges experienced by bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 with an attempt to influence the development of adequate bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus(es). To adequately outline what activities took place to achieve the study purpose, this chapter starts off by reintroducing the research questions. It will then describe the research methodology, design, and discuss the sample size. Added to this, the instrument of data collection that was used will also be described. Moreover, semi-structured interview, trustworthiness, data collection and management strategies will also be part of this chapter. Reflexive thematic analysis as a form of data analysis will also be discussed in this chapter. The researcher ensured the ethical standing of this study, and this chapter goes into this in detail. This chapter will be concluded by looking at the limitations and delimitations of this study.

3.2. Research questions

As indicated in chapter 1, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What kinds of loss have UKZN students experienced since the start of COVID-19 pandemic?
- (2) What are the grief experiences of bereaved UKZN students since COVID-19?
- (3) How did the grief experiences affect the academic life of these students?
- (4) What other mental health challenges did UKZN students experience associated with the loss?
- (5) Are there possible suggestions for intervention for grieving students at UKZN?

These questions facilitated the understanding of the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer the above research questions adequately, a well-planned approach to data collection had to be put in place. As indicated by Henriksen, Englander and Nordgaard (2021) using semi-structured interview is one way to collect data in a qualitative phenomenological study as it provides the opportunity for open-ended questions and for the participant to elaborate further. In addition to this, the interviewer can ask for clarification where appropriate, while following

the respondent's narrative (Henriksen, Englander & Nordgaard, 2021). As this study employed the phenomenological semi-structured interviews as an instrument of data collection, it allowed the researcher to gather in-depth data. Using these semi-structured interviews made it possible to adequately collect data from the bereaved UKZN students that were defined as the study participants for this project

3.3. Research methodology

Qualitative research approach was employed for this study because it emphasizes words in the collection and analysis of its data, contrary to quantitative research approach that dwells on quantification of data (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative research approach is suitable for studying constructs like loss and grief that cannot be easily measured or quantified. Therefore, the researcher of this current study had confidence that this research approach would appropriately answer the research questions without limiting the students to numbers or one-word answers. In this way, because qualitative research approach was employed, university students' experiences of loss, grief and bereavement was explored in-depth by giving the students a voice to express themselves.

According to Bryman (2012) qualitative research values the perspectives of its study participants. The researcher was therefore, interested in understanding students' interpretations of their loss. This is another reason why qualitative research approach was the most appropriate approach because it posits that individuals socially construct meaning in their interaction with the world (Merriam, 2002). This means that this qualitative study was interpretive in nature (Silverman, 2013). However, qualitative research approach was not chosen for this reason only, it was chosen because it also provides an opportunity to explore students' experiences as they occur in their natural setting (Silverman, 2013). This is important when studying loss, as the setting or students' environment shapes their experiences. Using a qualitative research approach provided in-depth data that answered the research questions adequately. It is anticipated that this data will influence the development of bereavement programmes within the UKZN university campus(es).

3.4. Research design

Phenomenological research design was adopted in this study as it is qualitative in nature. In addition to this, it is because a study that adopts a phenomenological design gains an understanding of people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation (Leedy and Ormrod. 2005). Furthermore, a phenomenological research design aims to unveil the core meaning of human behaviour (Seah & Wilson, 2011). "It also aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of meaning of our everyday experiences "(Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, as cited in Seah & Wilson, 2011, p. 5). Kunene and Makondo (2020) refer to this as "lived experiences". Therefore, considering the above, phenomenological research design was used in this study as it made it possible to understand bereaved students' situation around their loss.

Phenomenological inquiry has its foundation on holistic view of understanding and interpreting people's lived experiences (Patton, 2002, as cited in Seah & Wilson, 2011). This inquiry was then employed in this study because it is concerned with the holistic view of grief experience by placing much attention on the emotional, physical, interpersonal, behavioural, and spiritual aspects of it.

According to Seah and Wilson (2011) grief phenomenon is subjective, personal, and complex. The emergent of COVID-19 has made grief phenomenon even more complex as it alters people's experiences of loss, grief, and bereavement (Mortazavi et al., 2020). As such, the students in this study described their lived experiences to shed light on how they have experienced loss and how they grieve during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of semi-structured qualitative interviews made it possible to obtain rich information about bereaved students' experiences. This is because interviews as a qualitative research instrument of data collection, it creates a platform for the researcher to be able to hear about the interviewee's experiences directly from them (Henriksen, Englander & Nordgaard, 2021).

3.5. Population size and sample size

Several university students experience the death of a close person in their lives (Tedrick Parikh and Servaty-Seib, 2013). This is particularly so in their undergraduate years where they are between the ages of 18 and 23 (Balk, Walker & Baker, 2010, as cited in Walker, Hathcoat & Hoppe, 2012; Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). These findings are mainly from studies done in the United States. In an African context, similarities exist as other researchers also observed that university students in eSwatini are amongst the population that experience bereavement because of death of a loved one (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). They go on to indicate that these bereaved students' mental wellbeing is negatively impacted which results in poor academic performance. For these reasons, this study focused attention on sampling bereaved university students.

Purposive sampling technique was used to sample the participants needed to answer the research questions for this study. According to Patton (1990) and Palinkas et al. (2015) purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research as it is concerned with the selection of participants that provide rich information about the phenomenon of interest. Bryman (2012) also mentions that purposive sampling can be employed in a manner that is fixed, sequential or there may be a criterion for selecting individuals or cases. For this study, the researcher established a criterion for selecting the kinds of cases that are needed to sample bereaved students. The criteria included students who have experienced loss during the COVID-19 pandemic and are bereaved during their academic studies at the UKZN, PMB campus.

According to Henriksen, Englander and Nordgaard (2021) semi-structured interviews create a platform for the researcher to be able to hear about the interviewee's experiences directly from them. Semi-structured interviews were then used in this study to ask bereaved students questions without limitations or restrictions by a set of predetermined questions like in a structured interview.

Initially it was anticipated that a total of ten participants would be sampled. This is because literature proves that having two to ten participants is enough to reach saturation (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Hence, it was decided that having ten participants for this study will be enough to reach saturation and to get rich data from the students. Due to

the sensitive nature of the study, students were reluctant to participate; therefore, the study was successful in recruiting a total sample of five UKZN bereaved students who were then interviewed by the researcher. Keeping in mind that this study employed a phenomenological design, these interviews were guided by open-ended interview guide to allow for flexibility and for the researcher to attain detailed information about the bereaved students' experiences.

3.6. Instruments and source of data

Collecting adequate data that answers the research problem, was made possible by using interviews and interview guide, which are discussed in detail below:

3.6.1. Interviews and interview guide

Interviews are one of the widely used data collection methods in qualitative research than in quantitative research (Qu & Dumay, 2011). To indicate how important interviews are, even though quantitative research is concerned with quantification, interviews are still used when conducting a pilot study before a survey is designed (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This is because interviews are knowledge-producing conversation that allows the researcher to obtain detailed information about their research techniques even before they carry out the study to a larger population (Chabangu, 2014). The same way as Thrasher (as cited in Fontana & Frey, 2000) who is one of the first authors to rely fully on qualitative interviews in their study, this current study also made use of qualitative interviews.

There are wide variety of interviewing forms. Interviews can either be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Spoken word can be ambiguous, even when the questioning, reporting, and coding is well structured (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This does not negate the fact that interviews, particularly semi-structured interviews make it possible to understand what participants mean. Hence, this study made use of semi-structured interviews for their ability to allow the researcher to probe and ask follow-up questions to a point that rich information about students' subjective way of thinking and perspectives is attained. As Maree (as cited in Chabangu, 2014) puts

it, the aim of qualitative interviews is to ensure that the researcher sees the world through participant's eyes. This instrument of inquiry made the above task possible.

According to Qu and Dumay (2011) interviews that are conducted in a causal manner can negatively influence the quality of data that is being collected. Consequently, the researcher conducted the interviews in a private and professional space at the CFC.

According to Qu and Dumay (2011) some interview guides are highly scripted while other are not, however they all ensure the application of the same thematic approach during the interview. This study interview had an interview guide containing a set of questions that covered topics about loss, grief, and bereavement. The interview questions were constructed in a way that could allow the researcher to adjust the pace, style, and the order of the questions to encourage participants response (Qu & Dumay, 2011). In this way, the researcher ensured that the quality of data is maximised.

3.7. Data collection and management

According to Palinkas et al. (2015) purposive sampling is widely used for qualitative data collection in research. As a result, after the study was advertised on the UKZN Facebook pages and on LEARN 2022, students were then purposively selected as per the inclusion criteria. These selected students were then informed about the nature of the study.

An interview date was then scheduled in consideration of the students' availability. Informed consent was done face to face at the CFC, where the interviews took place. The students were well informed about the study, their right to withdraw at any time and confidentiality. They were also given the opportunity to ask questions and for their questions to be answered. The students then signed two consent forms which indicated that they understood what the study was about, that they agree to be interviewed and to be recorded (see appendix 3). One consent form was given to the participant, and one was kept by the researcher. Before the interview started, the researcher reminded the students about their rights as research participants. That is, their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time they want. In addition to this, students were reminded that there is no right or wrong answer, and they should indicate when they feel uncomfortable to answer certain questions. Most importantly, the researcher verified if

the participants still agree to be audio recorded. Considering that COVID-19 still exists, the researcher and the participant were not in close contact and wore masks and sanitized their hands before and after the interviews.

Establishing a rapport during the introduction by engaging in small talks with the interviewee is considered by several writers to be vital when conducting an interview as they lead to depth and truth telling (Qu & Dumay, 2011). For this reason, the interviews in this current study started with general questions and then afterwards questions about students' loss, grief and bereavement experiences were introduced. This was so that the participant or the interviewee can feel more comfortable to talk to the researcher.

Since the study made use of semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was used during all the interviews with the students. Data that was collected in detail as the researcher constantly probed and asked follow-up questions. In conclusion of the interviews, students were reminded of the available CFC counselling services should they require these.

The signed informed consent forms were scanned and stored in a password protected USB, Computer and Dropbox folder. The hard copy of the ICF's were placed in a sealed envelope. Verbatim format was used to transcribe the audio recordings into a word processing document. These audio recordings, transcriptions and the interview guides were stored together with the scanned ICF's with the plan of keeping them for a period of five years before discarding or deleting them.

3.8. Data analysis procedures- Reflexive thematic analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process of not only reviewing but also synthesizing and interpreting data to explain a phenomenon under study (Fossey et al., 2002). Added to this, in qualitative data analysis, feelings, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and experiences are analysed to establish how participants make meaning of a specific phenomenon (Chabangu, 2014). As a result, Steinberg (as cited in Pillay, 2009) view qualitative analysis to be centralised around content analysis.

Reflexive thematic analysis as a method that identifies and provides interpretations of themes and patterns in qualitative data set, is a widely used method of qualitative research that is independent of theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Majumdar, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis is the revised term thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The flexibility of this analysis allows a researcher to determine themes in a number of ways (Braun and Clarke, 2006). There are five specific guidelines for its conduction. These guidelines give reflexive thematic analysis a scientific vigour (Majumdar, 2019). It is therefore, for these reasons why this current study employed reflexive thematic analysis and because of its rich and detailed analytical account (Majumdar, 2019). Inductive analysis of qualitative research is the best way to achieve the goals of this study. This is because it is a type of reflexive thematic analysis that is mainly data driven and is not concerned with linking the data with any pre-existing conceptions of the researcher or themes from other research studies (Majumdar, 2019). Further to this, this method was employed because it aligns with the ontology and epistemology of the interpretive phenomenology. This is to say that bereaved UKZN students' lived experiences of loss was studied and analysed successfully. There was also a recognition that the researcher was not bias free and these biases were highlighted in the report.

According to Majumdar (2019) when reflexive thematic analysis is employed, the data set is identified, analysed and major themes that emerge are then reported. The same in this study, the data was collected from conducting interviews with bereaved students, thereafter, the audio recordings on these interviews were transcribed as a verbatim into word processing documents. Since the aim of this study was to highlight bereaved students' experiences and ultimately influence the development of bereavement programmes within the UKZN campus (es), data analysis was conducted in an exploratory design and similarities and differences in experiences of bereaved students were uncovered in relation to how relevant they are in answering the research questions. Added to this, the students' data was used to justify the identified themes that emerged. These themes do not only embody answers to the research questions, but they also provide a structure that is easy to follow and understand.

Transparency about the decisions and methods of data collection and analysis is important if the research study is to maintain scientific vigour (Majumdar, 2019).

Therefore, the process of analysing the bereaved students' data in this study proceeded by following Braun and Clarke's six step framework. It is important to note that these steps are however not linear, hence, the researcher can move forward and back as and when they need to (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). These steps are discussed in detail below:

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate that this step is about transcribing, reading and re-reading and ensuring that the initial ideas are recorded. As a result, this current study researcher ensured that the data that was obtained during the interviews was transcribed. During the transcription, the researcher listened to the audio recording several times and this helped the researcher to familiarize themselves with the participants interview data. Beyond this, the transcriptions were read without listening to the audios. This helped to lay the foundation for the following step.

Step 2: Generating initial codes

The aim on this step was to provide data that is organized systematically and meaningfully (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Since our focus was to address the research questions, we coded segments of data that was relevant to answer the study questions. From this, codes were developed, and some were even modified as transcripts were read and re-read. This was done by working through the soft copies and sometimes hardcopies of the transcripts using stickers, pens, and highlighters.

Step 3: Search for themes

"A theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3356). The themes were descriptive to ensure that relevant data patterns are described. Initial themes were identified by looking at the similar experiences in the participant's interview transcripts. The sections of the transcripts that talks about similar experiences were marked and grouped together to be later revisited and assessed before deciding on grouping it into a single most appropriate theme

Step 4: Review themes

This step is about ensuring that the preliminary themes are modified and developed (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researcher ensured this by scrutinizing and assessing the themes to identify which ones are most appropriate or relevant to answer the study questions. The researcher determined if the themes make sense, if there is data to support the themes, if there is overlap in themes and if there is evidence of subthemes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). It is further indicated that in this step, it is important to gather all data that is relevant to the specific theme. In this study, these was done by colour-coding the data associated with each theme. This made it easy to understand patterns and to interpret the data.

Step 5: Define themes by refining them in a way that captures their essence

This step is about refining the specifics of each theme and ensuring that all themes have clear definitions and names (Braun and Clarke, 2006). If subthemes were identified in the previous step, it must be determined here if those subthemes interact or relate to the main theme (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). During this step, themes were further scrutinized and the essence of what each theme is about was identified. Finalization of themes was then done in this step once it was clear what each theme was focused on.

Step 6: Writing-up to present the end report

At this step all the identified themes and the data were compiled, and findings of the study were reported. To ensure that the data reflected the bereaved students' views and experiences, extracts were included when reporting the findings. Further details on this, are found in the findings chapter.

3.9. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the study findings are a good reflection of the personal and lived experiences of the investigated phenomenon (Curtin & Fossey, 2007). The four general criteria for trustworthiness are discussed below:

3.9.1. Credibility

Smith (2015) indicates that for research findings to be utilised in practice and to be incorporated into care delivery, it is essential to evaluate the quality of research. This is where credibility of the procedures used in the study comes into play. This current study then made use of various tools to assist in reducing threats to credibility. This includes, triangulation, respondent validation, neutrality, audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions.

Triangulation entails the use of more than one source of data or method when studying a social phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). According to Tracy (2010) triangulation also encompass the use of multiple theoretical frameworks. Hence, multiple theoretical frameworks were also used in this study to identify and report data in themes that are credible. Furthermore, triangulation was achieved by recruiting participants from different departments within the university. Incorporating different groups of students, helped gather different perspectives or experiences of students from different departments. Representing what Mays & Pope (as cited in Coleman, 2022) called fair dealing or truth value. That is, "...the viewpoint of one group is never presented as if it represents the sole truth about any situation (Mays & Pope, 2000, as cited in Coleman, 2022, p. 2043).

3.9.2. Dependability

Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Bashir, Afzal & Azeem, 2008) indicate that dependability is the best term to describe research reliability. In definition, "...The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable" (Joppe, 2000, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). In simple terms, dependability is the appropriateness and the application of methods used in a study and the integrity of that research study conclusions (Colman, 2021).

To maximize trustworthiness, it is important that the researcher achieves neutrality, that is they consider the role that they play in the research (Coleman, 2022). Consequently, the researcher conducted literature review into different theories and approaches than

only choosing one that they are familiar with. Furthermore, the researcher had practice interviews before the study commenced to assess how they ask questions. This is because the researcher was aware that their skills, perceptions, and efforts can affect the credibility of the study. These efforts therefore helped the researcher to demonstrate rigour in their work (Coleman, 2022).

Qu and Dumay (2011) indicate that for an interviewer to minimise bias, they should not pose leading questions or fail to follow-up. For this reason, the researcher ensured that the questions were not asked in a way that will lead the students to answer in a certain manner. In this way, the study was able to gather rich data about students' feelings, perceptions, and behaviour (Chabangu, 2014). Another way that enabled rich data to be collected was by using audio recordings and verbatim transcripts. The use of this tools provides an opportunity for the raw data to be scrutinized and for a detailed picture to be revealed (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gray, 2018, as cited in Coleman, 2022). In addition to this, answers and details about the questions asked by the researcher are provided when reporting the findings to provide a thick and contextualised description.

One way of promoting dependability in qualitative research is through multiple coding (Coleman, 2022). This means that more than one qualitative researcher independently analyses the study data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, as cited in Coleman, 2022). This multiple coding was used in this study in a form of having not only the researcher but also the supervisor of this master's research to review the data to maximise the reliability of the conclusions. As Burnard (as cited in Coleman, 2022) argues, this process therefore made the analysis to be more rigorous and reduced the possibility of bias.

3.9.3. Confirmability

“Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers”(Anney, 2014, p. 15). One of the best ways to overcome misinformation in qualitative research is to employ good interviewing techniques (Wallendorf &Belk,1989; as cited in Anney, 2014). As this study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to allow the students to feel free to speak while probing and following up on what they were communicating. This kind of validation is important because it allowed the researcher to confirm their understanding

of what the interviewee was articulating during the data collection process (Coleman, 2022). Furthermore, the researcher was paraphrasing where communication was ambiguous (Coleman, 2022).

An interview guide was used to direct the conversations between the researcher and the participants. In this way, reliability was enhanced as there was control and uniformity within the interview process. At the same time, the researcher ensured that the interviews are not very dependent on the interview guide by probing where it was necessary. This was done to ensure that reliability is not compromised by having participants not feeling free to share full accounts of their experiences (Coleman, 2022).

3.9.4. Transferability

Transferability is concerned with whether findings are applicable in other contexts, while replicability determines whether the way the report is done conveys what an individual would have witnessed if they were observing (Stiles, 1993, as cited in Coleman, 2022). Therefore, the use of audio recordings and full transcription in this study offer an incredible opportunity for replicability of the study. Further to this, description of the study participants demographics and location of the study was provided. This provides an opportunity to future researchers to be able to compare this current study sample with their sample. Therefore, increasing the transferability of the study.

3.10. Ethical considerations

The protection of participants from harm, providing informed consent, maintaining privacy and honesty is a major concern in ethics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). As indicated by Belmont's report, ethics are summed up by three principles namely, Respect for the participant, Beneficence which is concerned by risk-benefit analysis and Justice in the selection of participants (Friesen et al., 2017). Resultantly, the researcher ensured the ethical standing of the study in several ways. To begin with, an ethical clearance, indicating that this study was compliant to the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethical guidelines was obtained and that students can be approached and recruited into the study. Added to this, approval was also granted by the UKZN registrar for the study to advertise on the UKZN online platforms.

After obtaining ethical approval, the researcher realised that the study advertisement poster was not very detailed; resultantly, it was amended to ensure that background information about the study and activities are explained in detail. After careful consideration, the interviews were conducted at the CFC. This provided the participants with the opportunity to access social support easily. In addition to this, it maximized rapport. The COVID-19 restrictions were lessened at the time of data collection; however, the researcher and participants wore protective masks, sanitized hands, and kept safe distance. Considering that the students were taking their time to come to the CFC and the sensitive nature of the study topic, the researcher reimbursed participants with R50 airtime. This was indicated to the participants that it is not a payment, but an incentive that will assist them to contact the CFC should they realise later that they require social support. The total participants were five, but only four were provided with the R50 reimbursement because one student indicated that she did not need the airtime. The Informed Consent Form was then updated to include the above amendments. Added to this, the title that was written on the approved ICF was not corresponding with the approved study title, the researcher then updated it accordingly. All the above deviations were reported to ethics (see appendix 7), letter of correspondence is still pending.

After all the above, the researcher used the designed advertisement poster (see appendix 2) to advertise the study on the UKZN online platforms (Facebook and UKZN LEARN 2022). The advert introduced the study in brief as it provided background information about the study, inclusion criteria, location, referral organization and researchers contact details, and ensuring that there was transparency and honesty even during recruitment to encourage participation.

Potential participants were therefore recruited online, and the consenting process happened face to face where participants were informed about their rights. There was emphasis on the voluntary nature of the study; that is, they can withdraw from the study whenever they want without being subjected to any consequences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). They were further informed that interviews will be recorded and written consent was obtained for this.

It is crucial that, in addition to respecting the rights and opinions of individuals, their privacy and confidentiality is also respected (Health Professions Council of South Africa,

2006). Since the interviews were held at the CFC, the researcher ensured that the interview room was closed during the interviews to protect the confidential information that the participants were sharing and for them to feel comfortable to talk without any other person listening to the conversation.

The researcher addressed the issue of anonymity by giving participants pseudonyms and keeping the study documents in a password protected laptop, USB, and Dropbox folder. The aim is to store the information for a period of five years before it is deleted. Only the researcher and the supervisor had immediate access to the ICF's as these contained participants real names. Since this research study is affiliated with the UKZN or done in pursuit of a master's degree, participants were informed that the study documents would be made available as per request to scholarly individuals or the ethics committee when necessary.

Loss and grief are sensitive topics, that can sometimes trigger different emotions, consequently, the researcher made arrangements with the CFC and informed the participants that CFC counselling services are available for them in case they need counselling (see appendix 5). The contact details of the CFC and other free psychosocial services were provided in the consent form for easy access to the participants. In addition to this, the contact details of the researcher, supervisor and the ethics committee were also made available on every consent form given to the participants (see appendix 3). This was done to ensure that the participants can contact the researcher when they have questions about the study, the findings, or if they need to make use of psychosocial services.

3.11. Limitations and delimitations

Human studies are always expected to have challenges or limitations because people are always changing, adapting and they have similar yet different experiences that they respond to, in their own unique ways. It is therefore important for human studies to highlight the limitations experienced, to shed light and help provide information to other researchers about what to expect, avoid or implement in their studies to maximise the credibility of their findings. This section will however not only look at the limitations of the study, but it will also discuss why some limitations are unavoidable, how they are not

expected to affect the findings negatively and the researcher will also present strategies to minimize negative consequences of the limitations and delimitations.

As mentioned in chapter 1 under section 10.2, there are number of limitations to this study. Firstly, the lack of generalizability to other universities because the sample was small and only consisted of UKZN students. This was unavoidable because the study was qualitative in nature and aimed at acquiring in-depth information with less focus on generalizing the data like in quantitative research studies. This was a trade-off between breath or depth of the data.

Secondly, since this study was conducted during COVID-19 pandemic, focus groups were not carried out. The researcher was concerned with the safety of the participants because even though the COVID-19 regulations were relaxed, COVID-19 was still present and highly infectious. The researcher made thorough literature review and built rapport with the participants to ensure that the data collected is detailed and trustworthy. Triangulation was carried out by using multiple theoretical frameworks and recruiting students from different departments.

Thirdly, there is also an issue of cost effectiveness of travelling to the CFC. The researcher tried to limit costs for the students by allowing them to pick the date for the interview. This allowed the participants to choose a day that they had classes and were supposed to come to campus. In addition to this, for those students who were using university buses, the researcher encouraged them to schedule their interview around the times when buses are available.

Fourthly, the researcher's aim was to recruit ten participants however, only five participants were recruited. Recruiting students online was time consuming and needed more effort. The study advertisement was then modified so it provides participants with more details about the study and to be more attractive to the reader. This advert was then used on Facebook and UKZN LEARN 2022 to advertise the study to UKZN PMB campus students.

The fifth limitation was that there were some inconsistencies in the information that was provided by two participants. Perhaps, it is important for the interviewer to emphasise during the consenting process that it is important to answer each question truthfully.

The last limitation to the study is that there were some students who were reluctant to participate, and some changed their minds because of the sensitive nature of the topic. As a result, data collection took longer than anticipated. Consenting process was carried out with all study participants. When students were hesitant to participate, the researcher gave them time to think more about their decision and told them to reach out if they decide that they want to participate in the study. This enabled the researcher to recruit and conduct interviews with participants who were sure about their decision and were not coerced in any way.

There were several limitations to the study, “However, the potential benefits outweigh these limitations” (Pillay, 2009, p. 100). This study provided an opportunity for bereaved students to talk and express themselves and to voice out their opinions about how their challenges can be addressed. Hence, it is anticipated that the study findings will contribute knowledge when decisions are made about how to improve bereaved students’ experiences and when planning to develop bereavement programmes within the university. To achieve these benefits, the data limitations needed to be dealt with carefully.

In research, there is always a room for improvement. As a result, the researcher suggests that to minimize negative consequences, future researchers should consider conducting the interviews by phone call to reduce costs for the participants. In addition to this, they can sample from more than one campus to get a diverse sample as the participants might have different experiences to that of PMB campus students.

3.12. Summary of chapter three

This section concludes chapter 3, which was all about the research methodology and design that was used to carry out this research study. It started by discussing in detail the research questions that the study is attempting to answer. It went on to discuss the type of sources that are necessary to answer the mentioned research questions. Added

to this, the research methodology which is qualitative research was also explained together with the rationale for selecting this methodology.

The researcher took into considering that purposive sampling in qualitative research is concerned with the selection of participants that provide rich information about the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 1990; Palinkas et al., 2015). As a result, this research employed purposive sampling techniques to recruit five participants. Furthermore, a detailed description of the population and the sample is highlighted. It is explained that phenomenological design makes it possible to understand people's perspectives, perceptions and understandings of a particular situation drawing from their lived experiences (Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Therefore, in-depth semi-structured interviews were employed to collect in-depth data about bereaved students' experiences. This chapter went in detail to explain how interviews were conducted. The data collection and management described the step-by-step procedures that were used to carry out the data collection steps. In this way, this section provides enough details to enable other researchers to replicate the study. In addition to this, this chapter provided solutions to mitigate the study limitation, and this might be useful to future researchers.

This study would have not provided credible data without taking into consideration its ethical standing. It is important to note that "ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in social research" (Bryman, 2012, p. 130). It is for this reason that this chapter also covered the ethical issues from the initial planning of this research to recruitment, interviewing, analysis, and reporting of the data. It is explained in this chapter how the researcher protected the rights of the participants, the voluntary nature of the study, how anonymity and confidentiality was maintained. It was important that the researcher does this because protecting the study participants is of utmost importance in research.

The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this study was to highlight the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement programme(s) within the UKZN campus(es).

The researcher will start by providing an overview of the five participants demographics. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants identities.

Demographics of participants

Nyiko is a 35-year-old female student. At the time of the interview, she was studying for an honour's degree in the School of Social Sciences. The main loss that she spoke about was not related to COVID-19 but it occurred during the period of COVID-19.

Dzuni is a 23-year-old female student. At the time of the interview, she was studying for a bachelor's degree in the School of Life Sciences. The loss that she experienced was related to COVID-19.

Basani is a 21-year-old female student. At the time of the interview, she was studying for a bachelor's degree in the School of Arts. The loss that she experienced was not related to COVID-19.

Amu is a 22-year-old female student. At the time of the interview, she was studying for a bachelor's degree in the School of Social Sciences. The loss that she experienced was not related to COVID-19, and the loss did not happen during COVID-19. However, she experienced a sense of loss during the COVID-19 period.

Mixo is 23-year-old female student. At the time of the interview, she was studying for a bachelor's degree in the School of Agricultural, Earth and Environmental Sciences. The loss that she experienced was related to COVID-19.

The interviews that were conducted in this study were transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. There are different themes that were identified. The first theme was about the types of losses. This theme had four subthemes: loss of social life or friends, loss of jobs and family lifestyle, loss of family members and loss of academic routine or contact learning. The second theme was about participants' response to loss and mental health challenges. This theme had three subthemes: initial response to loss, and current response to loss and overall participants' state, and mental health challenges. The third theme was about grief experiences during COVID-19. This theme had three subthemes: Burial processes, balancing grieving, studying and family responsibilities and, grief and spirituality.

The fourth theme was about students' academic life during COVID-19 pandemic. This theme had three subthemes: Online learning challenges, contact learning challenges and contact learning as the preferred learning method. The fifth theme was about coping strategies. This theme had nine subthemes: Detaching from reality, observing other people, spiritual quotes, praying, drinking alcohol, confiding in friends or relatives, counselling, burning cinnamon sticks and having plans. The sixth theme was about the support system. This theme had three subthemes: Support from family, support from peers or friends, and support from the university. The seventh theme was about the suggestions for intervention. This theme had two subthemes: suggestions to the university and suggestions to bereaved students.

The below table represent all the themes and subthemes that were identified in this study:

Themes	Sub-Themes
Types of Losses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of social life/ friends • Loss of jobs and family lifestyle • Loss of family members • Loss of academic routine/ contact learning
Response to loss and mental health challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial response • Current response to loss and overall participants' state
Grief experiences during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burial processes • Balancing grieving, studying and family responsibilities • Grief and faith

Students' academic life during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online learning challenges • Contact learning challenges • Contact learning as the preferred learning method
Coping strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detach from reality • Observing other people • Spiritual quotes • Praying • Drinking alcohol • Confiding in friends or relatives • Counselling • Burning cinnamon sticks • Having plans
Support system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from family • Support from peers/ friends • Support from the university
Suggestions for intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions to the university • Suggestions to the bereaved students

In support of the above themes, extracts from the interviews were used. To provide the reader with context, the researcher's questions are provided under each theme. Since the researcher conducted the interviews, abbreviation "Int" was used to refer to the interviewer and all five participants were given pseudonyms.

4.2. Types of losses

The interviewer asked the participants to talk about how COVID-19 has affected them. The below subthemes highlight the types of losses that the participants mentioned. The researcher explored this subtheme in order to understand the types of losses experienced by UKZN students and to examine how these types of loss affects students. Therefore, extracts were provided to illustrate in great details each subtheme under types of losses.

The first subtheme is about loss of social life/ friends.

4.2.1. Loss of social life/ friends

There are various things that Basani mentioned when she was asked by the interviewer to talk about how she was affected by COVID-19. One of those things that she mentioned

on the below extract is that COVID-19 robbed her of the opportunity to experience the university life. She explains that in 2020 she was a first-year student, but she did not get to experience the university life in that year because COVID-19 had just started. Basani was frustrated by this reality, and she shows it by clicking her tongue when talking about her experience.

Extract 1: Basani, 21

“Basani Well (tongue click) I came here in 2020

Int uhm

Basani At the start of COVID-19 and I didn’t get my first year!

Int uhmm

Basani I didn’t get to experience varsity life”

In addition to having lost the experience of being a first-year student or being at the university and partaking in all that the university had to offer, Basani said the below when she was asked to elaborate further on the things that she lost since COVID-19 started.

Extract 2: Basani, 21

“Basani But uhm yeah! And friends I’d say some old friends also cause we don’t talk or see each other as much

Int uhm

Basani and you find out that your friends are not your friends (both giggle) like ohh wow, so it was only because I saw you that we were friends”

Basani laments that after COVID-19 started, she lost friends because they were not able to see each other. She seemed surprised at her discovery that the friends that she had, were only part of her life only because they were in constant contact before COVID-19 started.

Nyiko in the below extract explains that she could not be in contact with her family members like she used to before COVID-19 started. She further explains that this has happened because everyone was isolated in their own homes.

Extract 3: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko and because of COVID we couldn’t reach to each other as frequent or as often as we used to

Int uhm”

Nyiko so you everyone was uhm in his, in his or her own shelter and on in a in her own nutshell kind of thing”

The second subtheme that prevailed was about family member’s loss of jobs and family lifestyle or roles. This was personalized by several participants as they were impacted by it.

4.2.2. Loss of jobs and family lifestyle or roles

In extract 1 and 2 Basani spoke about her personal losses. In the below extract, she now talks about her family members loses that had an impact in her life. These family members are her uncle and mother.

Extract 4 : Basani, 21

“Basani Retrenched or let out like they let him go and stuff

Int uhm

Basani And he needs to find a new job and it made life a lot harder for mom too because my mother because she had to find a new job and stuff

Int Uhm

Basani Yeah so it did make, like increase the unemployment and you know

Int uhm

Basani People were a bit anxious of what’s going to happen next

Int uhm

Basani like my family is going to starve and stuff like that but yeah, I’d say in that reference, yeah! And I think maybe also isocial time with your friends”

Although it is not Basani who lost a job, but her uncle and mother, she talked about this loss because it affected her indirectly. She said that when her uncle and mother lost jobs, it was hard for these two family members because they had to start looking for job. There was no longer a source of income in the family and Basani talked about how that made

everyone was anxious and concerned that they are going to starve of hunger. She ends by repeating what she said in extract 2, that she also lost social time with friends.

In the next extract Dzuni spoke about her sister losing a job and how that affected her.

Extract 5: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni and my older sister lost her job in 2020

Int uhm

Dzuni uhhh COVID-19 has affected me a lot”

Dzuni said that her older sister lost her job in 2020 and that affected her. In the below extract, she then talks about how her sister’s loss of job affected her.

Extract 6: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni yes and there were three of us at home and it’s like you’re you are the breadwinner now

Int uhm uhm

Dzuni so I had to use my NSFAS money to buy food, it was very hard”

Since Dzuni lost her grandparents who were breadwinners (see extract 8), she says in the above extract that she automatically became a breadwinner since her sister lost her job. The words uttered in the above extract “..it’s like you’re you are the breadwinner now” suggests that the responsibility to take care of the family fell on her without proper communication about it. Dzuni also stated that she had to use her student funding to buy food at home because things were very hard at the time.

The data analysis shows that Basani and Dzuni (see extract 4,5 and 6) experienced indirect loses that affected or changed their quality of life. It is evident that both lives of the above participants changed because of the loss of job by their family members. These participants had to adapt and take become providers in the family (see extract 6)

In the next extract, Amu explains how she was affected when her mother lost her job

Extract 7: Amu, 22

“Amu uhm I think personally coming from the home that I come from, I am from a very poor home that was the main thing. my mom lost her job, when my mom lost her job so we couldn’t afford anything

Int uhmm

Amu So that was very hard. Very hard specially when the lock down started

Int uhm

Amu It was very hard, few months when we had to lay off , from this to nothing

Int uhm

Amu So yeah I think that was our biggest challenge personally was the biggest challenge having to think where the next meal was gonna come from”

In the above extract, Amu mentioned that her mother lost her job, and it was difficult for them afterwards because they could not afford a lot of things like food.

The third and next subtheme that prevailed in data is the loss of family members.

4.2.3. Loss of family members

In the below extracts, the participants were asked the same question about how COVID-19 has affected them. Most of the study participants expressed that they lost family members and some of whom they were very close to. These are the people who looked after them.

In the below extract, Dzuni responds to the interviewer’s question below. She answers the interviewer by mentioning that she lost her grandparents, and she further explains the role that the grandparents played in her life.

Extract 8: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni Yoh COVID-19 affected me a lot uhm

Int uhm

Dzuni I lost my grandparents, there was the one who was taking care of me since I lost my parents when I was young

Int uhm

Dzuni both my parents passed away when I was young

Int uhm

Dzuni at the age of Ten, so I was raised by my grandparents, both my grandparents”

Dzuni indicated that COVID-19 affected her a lot because she lost both her grandparents. Her grandparents were important to her because they took care of her from the age of ten when she lost her parents.

In the extract below, Basani talks about who she has lost.

Extract 9: Basani, 21

“Basani yeah uhm this January 2020 uhm I lost my mom

Int uhm

Basani she was coming on her way from work, usebenza eBradlows (she was working at Bradlows) so she got a job uhm

Int uhm

Basani At the end of, I think it was end of 2020

Int uhm

Basani yeah at Bradlows and she was coming from work and heading to the gym and and that’s where the car accident happened. She got hit by a car”

Basani explained that she lost her mother in 2020. Her mother had recently got a job at Bradlows but then when she was coming back from work one day, she got hit by a car as she was heading to the gym. Basani provides contradictory information about when her mother passed away. She first said that “..this January” which it might be interpreted as this January 2022, but she then says, “this January 2020”. Later in the conversation she says “..I think it was end of 2020”.

In the following two extracts, Nyiko talks about the family members that she has lost.

Extract 10: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko cause we lost uhh a family member

Int hm

Nyiko my cousin who committed suicide”

Nyiko explained that she lost her cousin through suicide. On the below extract, Nyiko spoke about losing family members although she distances herself from this loss. She says that her mother lost a lot of family members who died from COVID-19. Even though these are also her relatives, she does not say that she lost them as well.

Extract 11: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko especially on that period cause even at my mother’s side of family she she, she was losing a lot of family members due to COVID”

In the next extract, Amu speaks about losing her mother and father.

Extract 12: Amu, 22

“Amu Ohh loss losing, uhm I lost my mom when I was seven and then my dad when I was twelve so I think I didn’t specifically lose during the period of COVID-19 but during tho those times of COVID-19 we have I think maybe if they were here it would be much better”

Amu indicated in the above extract that she lost both her parents when she was still young. There is an indication that she felt their absence more when COVID-19 started. She explained that maybe if they were still around, her experience during COVID-19 might have been different.

4.2.4. Loss of academic routine or contact lessons

Mixo explains in the below extract that she had to do her practical online.

Extract 13: Mixo, 23

*“Mixo but the problem that I have ehh its it’s the practical part
Int uhmm
Mixo where you doing it online”*

In the above extract, Mixo seemed to have experienced loss of academic routine since contact classes were replaced by online classes. She indicated that the problem that she had is doing her practical online.

4.3. Response to loss

4.3.1. Initial response to loss

4.3.1.1. Hopelessness

In the next extract, Basani explains that she was hopeless since she was no longer getting the support or encouragement from her mother

Extract 14: Basani,21

“Basani I felt like there was no purpose to life because it’s like, she will be the one to like encourage me ok

Int yeah

Basani You can do it and stuff like that, cause my granny doesn’t do that if I can say (breaths heavily) so it’s like, what am I still doing in university? Why am I still going on with life”

Basani indicated that she could not find a reason to live anymore because her mother was one person who supported her. She talked about how she will no longer have that support because her grandmother does not encourage her. She went on to question why she is continuing with going to university and with life.

In the below extract, Amu talks about how hopeless she felt.

Extract 15: Amu,22

“Amu I felt like I had nothing to live for anymore

Int uhm

Amu so it was like I lost everything at that time

Int uhm

Amu yeah I felt so much pain, so much hate for the world”

Amu explained that she felt like she had lost everything at the time. She did not want to live anymore because she was in a lot of pain, and she hated the world.

4.3.1.2. Confusion

Some participants spoke about how confused they were.

In the next extract, Basani spoke about how the loss did not make sense and how confusing she was.

Extract 16: Basani,21

“Basani yeah there’s no reason, it’s like, you know so I was really! Confused and lost (breaths heavily) and like yeah!, I just, it doesn’t make sense”

Basani emphasizes that she was really confused and not only that, but she felt lost because nothing made sense about her loss.

In the next extract, Nyiko explains that she was sad and she struggled to make sense of the loss.

Extract 17: Nyiko,35

“Nyiko so it was a very sad and

Int yeah yeah

Nyiko and un-understandable”

Nyiko indicate that it was very sad when she heard that her cousin had passed way. She also spoke about how the loss did not make sense. In this extract, Nyiko expressed feeling confused. On the below extract, Nyiko further elaborate on what she said in extract 16, that she was confused about why her cousin committed suicide.

Extract 18: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko but because you couldn’t, I couldn’t put the puzzles together

Int uhm

Nyiko like why did she end up taking herself”

4.3.1.3. Guilt

Extract 19: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko I was guilty

Int uhm

Nyiko aw I don’t know I just felt guilty cause I haven’t spoken to her in a while”

Nyiko comments that she felt guilty. She mentioned that what made her feel guilty was that she had not spoken to her cousin in a while before she died.

Many of the participants lost family members (see extract 8-12). Nyiko is the only participant that spoke about feelings of guilt after hearing that she has lost her family member.

4.3.1.4. Numb

In the following extract, Basani explains that she was numb.

Extract 20: Basani, 21

“Basani (breaths heavily) I think I went numb, I felt like my whole world was just crushing down”

Basani explained to the interviewer that she went numb and felt like her world was coming to an end, when she heard that her mother passed away. Basani seemed overwhelmed with emotions as she breathed heavily before talking about how numb she was.

On the next extract, Basani further explained that another thing that made her numb was that she did not have friends. She explained that the friends that she thought she had proved to her that they are not her friends when her mother passed away.

Extract 21, Basani, 21

“Basani I was also numb again and not ok

Int uhm

Basani And cause I knew what was making me sad like I don't think I have friends,

Int ohh ok

Basani the people that I thought were my friends

Int uhm

Basani Are not my friends, and now even when my mother away to actually see that evidence"

On the below extract, Basani continued to explain more reasons why she went numb.

Extract 22. Basani, 21

"Basani Just get on with it. Uhm so I'd say for me I made myself feel numb and I felt like cause my granny is like Basani (khala njengamanje) cry now when we first heard, and I did cry and it's like (ma sekufika abantu) when people arrive don't cry. You must be strong and be part of the people and staff like that

Int uhm uhm

Basani So personally for me I didn't like that

Int uhm

Basani I felt like I needed to express myself and cry as much as I wanted to cause for her

Int uhm

Basani She got the comfort from the neighbours, from the people cause you know what they do in Zulu culture where people come in and they mourn and talk about the person and staff"

Basani explained that she cried when she first heard about her loss. She then also explained that after that, she made herself numb because her grandmother was telling her that she cannot cry when people are around, she must be strong and interact with people. Basani was not happy about this. She said that she needed to cry and express how she felt. Basani expressed that her grandmother was not being fair. She pointed out that her grandmother was able to express herself anytime because she was able to mourn with people who came to her house.

4.3.1.5. Shocked

In the below extract, Nyiko indicates that she was shocked when she first heard about her loss.

Extract 23: Nyiko, 35

*Int yeah yeah and how was your reaction like ehh when you first
Nyiko it was shocking I don't wanna lie, it was shocking, and I try not to think about it"*

In the above extract, Nyiko spoke about how shocked she was when she first heard about her loss. She seemed to have been really surprised to hear about her loss. She repeatedly mentioned that she was shocked.

4.3.1.6. Scared

Dzuni indicates in the below extract that she was scared of COVID-19 when she heard that it was the reason that her grandfather passed away.

Extract 24: Dzuni, 23

*Int uhm, and how was your your reaction when you first heard that you've lost your
 grandfather?
Dzuni I was so scared
Int uhm
Dzuni of COVID-19, first of all
Int yeah
Dzuni because I didn't know about it"*

When Dzuni was asked her reaction after she first heard that she lost her grandfather, she responded and said that she was scared. There is an indication that she was not only scared because her grandfather passed away, but because of how he died. She explained that she was scared of COVID-19 as she did not have much knowledge about it.

4.3.1.7. Disbelief about the cause of death

Dzuni continued in the below extract and expressed that at first, she did not believe that COVID-19 is here. She then indicated that after her grandfather passed away to COVID-19 she started to believe that COVID-19 exists.

Extract 25: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni I can say that uhh I, ok firstly I believe that I didn’t believe that COVID-19 it can happen

Int uhm uhm uhm

Dzuni then after I saw my grand, after I lost my grandparents then

Int uhm

Dzuni I believed that COVID-19 it’s here”

On the below extract, Basani indicated that she did not think that her mother being hit a car was a huge thing. She indicates that she thought because her mother is fit and works out, she will be well.

Extract 26: Basani, 21

“Basani Yeah, I really thought it wasn’t anything that big, like she just like people do get hit by a car

Int uhm

Basani she works out so she’ll be fine”

4.3.2. Current response to loss and overall students’ state.

There is an indication from analysis of data that when time has passed since participants’ experience of loss, their reactions and overall state changes.

4.3.2.1. Not easily triggered

In the below extract, Nyiko explains that she is no longer triggered by her loss.

Extract 27: Amu, 22

“Amu I don’t get triggered by anything. I think I’ve just I don’t know , let it go or healed or maybe I’m just shaved it away somewhere but hey

Int uhm

Amu it really doesn’t bother me anymore

Int uhm

Amu except for the time where, the only time that it bothered me, was when I was like seeing graduation things here in UKZN I saw their parents I was ok

Int uhm uhm

Amu I’m not getting my parents like in my graduation”

Amu explained in the above extract that she does not easily get triggered about her loss anymore. There is a sense of uncertainty about why she responds in this way. She communicated that she might have healed, or she might be ignoring her feelings. Amu further explained to the interviewer that it is only during special occasions that she gets triggered or thinks about her deceased parents.

4.3.2.2. Self-esteem

In the next extract, Basani speaks about developing her self-esteem after experiencing loss.

Extract 28: Basani, 21

“Basani Because uhm with everything that iv gonn through the previous year, I think from where I am now, I’m not because I’ve really build my self-esteem”

Basani indicated that she has built her self-esteem after experiencing loss.

4.3.2.3. Future-plans

In the next extracts, participants speak about their future-plans.

Extract 29: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni I want to have a bright future

Int *yeah*
Dzuni *because I'm the one, I'm I'm their, I'm their last hope actually*
Int *uhm uhm*
Dzuni *because my brother is still in primary*
Int *yeah*
Dzuni *and my sister is now working as a teacher*
Int *uhm*
Dzuni *so yeah I'm the one who is in varsity now*
Int *uhm*
Dzuni *towards varsity so I have to study*
Int *uhm*
Dzuni *finish this degree"*

In the above extract, Dzuni explained that she wants to have a bright future. She indicated that she wants to complete her degree because she is the only one from her home that is in university, and they depend on her.

Extract 30:Basani, 21

"Basani *Cause I'd say now I'm very happy. I feel like for the first time I'm getting to, I'm getting to know myself*
Int *uhm*
Basani *Realize myself without limits you know and its ok to be who I am yeah*
Int *uhm*
Basani *To be free and express myself and it's the most freeing thing ever in the world and yeah! I just loving myself, I'm loving my life, I'm loving my relationships, I love school, I love working hard*
Int *uhm*
Basani *Cause I love those words (giggles) so I'm happy. I see the future is bringing something bright and it's exciting to look towards yeah"*

In the above extract, Basani appeared to be very happy and content. She explained that she is learning more about herself and she loved it. She also explained that she loves the new relationships that she has, and she looks forward to her bright future

On the below extract, there is an indication that she has plans to help other people. She mentioned that she has plans to start a support group.

Extract 31: Basani, 21

“Basani And I don’t have like my future plans, I’m thinking of things that I wanna do. I have like something that I wanna do next semester in regards to that woman and building a groups, a support group of that sort”

4.3.2.4. Avoidance

In the next extract, Nyiko explains that she avoided thinking about her loss

Extract 32: Nyiko, 35

*“Nyiko it was shocking I don’t wanna lie, it was shocking, and I try not to think about it
Int uhm
Nyiko a lot of time cause if I do think about it, I get so, so scared”*

In the above extract 32 and in extract 23, Nyiko explained that she was initially shocked when she heard about her loss. She then continued to explain in the above extract that she avoids thinking about her loss because she gets really scared when she thinks about it. Nyiko shows signs of avoidance because she mentioned that she still tries not to think about her loss.

When it comes to the current response to loss and overall students’ state subtheme, Nyiko was the only participant who indicated that she intentionally avoided thinking about her loss because of the way it made her feel.

4.3.3. Mental health challenges

It is evident through data analysis of the previous section (see extract 13-24) that several participants went through different emotions after hearing about their loss. It is only Nyiko who spoke about experiencing mental health challenges. This is elustracted in the below extracts 33-34.

4.3.3.1. Anxiety and Panic attack

Nyiko explains in the below extract that she ended up seeking psychological help because she was sometimes having panic attacks and anxiety attacks.

Extract 33, Nyiko,35

“Nyiko for for for for uhh, I guess that’s why I end up going for psyche cause I was having

Int uhm

Nyiko panic attacks

Int yeah

Nyiko or anxiety attacks at times”

In addition to what Nyiko mentioned in the above extract, in the below extract she goes on and explain that she felt claustrophobic, and she could not breathe. She indicated that she was feeling overwhelmed, and she even thought that her cousin could have felt the same way and that’s why she committed suicide.

4.3.3.2. Claustrophobic

Extract 34: Nyiko,35

“Nyiko I felt as if I was in, I was in a crosophobic space like I couldn’t breathe

Int uhm

Nyiko cause now you would, you will feel overwhelmed cause you like maybe that’s the reason he she she

Int yeah

Nyiko she killed herself”

4.4. Grief experiences during COVID-19

4.4.1. Burial processes

The interviewer asked participants to describe their experience of the funeral/ burial process during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extracts below highlight participants responses.

Extract 35: Basani, 21

Basani During the burial, umm plrr there was some complication with getting her from here in PMB hospital to Midland's memorial

Int uhm

Basani And you know Zulu people with all this cleansing and cleaning

Int uhm

Basani And staff, so umm I'd say I wasn't a big major part of that it was like the grown-ups who were majorly doing that work"

Basani indicated that there were complications with getting her mother's body home. She seemed not to have a lot of information about what was really the problem. She explained that this is because the elders were the ones in charge.

In the next extract, Nyiko speaks about how strange it was to have a funeral during COVID-19 pandemic.

Extract 36: Nyiko, 35

Nyiko it was extremely strange

Int uhm

Nyiko what happened is that when the body comes, coffin

Int uhm

Nyiko it didn't get, usually the coffin will get into the tent or in the house

Int uhm

Nyiko and you need to open the body

Int yeah

Nyiko to see

Int to see”

Nyiko indicate that the way the funeral went was strange to witness. She goes on to talk about how burial services were done before COVID-19. She says that under normal circumstances, the coffin gets in the tent or house and people are given the time to see the deceased, however, things did not happen like that during this funeral.

Nyiko iterate in the below extract how the funeral went.

Extract 37: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko the body, didn’t have all of that, what happened is that immediately when the uhh hearse came, it came exactly, it went exactly to

Int to the graveyard

Nyiko to the graveyard where we did the the whole uhh ceremony church

Int uhm

Nyiko of of the graveyard and come back home”

Nyiko started in the above extract by stating that what she said in extract 36, did not happen to her cousin’s body. She explained that when the body came, it immediately went to graveyard where the church ceremony also happened. Nyiko indicated that it was only after the graveyard ceremony that everyone went to the deceased home. What Nyiko in extract 36 and extract 37 is lamenting is that the body was buried without being seen by people.

Nyiko continues in the below extract to talk about her experience of the burial process. She focused attention now on food and the duration of the entire burial process

Extract 38: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko and then we didn’t have even uhh formal food, like your salads and what not

Int yes yes

Nyiko we had sandwiches and drinks

Int yeah

Nyiko and that was it

Int so you just take that and go

Nyiko maybe by 12 it was done and dusted”

Nyiko explained that they did not have a proper meal during the funeral. They were provided with sandwiches and drinks only. She goes on to say that the funeral did not take long, by 12pm they were done with everything.

The following subtheme is about how the participants were grieving while studying.

4.4.2. Balancing Grieving, studying and family responsibilities

In the below extract, Dzuni was asked a question about her belief system and how it affected the way she was grieving but she does not seem to answer the questions but instead she spoke about the difficulty she had with balancing her studies and family responsibilities.

Extract 39: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni Yoh! It was very hard; all I can say is that

Int uhm

Dzuni because I had to study at the end of the day, and I had to take care of family”

Dzuni explained that it was hard for her because at the end of the day she had to study and take care of her family at the same time.

When the interviewer asked Dzuni to describe the emotions that she went through after experiencing loss, Dzuni continues in the below extract to mention that it was hard. She also spoke about how drained she was during that period. It appeared like her grief and the responsibilities that she was faced with were overwhelming for her. She mentioned that she failed some of her second-year modules and had to repeat them.

Extract 40: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni I was so drained

Int uhm

Dzuni like it was very hard, even failed my modules

Int uhm

Dzuni failed, repeat uhm so I repeated second year modules”

The interviewer probed to find out how Dzuni felt after failing some modules. In the next extract, Dzuni responded and indicated to the interviewer that she wanted to drop out of the university because at the time she felt like it was not working for her.

Extract 41: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni ahh ahh I want, I’m dropping out

Int yeah

Dzuni becau

Int you were giving up

Dzuni yes because ahh I feel like it’s not working for me”

In the below extract, Basani shares her experience of grieving while studying

Extract 42: Basani, 21

“Basani Everything! Uhm so what happened? Ok (ngabuya eRes) I came here to Res and I wasn’t doing my work for two months like I wasn’t participating in school

Int uhm

Basani In school work for two months straight and things were very bad, I’d be like crying all the time”

When Basani was talking about her experience in the above extract, she indicated that she came back to campus residency, but she was not participating in her schoolwork for two months. She appeared to be overwhelmed with grief and struggling to concentrate as she indicated that she was crying all the time.

4.4.3. Grief and spirituality

In the below extract Amu responds to the interviewer’s question about how she reacted when she finds out that she lost her parents. Amu’s response became to speak about how she questioned God.

Extract 43: Amu, 22

“Amu you know, I felt like God didn’t love me because sometimes, the one think you can, like for me

Int uhm

Amu for me the one thing that I looked at , how can God? Tt Some people have their mothers until they are like 80”

Amu explained in the above extract that she questioned God's love for her. She goes on to say that one thing that made her question God more was that she looked at how other people's mothers live until they are very old.

In the next extract, Basani speaks about how her faith was affected when the interviewer asked her about her belief system and how she coped with her loss.

Extract 44: Basani, 21

“Basani So yeah! I did question and (breaths heavily) I was really hoping that she will come through out of it cause I was like asking for everybody, all my friends, church people and staff just like please pray for her

...

Basani yeah! And it didn't! Happen! So, it affected my faith as a person cause

Int uhm

Basani It was reallyyy like hard, when you believe in something, and it doesn't happen and”

Basani laments in the above extract that she had so much faith that her mother would get better because she asked everyone to pray for her. Basani then goes on to say that when her mother did not get well, it affected her faith because she believed in something, but it did not come true.

Extract 45: Basani, 21

“Basani And you know Zulu people with all this cleansing and cleaning

Int uhm

Basani And staff, so uhm I'd say I wasn't a big major part of that it was like the grown-ups who were majorly doing that work”

In the above extract, Basani indicated that she was not involved in the traditional ceremonies because only the elders were handling everything.

4.5. Students' academic life during COVID-19 pandemic.

When the interviewer asked participants how COVID-19 has affected them and their studies, there seemed to be contradictory feelings. Participants indicated that there are both challenges and benefits to online and contact lessons. This theme will then be divided into three subthemes: Online learning challenges, contact learning challenges and the preferred learning method.

4.5.1. Online learning challenges

4.5.1.1. Lack of motivation

On the below extracts , Basani and Mixo spoke about how their motivation for studying or learning was impacted by online learning

Extract 46: Basani, 21

“Basani I feel like you didn't study as hard as you possibly could have or should have because

Int uhm

Basani because everything was like freely accessible”

Basani indicated that she felt like it was not necessary to work hard on her studies because information was made freely accessible. She further mentioned that online learning made her not to be as hard working as she could have.

On the below extract, when the interviewer probed to find out why Mixo says online learning is not good, she responded by saying:

Extract 47: Mixo, 23

“Mixo sometimes we just, you just lazy

Int uhm

Mixo it makes you lazy”

Mixo explained in the above extract that online learning made her lazy.

4.5.1.2. Limited knowledge about computers and English

In the below extract, Basani speaks about being computer illiterate and how other students struggled academically.

Extract 48: Basani, 21

“Basani uhhm but having to start first year, cause (ka qala) started COVID-19 and we didn’t know anything about how to use a laptop or anything else (both laughs) and you just like thrown into everything. yeahh ok I did but I know for like so many other students

Int uhhh

Basani Who didn’t, and it was really hard for them to get around and I know a few who didn’t pass too well

Int yeah

Basani Because they didn’t understand and even (mhlawumbe lenkinga ukuthi isingisi abasiqondi kahle) maybe it’s because of the problem that they don’t understand English too well, we need (ama) the contact classes, so that did affect them in that way”

Basani indicate that she started her first year when COVID-19 had just started, and this affected various students. She indicated that this is because some students didn’t know how to use laptops. Basani also indicated that some students have limited understanding of the English language, and this affected them academically as some even failed.

In the next extract, Amu speaks about how online learning was challenging.

Extract 49: Amu, 22

“Amu Was very challenging because most of us don’t know anything we first years, we don’t know anything about laptops, computers anything so , we don’t know anything , we don’t have ne (the) internet coverage, we don’t even know anything about those big things so, having to just start! registration it was very hard

Int uhm

Amu Yeah gaining access, gaining kno knowledge or anything like that was very hard”

Amu communicated that as first year students they didn't know anything about laptops, and they also did not have internet coverage. Amu further indicated that this made it hard to do registrations.

4.5.1.3. Online registration

In the below extract, Basani communicates that she had trouble with doing her registration online.

Extract 50: Basani, 21

“Basani Ohh I think its cause I was having issues with my registration and that’s why I went to him and it’s like ohh he’s a psychologist”

In the above extract, Basani indicated that she had trouble with her registration, and she had to go to one of her lecturers for assistance.

4.5.1.4. Studying online

Dzuni explains in the below extract that learning online was hard for her.

Extract 51: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni ok firstly online learning was very hard for me

Int uhm

Dzuni so cause I was at all, when I was at home

Int uhm

Dzuni it was very hard to study because I had to take care of my younger brother”

Dzuni communicated that online learning was challenging for her because she had to study and attend to her younger brother as well.

4.5.1.5. Online practical

Mixo explains in the next extract that doing her practical online was hard.

Extract 52: Mixo, 23

“Mixo but the problem that I have ehh it’s it’s the practical part

Int uhmm

Mixo where you doing it online

Int uhmm

Mixo so it, it was difficult for us

Int uhm

Mixo to do the practical online”

In the above extract, Mixo indicated that it was challenging for her to do the practical online.

4.5.1.6. Navigating zoom

In the below extract, Basani explains how difficult it was to operate Zoom application at first.

Extract 53: Basani, 21

“Basani Uhm (clicks tongue) but (ngathi ama) I can say zoom were first a bit tricky because I couldn’t understand them but then as time went by it was pretty easy because the teachers were really considerate and

Int Uhm

Basani And (ama slides nama) the slides and notes everything was always ever there”

In the above extract, Basani indicated that navigating zoom was difficult for her. She explained that it became easier to navigate zoom because she received assistance from lecturers. She continued to explain that lecturers were considerate, and they ensured that learning materials were always available.

In the below extract, she indicates the reason why many students passed and also goes on to talk about how anxious she was.

Extract 54: Basani, 21

“Basani Yes! It’s like, I feel like that’s why the grades were so up for every student now cause yeah but it did help me that spe because when I first came to the university I was so stressed out and id spend until like (isikhathi) time until like 4 o’clock in the morning

Int uhm

Basani Cause I was so anxious about failing and staff”

In the above extract, Basani indicated that because study materials were easily accessible (see extract 46), several students performed well. Basani also indicated that online learning has helped her a lot and she used to spend a lot of time studying because she was anxious about failing.

4.5.2. Contact learning challenges

4.5.2.1. Long learning hours

The interviewer asked Mixo to describe her experience of transitioning back to contact learning. In the next extract, Mixo communicates that contact learning is going to be challenging because they must be on campus almost the whole day and they don’t have time to do other things.

Extract 55: Mixo, 23

“Mixo so this thing of going on campus from 07:00 to 17:00

Int uhm

Mixo having a practical from 14:00 to 17:00 o’clock

Int uhm

*Mixo and ehh ehh you come hom you com, you you come back tired and hungry.
There’s no time to to to cook*

Int uhm

Mixo you have to to to do your tutorials and staff

Int uhm

Mixo yeah it's going to be difficult, were not used to that now"

In the next extract, Basani explains how long contact classes used to be.

Extract 56: Basani, 21

"Basani do things at my own time and it wasn't like, cause I remember we used to I like go to class at like seven four 07:45 and staff

Int uhm

Basani and from this class and this class and id finish at like five so I never feel relaxed"

In the above extract, Basani explained that she used to attend contact classes from morning till late in the afternoon and she used to always be tired.

4.5.3. Contact learning as preferred learning methods

There is an indication from data that some participants prefer contact learning more. The below extracts provide details:

Extract 57: Mixo, 23

"Mixo Yeah, like we need to, we need, they need to to, we need to have lectures, contact lectures

Int uhm

Mixo lectures, not online lear, lectures

...

Mixo it's going to make things easier

Int uhm

Mixo because now you going to, we going to able to ask questions face to face

Int uhm

Mixo and then if you don't understand the lecture will explain to you until you understand"

Mixo communicated that contact learning should be brought back. She further mentioned that contact learning will simplify students' lives because they will be able to have consult with lecturers.

In the below extract, Basani indicates that contact lessons are needed to eliminate poor academic performance.

Extract 58: Basani, 21

“Basani Because they didn't understand and even (mhlawumbe inkinga ukuthi isingisi abasiqondi kahle) maybe it's because of the problem that they don't understand English too well we need (ama) the contact classes, so that did affect them in that way”

In addition to what Basani explained in extract 48, that various students did not perform well because they did not understand the English language too well, she also indicated in the above extract that contact lessons are needed if students are to pass well.

4.6. Coping strategies

4.6.1. Detach from reality

In the extract below, Basani explains how she detached from her reality.

Extract 59: Basani, 21

“Basani I think for me that's how I've gotten through some things (giggles) just like to detach from the whole experience”

In the above extract, Basani indicated that detaching from reality helped her to cope.

4.6.2. Observing other people

Basani explains in the below extract that another thing that helped her to cope was to see other people get through what she was currently going through. Basani indicated that she was hopeful that things will get better.

Extract 60: Basani, 21

“Basani I don’t know! just seeing someone who is going through what you are going through and has even gone the mile, so they know the way.

Int yeah

Basani it gives you hope (ukuthi) that it gets better”

4.6.3. Spiritual quotes

Nyiko talks about reading spiritual quotes.

Extract 61: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko umm hee Yoh! I did something that, I read a lot of uhh quotes, spiritual quotes”

Nyiko explained in the above extract that what helped her cope was to read spiritual quotes.

4.6.4. Praying

In the next extract, Nyiko explains that during the time that she was still grieving, she tried praying to cope with her loss.

Extract 62: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko like I would try to pray but something would just make me to stuck up

Int uhm

Nyiko in prayer

Int uhm

Nyiko so I couldn’t pray at that particular”

Nyiko explained that she tried to pray but she would get stuck. Nyiko explains that she could not pray in a way that suggests that there was something preventing her to pray.

In the below extract, Dzuni explains that she used to drink alcohol to help cope with her loss.

4.6.5. Drinking alcohol

Extract 63: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni I don’t wanna lie, I was drinking a lot

Int yeah

Dzuni for pain nje (just)

Int to go away?

Dzuni yes, to go away so I was drinking a lot and my sister was also worried about me”

In the above extract, Dzuni indicated that she was drinking alcohol a lot with the hope that it will help release her pain. She further indicated that her sister was even worried because of the way she was drinking.

4.6.6. Confiding in friends and relatives

In the below extract, Dzuni talks about the people that she confided in.

Extract 64: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni uhh talking to my friends

Int uhm

Dzuni and also my cousin”

Dzuni communicated that she was talking with her friends and cousin about her loss.

In the below extract, Nyiko expressed why she did not confide in anyone.

Extract 65, Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko I don’t want people to feel sorry for me

Int uhm

Nyiko uhh you know! So, what I usually do I distance myself”

Nyiko communicated that she did not confide in anyone because she did not want people to pity her. Instead, she distanced herself from people.

4.6.7. Counselling

There are some participants that communicated that they sought professional counselling to help them deal with their loss.

In the below extract, Dzuni speaks about her experience of going for counselling.

Extract 66: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni uhh its hard, still now uhm I used to go to counselling, school counselling

Int uhm

Dzuni Muzi, there’s a guy Muzi

Int yeah

Dzuni Zwane

Int uhm

Dzuni he’s helping me

...

Dzuni uhm university counselling is better than my friends”

Dzuni explained that she made use of the counselling services on campus and her counsellor was able to help her to deal with her loss. She further indicated that she opted to go for counselling because talking to her friends was not helpful.

In the next extract, Nyiko explains that she went for counselling.

Extract 67: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko yeah and then and also, I was also going for therapy

Int yeah

Nyiko uhm

Int ok, so what can you say about that uhh process, was it working for you at that time?

Nyiko I felt it was working”

Nyiko explained that she went for counselling, and she believed that it helped her.

In extract 84, Basani indicated that she found a psychologist. In the next extract, Basani speaks about how her psychologist assisted her.

Extract 68: Basani, 21

“Basani She’s very supporting, she’s like, always encouraging me, telling me like this happened, it’s for my story and like it’s going to help me propel, it’s going to propel me towards a great future”

Basani indicated that her psychologist was very supportive and helped her to make sense of her loss

4.6.8. Burning Cinnamon sticks

In the below extract, Nyiko talks about burning cinnamon sticks.

Extract 69: Nyiko,35

*“Nyiko but I tried this this uhh cimon, cinnamon sticks, I would burn them
Int uhm
Nyiko and I would try to inhale, so that”*

In the above extract, Nyiko indicated that she burnt cinnamon sticks and inhale it.

4.6.9. Having plans

In the next extract, Amu speaks about having plans as a coping strategy.

Extract 70: Amu, 22

“Amu just cope , yeah I think that was just one thing and then I have family and having things to look for forward to, like studying”

Amu indicated that having plans like studying helped her cope with her loss.

4.7. Support system

When the participants were asked about the kind of support that they received while they were grieving, some participants indicated that they received support from family, friends, and the university. Some participants said that they did not. Some said that the support that they received was minimal.

4.7.1. Support from family

In the below extract, Dzuni spoke about the support that she received from her sister.

Extract 71: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni my sister, ohh when I told my sister that I’m giving up

Int uhh

Dzuni she was the one who was encouraging me to not giving up on school”

Dzuni indicated that her sister encouraged her not to give up on school.

In the next extract, Mixo shares how her family supported her.

Extract 72: Mixo, 23

“Mixo yeah, my family and during 2020 you know we were studying at home, so they give me time to, to study, to do my my schoolwork”

Mixo explained that her family gave her time to attend to her schoolwork when she was learning online.

In the next extract, Amu mentions that she only received physical support from her family.

Extract 73: Amu, 22

“Amu Uhmm physical support uhm I don’t if yeah physical support was there, uhm family was there for me. Uhm my I’m I cannot say that I really, my family was there and in term like getting me to school

Int uhm

Amu Buy me things and like feeling like that home , a father financially, physically but emotionally no, never not even one

...

Amu then they really emotionally unavailable”

Amu emphasized how much her family support her physically. It is possible that Amu was longing for emotional support from her family. She also mentioned that not even one person provided that emotional support for her. She then went on to indicate that they are all emotionally unavailable.

In the below extract, Basani communicates a lack of emotional support from her grandmother

Extract 74, Basani, 21

“Basani Just get on with it. Uhm so I’d say for me I made myself feel numb and I felt like cause my granny is like Basani (khala njengamanje) cry now when we first heard, and I did cry and it’s like (ma sekufika abantu) when people arrive don’t cry. You must be strong and be part of the people and staff like that”

In the above extract and in extract 22, Basani communicated that her grandmother was not supportive emotionally. She indicated that her grandmother was against the idea of seeing Basani cry in front of people. Basani indicated that her grandmother told her that she can only cry when people are not around, and people are around she should be strong and attend to people.

4.7.2. Support from friends/ peers

In the below extract, Basani indicates that she received support from some friends and not from other friends.

Extract 75: Basani, 21

“Basani yeah! They would be like, cause there were like guys also and girls (abanye baya siza ek’phekeni abanye cleaning, abanye laphayan ethuneni) others were

helping with cooking and others with cleaning, others were there at the grave with the rocks just seeing hey I'm not alone like

Int uhm, you have a support system

Basani I have a support system, like and that was like the first time just like a proper one. So, it helped. It really did help, and it didn't like cause like I said with the whole thing (ukuthi) that you thought your friends are the ones and like even my high school friend, like my best friend from high school like she she wasn't there"

Basani explained that she received physical support from both male and female friends. She even said that having all those friends come to support her, made her realize that she was not alone, and it helped her a lot. There is a sense of disappointment expressed by Basani. She mentioned that there are some friends that she expected to come and support her, but they did not. She seemed very surprised that her high school friend was also not there for her.

On the next extract, Basani further explains that she was mostly disappointed at her church friends. It is possible that Basani was disappointed with these church friends because they were spiritual friends, who she was expecting to support her spiritually.

Extract 76: Basani, 21

"Basani Yeah when it was my turn to have (isupport) the support from my friends and not to receive it and the worst part for me was that the church friends that I thought like cause I even told them on the group like please pray for my mom and it's like three people"

The interviewer asked Nyiko about the kind of support that she received from her friends, and she communicates in the below extract that she did not receive support from friends. Nyiko further explains that she was isolating herself because she did not want anyone to pity her.

Extract 77: Nyiko, 35

"Nyiko I don't want people to feel sorry for me

Int uhm

Nyiko uhh you know! So, what I usually do I distance myself”

Dzuni talks about her friends reaction and lack of support

Extract 78:Dzuni 23

“Dzuni uhh because uhh sometimes my friends are a bit judging me because of like drinking habits”

In the above extract, Nyiko indicated that her friends were judging her because she was drinking a lot.

4.7.3. Support from the university

In the next extract, Mixo mentions that the lecturers supported them by uploading the study materials online.

Extract 79: Mixo, 23

“Mixo yes, the books and they upload it online”

In extract 66, Dzuni communicated that she made use of school counselling and how it helped her. In the next extract, Dzuni mentions that she was informed at the university that there are available counselling services that are available.

Extract 80: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni ok uhm they told me about counselling”

The interviewer asked Dzuni about her experience of having online counselling support. Dzuni responded in the below extract and indicated that the experience was not pleasant because she prefers to talk to people face to face.

Extract 81: Dzuni , 23

“Int and how wa how was that experience of having like online counselling?”

Dzuni ehh it was not, it was not good

Int uhm

Dzuni cause I liked I like face to face

Int yeah

Dzuni I like to talk to someone face to face”

In the below extract, Dzuni further explained to the interviewer that she was also given an opportunity to repeat the modules that she had failed.

Extract 82: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni and they eh after I failing two modules, they gave me a the second chance to register for them

Int uhm uhm

Dzuni and to do it again”

In the below extract, Basani talks about seeking assistance from her lecturer.

Extract 83: Basani, 21

“Basani Like I cannot do this. So, I reached out to uhm uMr Mathebula like the life skills teacher, lecture and I was like I need this I can't just

Int uhm

Basani Was it before or prior? I think it wass prior the test or just like before the due day of the test time whatever. Not too sure”

In extract 42, Basani mentioned that she could not focus on her studies. In this extract, she then explained that she sought assistance from one of her lecturers before the due date of her test because she could not cope.

On the below extract Basani indicates that after reaching out to her lecturer she realized that she needs help. Even though Mr. Mathebula was both a lecturer and a psychologist, Basani seemed to be uncomfortable with seeking psychological help from him. She then indicates that she found a female psychologist from another campus. Basani further explains that another reason she was looking for a psychologist was to get a medical referral to justify why she could not write her test.

Extract 84: Basani, 21

“Basani Uhm so I reached out to him, and I was like ok he's a psychologist and staff, I need help. I couldn't tell him cause I wanted someone who is a female psychologist and until I found one but then she is from Durban

Int *yeah*

Basani *Yeah and so but I think it was a way, cause I couldn't write my test so I needed somebody to validate this to why I couldn't write my test*

...

Basani *uhm So yeah, I can say that in regards to school I did reach out finally uhm yeah"*

In the following extract, Basani talks about her preference between online and contact counselling sessions.

Extract 85: Basani, 21

"Basani *It's a, yeah I had a zoom one*

Int *uhm, and how was that?*

Basani *It's good but I feel like at the start I'd appreciated like a contact one*

Int *yeah*

Basani *Yeah I think that's much more better"*

In the above extract, Basani indicated that her counselling sessions were via Zoom, but she would have preferred contact sessions because she thinks that would have been more helpful.

In the next extract, Nyiko speaks about why she sought private counselling instead of making use of the university provided counselling services.

Extract 86: Nyiko, 35

"Nyiko *whereas it's not true but you don't wanna be categorized as someone who sees a psych*

Int *uhm uhm*

Nyiko *so you prefer, I preferred to do it privately*

Int *yeah yeah*

Nyiko *so I then I thought if I go to the university one*

Int *uhm*

Nyiko *it would look like I have issues that I ah ah"*

Nyiko indicated that she sought private counselling services because she did not want to be stigmatised as someone who sees a psychologist on campus.

Nyiko mentions in the below extract that she does not think that the university counselling services are accessible

Extract 87: Nyiko, 35

“Nyiko as much as they are there, but I don’t think they are accessible”

In the next extract, Amu speaks about her experience with accessing university provided counselling services.

Extract 88: Amu, 22

“Amu this actually the first thing or the first things I’ve heard about. Yeah and most people are not aware if there’s anything () any counseling. Yeah like I’m not saying everybody”

Amu explained in the above extract that she has never heard about university counselling services. Amu further explained that it is her first-time hearing about something like this study.

4.8. Suggestions for intervention

When the interviewer asked the participants if they had any suggestions for intervention or improvement of the experiences of bereaved students on campus, the participants provided suggestions for intervention to both the university and the bereaved students. The below extracts provide more detail.

4.8.1. Suggestion to the university

The next extracts highlight the suggestions that were provided by the students to the university.

4.8.1.1. Educational psychologist's services

Extract 89: Nyiko, 35

"Nyiko so the university must make it their own, that's why I always say that there a by now each university should have educational psychologist whereby

Int uhm

Nyiko they reach out

Int uhm

Nyiko to each and every kid so that they can understand their background

Int uhm

Nyiko their struggles"

Nyiko suggested that the university should have educational psychologists that reach to students to find out about the challenges that they have.

4.8.1.2. More awareness about counselling services

In the below extract, Basani suggests that the university should prioritize awareness of counselling services to students

Extract 90: Basani, 21

"Basani They don't really listen and if it's not something that you don't prioritize you know. I feel like the university should prioritize their services to students as to uhm like remind them all the time as much as they can. At any chance that they can to be like

Int uhm

Basani It's here, it's for you because you never know when someone can just need that call and they not gonna take it the first time, second time, seventh time or anything but there will be that day like (yazi) you know I'm all alone. My friends are not here, his is not here, there and that and I just need somebody to give me good advice, I want them to help me out with this one thing"

In the above extract, Basani mentioned that the university should ensure that they provide awareness about their counselling services. She goes on to say doing so, will

make the services more helpful because some students don't access the services the first time they hear about them. It appears that Basani is more concerned about the accessibility or visibility of the counselling services on campus.

In the next extract, Amu mentions that students trust lecturers and therefore, the university can use lecturers as a tool to provide awareness about counselling services.

Extract 91: Amu, 22

"Amu uhm I think , I think student really tru.. students really trust lectures I think

Int uhm

Amu maybe maybe have lectures mention it because then it doesn't take like an hour

Int uhm oh yeah

Amu have a lecture mention it for that five minute (nyana) a bit

Int uhm

Amu it's and say like those who think like the the the I have put it on my pad ,module pamphlet"

In the above extract, Amu indicated that students trust lecturers, Therefore, lecturers should take few minutes to make students aware that there is information about counselling services on the module outline.

In the below extract, Amu explains the reason why she says lecturers should provide awareness about the counselling services provided by the university

Extract 92: Amu, 22

"Amu yeah because I've seen like we've seen that like like maybe after a mo a module and everything and then they gonna put like counselling things beneath below but then it's like you you really skeptical about are they really gonna , are they really gonna help? Is this thing real? I didn't even

Int uhm

Amu the only () coming to UKZN are they gonna help me, if I come forward are they really gonna help me?

Int uhm uhm

Amu you you really doubt those things"

Amu explained that numerous students are skeptical about counselling services provided by the university because they are not sure if they will be assisted or if the services even exist.

In the next extract, Basani suggests that the university should make the contact details of counselling services available and easily noticeable like in a board. She further indicates that these contact details should be functional.

Extract 93: Basani, 21

“Basani So I think for me it should be made like available (engathi mhlawumbe) I think maybe if you could put like (iBoard)a board somewhere to like

Int uhm

Basani With the numbers and the contact staff so that its publicly like seen and staff

Int yeah

Basani And the right email and write the right numbers (giggles)”

4.8.1.3. Basic Communication skills class

In the next extract, Basani also suggested that the university provides students with basic communication skills.

Extract 94: Basani, 21

“Basani A class where you can teach people like basic things , like it’s ok to commume to , like how to communicate, how to ask for staff that is ,those simple things that I feel like for me I had to grind myself and learn that because I read a lot an I’m obsessed again with self-improvement so it’s a must for me to improve my communication and I feel like a lot of people will not do that”

Basani suggested that the university educate students how to communicate with people and how to communicate their needs. She mentioned that she was able to seek such education for herself and she thinks numerous students would benefit from such basic communication skills classes.

4.8.1.4. Explain in detail during lessons

In the next extract, Mixo suggests that the university lecturers should explain thoroughly when they are teaching.

Extract 95: Mixo, 23

“Mixo I think the the lectures have to have to explain like their some lectures on online that

Int uhm

Mixo do not explain properly that just read the slides

Int uhm

Mixo and then it's it's done

Int uhm

Mixo yeah, I think face to face they need to explain like everything”

Mixo indicated that from her experience with online learning, there was no thorough explanation during lectures. She then suggested that when contact classes start, the lecturers should consider providing thorough explanation when teaching. This could assist many of those students that Basani was talking about in extract 48, who have limited knowledge of the English language.

4.8.1.5. Provide support groups

Extract 96: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni counselling and ahh ss groups

Int uhm

Dzuni suppo supporting groups”

Dzuni suggested that the university should provide students with counselling services. She also added and indicated that there should so be support groups

In the next extract, Basani explains that the university should consider having support groups and goes on to indicate how important they are.

Extract 97: Basani, 21

Basani It's like a support group. I think that would be so cool and to see and for (mina) myself it's so nice when I can see other people be vulnerable, feel safe like ohh ok

Int uhm

Basani Then it's not a bad thing to express myself and my feelings

Int yeah

Basani cause we come from ok! For like us black children per say, we come from home where you as a child you don't have a voice

Int uhm

Basani Listen to the grown-ups, do what they say, don't question them whatsoever and so having to go to a place where you can express yourself"

Basani indicated that if the university can provide support groups, students will have a platform where they are able to express themselves. She continued to explain that this would be beneficial for many black students because they come from homes where they are not allowed to express themselves.

4.8.2. Suggestions to the bereaved students

The next extract highlight the suggestions that were provided by the study participants to other bereaved students.

4.8.2.1. Good friends or close people

Extract 98: Dzuni, 23

"Dzuni is to have good friends and"

Dzuni indicated in the above extract that bereaved students need to have good friends.

In the next extract, Dzuni also indicates that it is important for students to have people that will encourage them to study hard.

Extract 99: Dzuni, 23

“Dzuni yes and people who are close to you

Int uhm

Dzuni that will encourage you to study hard”

4.8.2.2. Someone who has experienced loss

In the below extract, Amu explains that bereaved students can talk to their friends, but it is more helpful to speak to someone who has already experienced loss.

Extract 100: Amu, 22

“Amu I think having someone to to genuinely talk to and someone to really understand and when it comes to friends, it gets like yeah someone you used to sometimes you mean, you understand me?

Int uhm

Amu yeah. I don't wanna say people who have have parents don't get it because I really think they do

Int uhm

Amu in a way because they do understand

Int uhm

Amu because they not gonna feel exactly as you feel but they do understand when you tell them, but I think there's a level of understanding and a level of talking I I don't know but there's just a certain level to a certain person

Int uhm

Amu that sometimes you need, someone whose actually gonna get it, someone whose gonna

Int uhm

Amu just let you, let let it, make you talk it out”

Amu indicated that talking with someone who has already experienced loss of parents makes it easier for the bereaved student to be vulnerable and there is a different level of understanding between the two bereaved individuals than when talking to someone who has not yet experienced loss.

4.9. Summary of findings

The findings represent bereaved students' experiences of loss. There were both similarities and differences in the experiences of the bereaved students. These are shown by the themes that prevailed during data analysis. The themes are as follows; Types of losses, Response to loss and mental health challenges, grief experiences during COVID-19, students' academic life during COVID-19, coping strategies, support system and suggestions for intervention. In support of the themes, extracts were used.

The findings pointed out that most participants experienced more than one type of loss. The most common type of loss that participants experienced was a loss of family members. Most of these family members were also care takers or breadwinners. Evidently in the data, some participants experienced indirect loss where their family members lost jobs and as a result, the participants lost food security and dependency. One participant indicated that she had to take on the responsibility of a breadwinner and use her student funding to support her family.

The findings showed that after participants experienced loss, their immediate responses were more emotional than later responses. Some participants were confused and even questioned God. There are some participants who communicated that they were hopeless to a point that they felt like they had nothing to live for anymore. Participants who indicated feelings of hopelessness were those who lost close family members. Later responses to loss were mostly positive. Participants reported that they have plans for the future. The researcher ascertained that these participants had time to process their loss and to work through their grief. Although the findings indicate that some participants were working through their loss and grief, one participant seemed to be avoidant of this process by avoiding thinking about her loss. An interesting result in the findings is that this one participant who showed signs of avoidance, is also the only participant who reported experiencing mental health challenges.

There was an indication in the data that various study participant's studies and family responsibilities were affected by their loss and grief. Some participants were overwhelmed with school and family responsibilities. Some participants indicated that it

was hard for them to do their schoolwork to a point that one participant even mentioned that she failed some modules. Some participants indicated that their experience with having a funeral during COVID-19 was strange and there were complications during the burial. One participant mentioned that they could not even see the deceased because viewing of the deceased was not allowed.

The transition from contact learning to online learning brought numerous challenges for the bereaved students. The analysis indicates that several students were lacking motivation, had little knowledge about computers and how to operate them. The only challenge that some students had with contact learning was the lengthy lessons. It was, therefore, evident in data that some students preferred contact learning as opposed to online learning.

The data indicates that students had different coping strategies like drinking alcohol, detaching from reality, spiritual quotes, praying, observing, and confiding in others, burning cinnamon sticks, and having something to look forward to. The only coping strategy that more than half of the participants used was seeking professional counselling. All these participants indicated that they benefited a lot from their counselling sessions.

All the study participants spoke highly of the importance of having a support system after experiencing loss. Four participants indicated that they received support from friends and family members. Some participants were disappointed at their friends for failing to provide the support that they needed. One participant indicated that she felt judged by her friends when they heard that she was drinking a lot. Another participant indicated that some of the friends that she thought would be there for her, were not there. A significant finding was that one participant did not seek assistance of either friends or family members because she thought they would pity her. The findings revealed that the support from family was mostly academically, financial, and physical and less about the emotional support. Some participants indicated that they received academic support from the university, and some received emotional support in the form of counselling. The findings also indicate that the counselling services provided by the university were not easily accessible to the participants and some participants prefer contact sessions instead of online sessions.

All the study participants provided few suggestions for intervention. Some participants indicated that they did not trust the university counselling services and others indicated they did not have enough information about where to access the university counselling services. Therefore, several participants suggested that the university should provide more awareness about their counselling services and involve lecturers to assist with this awareness. The participants also suggested that the bereaved students should try to have good friends who will support them when they need support.

The next chapter is about discussing the findings. The researcher will discuss the findings in more detail and in relation to the literature and the two theoretical frameworks that were adopted in the discussion of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The aim of this current study was to highlight the bereaved UKZN students' experiences of loss and grief during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement programme(s) within the UKZN campus(es). The research sample comprised of UKZN PMB campus students who experienced loss.

Mental health challenges, social isolation, loneliness, burnout syndrome, academic challenges are some of the adverse effects that are faced by students who are bereaved during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kunene & Makondo, 2020; Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This current study findings indicate that bereaved students experience various challenges that affects their personal, student or academic life. This is evident in the seven themes that were identified during data analysis. These themes are Types of Losses, Response to loss and mental health challenges, Grief experiences during COVID-19, Students' academic life during COVID-19, Coping strategies, Support system and suggestions for intervention. Keeping in mind the study objectives and theoretical frameworks, the above-mentioned themes will be discussed in detail in this chapter. In addition to this, the themes will be discussed in relation to existing literature.

5.1. Types of losses

Research cited examples of non-death losses that are experienced by university students as loss of identity, control, independence, social life, rituals, jobs, financial stability, educational delivery, loss of connections to others and even failure to achieve set goals (Aristovnik et al., 2020; Sirrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021; Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). This current study found similar findings. Two students experienced non-death losses in the form of losing friends and social life. This was in association to COVID-19 and the restrictions on social interactions that prevented the students from interacting with people. This brings forward the implication that COVID-19 pressured these students into independency and to live isolated lives. One participant felt that she was robbed of the opportunity to experience university life as a first-year student. This then suggests that the student transitioned into university and had to face all the challenges of being a university student without the support of her peers. Further to this, it is possible that her identity of being a university student might not have been fully established because she

did not get to partake in all university activities or interact with other students and lecturers. Perhaps, this is the reason why this student and many other students are developmentally in their intimacy vs isolation stage but still struggle with identity formation and fusing their identities to that of others.

The students also reported that their family members lost jobs, and this triggered several other kinds of losses like loss of lifestyle, food security and dependency. One student expressed that her sister lost her job when COVID-19 started and as a result, she automatically had to take on the role of a breadwinner and use her student funding to support her family. This finding is in support of the finding by Mthlane, Agbenyegah and Dlamini (2021) which indicates that some students lose their dependency because after experiencing loss, they need to take on the role of a breadwinner in their household. It is then possible that the students' university lifestyle was affected and there was then a need to re-establish new identity as now a student who is a breadwinner. Even though university students are at a developmental stage where they value autonomous life, the responsibility to be a breadwinner appeared to be challenging and to be a less preferred way to prove their autonomous nature. Of great concern from all the students that reported family member's loss of jobs, was food insecurity and this affected their mental health as they were always anxious about where their next meal will come from. What is not clear from the interviews is whether these indirect losses affected the students' academic performance.

Most university students experience the death of a close person in their lives (Tedrick Parikh and Servaty-Seib, 2013). This was evident in the data, majority of students experienced loss of family members through death. One student indicated that, in 2020 she lost both her grandparents who were her caregivers since both her parents died when she was young. Another student also indicated that she lost her mother in 2020. Both these losses were sudden. Various researchers point out that the death of a parent is in most cases, the most stressful life event which affects three to four percent of young people (Lutzke et al., 1997, as cited in Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Santos et al., 2021). In this case, this current study findings highlight that a sudden loss of any caregiver during COVID-19, is also stressful because not only are bonds broken but the students are pressured into independency and to re-establish their identities without the presence and the support of attachment figures. Since COVID-19 brought various

restrictions on social gatherings and funerals, there is a possibility that this also made students to be more vulnerable to intense grief experiences because they were grieving their caregivers in isolation.

Another significant finding was that one student indicated that she lost both her parents when she was young but when COVID-19 started, it is only then that she really felt their absence. It appears like she was still directly affected by COVID-19 as her grief experience was intensified during COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps, COVID-19 triggered emotional reactions and it also exacerbated challenges that comes with losing a caregiver regardless of when the loss happened, because there is no timeframe of when someone stops grieving.

The study also found that one student lost family members that were not caregivers or breadwinners. Although this student lost more than one family member, it seems she was more affected by the loss of her cousin than other family members. Perhaps, this student had stronger bond with her cousin than any other family members that she lost. Added to this, it can be assumed that the student was least affected by the deaths of her other family members because they were not caregivers, and that loss did not take away her dependency or threatened her role in the family or the university.

Literature indicates that grief can be experienced after a loss of anything that is significant in a person's life (Wango & Gwiyo, 2021). This was evident in one of the students' interviews, the most important thing for her appeared to be her studies and when learning moved online, she lost academic normalcy as she could no longer have contact practical. This suggests that the student was struggling to adjust to her new role as a student who is learning online.

5.2. Response to loss and mental health challenges

Grief reactions are extremely painful emotions such as a feeling of shock, loss of control, extreme sorrow, and denial (Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). This study found that all students experienced emotional responses when they first heard about their loss. Some emotions were more intense than others. For instance, two students experienced hopelessness and they did not want to continue with their studies or with life in general.

A significant finding is that the students that experienced hopelessness are also the same students that lost their caregivers. This suggests that the bonds with caregivers influenced the intensity of their emotions, their general outlook at life and their commitment to their studies. This study also found that when students hear for the first time that they have lost something or someone, particularly an attachment figure, they are confused and with many questions and some are in shock, confused and numb to the experience. This finding suggests that the students are overwhelmed with grief. Perhaps, their reactions are influenced by their developmental stage as young adults who are transitioning from adolescence, who are learning to deal with challenges and are not fully independent of their caregivers. Added to this, the finding also suggests that the severity of attachment to the deceased also influence the different emotional reactions that the students experience.

Literature suggests that because some cultures do not embrace the expression of feelings and the mental health of young adults, they are then at a higher risk of experiencing cumulative grief (Demmer, 2006; Nachmann, 2020). In this current study, it was found that emotional support was not offered by either relatives or friends. One student even lamented that her grandmother discouraged the expression of feelings in front of people. The grandmother was able to express her emotions in front of people.

Research findings from a study done by Gross, Ozel and Ozkan (as cited in Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021) indicate that grief rituals that take place in various cultures are associated with the expression of feelings, thoughts and emotional support. This current study findings indicate that this notion was not applicable to the students or young adults, only adult family members were allowed to express their emotions in public. Evidently, culture as well as the society that an individual lives in affects or shapes their verbal expression of grief, duration, how they cope and their reactions to grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1998, as cited in Arslan & Buldukoglu, 2021). Consequently, in this current study, some students suppressed their feelings and did not communicate how they felt and how they wanted to express their grief with their relatives or friends. There is an indication that the students were following the cultural norms even when they did not agree with them. It can be assumed that culture played a role in why some students were grieving in isolation. Perhaps, these students had low self-esteem to be able to communicate their needs or express their distress.

The study revealed that one student still avoided thinking about her loss months later. Evidently, this affected her mental health. This is a significant finding because this is the only participant that expressed that she experienced anxiety, panic attacks and claustrophobia. Perhaps, avoidance of expression of distress puts students at a higher risk of experiencing mental health problems and difficulty to adjust after loss. It is also possible that not having lasting identity and close relationships also plays a role in developing mental health problems after experiencing loss.

Beside the above-mentioned student, other students seemed to have started to adjust after their loss. For instance, this study found that some students were starting to make plans about their future. Another significant finding is that the two students that experienced hopelessness at first, they later seemed to have adjusted to their loss as they made plans to finish their degrees and to take care of their families. The study also found that one student that was also able to build her self-esteem and to make plans to help others who experience loss. This brings forward the implication that over time, some bereaved students develop an adequate sense of self. The study by Palmer, Saviet and Tourish (2016) found that for some bereaved young adults, certain milestones made them to acutely feel the absence of the deceased, causing them sadness instead of happiness. In line with this finding, one student indicated that even though she was no longer experiencing intense emotions when she thinks about her loss, certain celebrations like graduations still triggered her because they make her to realize that she won't have her parents at her graduation. This finding suggests that even if a student has worked through their grief, significant occasions can still elicit different emotions in them.

5.3. Grief experiences during COVID-19

The COVID-19 restrictions to funerals do not necessarily indicate that the bereaved person will have poor experiences or outcomes (Burrell & Selman, 2022). On the contrary, the current study discovered that some students experienced challenges before and during funerals which resulted in a poor experience or outcomes in some participants. One student said that her experience of the burial or funeral process was strange because they were not allowed to view the body of the deceased. It seems like this student was longing to see the deceased body one more time during the funeral; however, this did not happen because of COVID-19 restrictions that were in place at the time. This

is a significant finding because this student is the same student that indicated that she experienced mental health problems. This suggests that having a funeral alone was not sufficient to help this bereaved student to process the loss. Perhaps, the opportunity to see the body of the deceased during the burial plays an important role in assisting the bereaved students to process their loss and adequately mourn their loved one.

Balk (2001) and Nachmann (2020) suggest that grief affects students in various ways, with concentration being a major concern because it plays a role in why several students fall behind academically. Similarly, this current study discovered that two students were struggling to concentrate on their studies after experiencing loss, however, their studies were affected to a different extent. One of these students was overwhelmed with grief and she could not focus on her studies after losing her mother; however, she still managed to pass her modules. The other student was overwhelmed because in addition to grieving the loss of her parents and grandparents, she experienced challenges with balancing her studies and family responsibilities. This student ended up failing some of her modules. These effects can be attributed to the type of loss, roles, and responsibilities that the students acquire after experiencing loss. In addition to concentration playing a role in poor academic performance, this study findings suggests that the type of loss, roles and responsibilities that bereaved students acquire after experiencing loss, also plays a role in why some students fall behind academically. Perhaps, in addition to this, students experience role confusion that influences their academic performance as they struggle to navigate their new role and responsibilities as students who are grieving.

A study conducted by Dyregrov and Dyregrov (as cited in Stroebe & Schut 2016), found that for the bereaved individual to gain control over their stressors, it is important for them to inform others about what happened, how it made they feel, the type of support that they received and how others can best support them. This was also true in this current study; however, an additional finding was the indication that the timing of communicating needs or seeking support also plays a critical role. For instance, the participant that passed her modules sought assistance from the university earlier than the participant that failed some of her modules. Therefore, for bereaved students not to fall behind academically, it is important that they communicate their needs early.

The inclusion of all family members in decision making about the funeral, family rituals and visitation of the cemetery is crucial as it helps in the grieving process and reduces the perceived lack of control (Santos et al., 2021). This current study found that one participant was excluded from traditional ceremonies and people who were considered elders were the ones taking part. Perhaps, being excluded played a role in why this participant experienced delays in their grieving process and intense emotions.

5.4. Students' academic life during COVID-19

The study reveals that several students struggled with online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. What made it hard was that the students did not have sufficient knowledge about computers, zoom as a learning platform, and because the students were home and had to balance school and family responsibilities. This suggests that the students were ill prepared to learn online. It seems these students' academic life was more challenging during their first year at the university. For instance, two students indicated that as first year students, it was hard to do registration online. Perhaps, this can be linked to the fact that they had internet coverage problems and could not concentrate because they were overwhelmed with grief. This finding is in line with what Dhawan (as cited in Olawale et al., 2021) found, that some students do not have access or the availability of online resources to be able to keep up with their studies. Perhaps, it can be concluded that students struggled to learn online because they had family responsibilities that were competing with their studies and this made them anxious, consequently, they failed some of their modules.

There is also a lack of motivation that was found to be linked with online learning. Two students indicated that online learning made them lazy, and they did not work hard on their studies because the study materials were easily accessible. Perhaps, this is the reason why some students indicated that they passed their studies regardless of learning online. This finding brings forward the implication that some of the bereaved students struggled to deal with the pressures brought by online learning; however, the freely available study material played a huge role in their academic performance. This finding also suggest that those bereaved students who performed well, were adaptive and they could independently work on their studies while navigating grief.

Literature indicates that some students found online assessments too complicated but failed to seek clarification because they did not have face-to-face interaction with the academic staff (Dhawan, 2020, as cited in Olawale et al., 2021; Mthalande, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). Similarly in this current study, one student indicated that it was hard to do her practical online and it was difficult to inquire with the lecturers online. Perhaps, online learning creates barriers for interaction between the lecturers and the students. A significant finding was that one student indicated that some students experienced poor academic performance because they did not understand the English language too well. Perhaps, students' academic background has a possibility of influencing their academic performance during COVID-19. All the above findings suggests that the bereaved students' transition into the university was more overwhelming because they had to do everything independently and online. Evidently, COVID-19 and online learning isolated students and challenged them to develop a sense of self that is independent and self-motivated to perform well academically.

It was also found that some students had a challenge with the long hours of contact learning, however, it appears like students preferred contact learning as compared to online learning. Two students indicated that they want contact learning to come back. One student communicated that although they are no longer used to contact learning, transition will be hard, but it will make it easier for them to inquire with the lecturers if they do not understand something.

5.5. Coping strategies

The study findings revealed that one student detached from reality to cope with her loss. This suggests that the student was numb from experiencing the emotions that are associated experiencing a loss of a close person. Evidently, the attachment to the deceased played a role in why the student was numb because it acted as a defence mechanism against experiencing intense grief emotions. This student's grief experience was delayed as she only started expressing her feelings after she had returned to university. Literature also supports this finding by indicating that maladaptive coping strategies causes the bereaved person to take longer to progress through their grief (Bergman, Axberg & Hanson, 2017; Mercer & Evans, 2006 as cited in Surrine, Kliner & Gollery, 2021). Added to this, the study found that delayed grief progression resulting

from maladaptive coping strategy, affects students' concentration and academic performance.

Young adults who are entering university or returning to university are at a transitional stage where they value autonomous life or self-discovery and as a result, they are very explorative and it is not uncommon for them to engage in risky behaviours that in most cases delay their grieving process (Balk, 2001; Cupit, 2016; Herberman Mash et al., 2013, as cited in Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). It was found in this study that one student was struggling to cope with her loss, consequently she used alcohol to help her cope and to forget what was happening. It appears that this student was using a maladaptive coping strategy to avoid dealing with the intense emotions associated with losing attachment figures. This coping strategy seems to have led the student more into autonomous life as she alienated herself from friends when they did not support her drinking habits. Perhaps, maladaptive coping strategies are not only disruptive for the bereaved student, but they are also isolating as they lead to unhealthy autonomous life.

The study also found that there are more healthy coping strategies than maladaptive coping strategies that were adopted by the bereaved students. For instance, majority of the students indicated that having plans, inhaling cinnamon sticks, and reading spiritual quotes helped them to cope with their loss. Another coping strategy that worked for some students was to confide in people and seeing how other people have dealt with their loss. The findings indicate that majority of the students were able to cope with their loss because they were proactive and adopted more than one coping strategy. A significant finding when it comes to coping strategies is that three out of four students that experienced loss through death sought counselling and they all indicated that it helped them to process their loss and to adjust. These findings suggest that accessing social support services was a highly preferred and successful coping strategy for students that experienced loss through death.

Sirrine, Kliner and Gollery (2021) found that students who were highly spiritual, had lower levels of loss of control and avoidance. In this study, there is an indication that apart from spiritual quotes, the students did not turn to spirituality to cope with their loss. Only one student indicated that she tried to pray but prayer still did not work because it hard for her to commit to prayer at that time. This is a significant finding because some students

indicated that they go to church, were praying before experiencing loss and church members assisted them during the funeral but none of them spoke about how their spirituality helped them to cope.

5.6. Support system

The study found that four out of five participants received support from their family members. Some participants indicated that they received support in the form of encouragement, and they were also given time to study. There is, however, an indication that some participants did not receive all the support that they felt they needed at the time. The research by Demmer (2006) found that the Zulu culture only encourages crying during the funeral but after that, the individual is expected to be strong and to move on with their lives. This current study found similar findings. One participant from the Zulu culture communicated that her grandmother did not support her emotionally. The grandmother explained to the participant that she is not supposed to cry in front of people. The difference with this current study findings is that the participant was expected to cry in private or away from the visitors as compared to only crying during the funeral as indicated by Demmer (2006). This finding puts forward the implication that, not crying in front of people makes one seem strong and less affected by the loss. It is possible that the student's identity within the family was developed around suppressing emotions and to independently deal with their grief.

Another participant indicated that she received a lot of physical and financial support from her family, but she did not receive emotional support that she felt she needed. The reason that she provided was that her family members are not emotionally available. There is an indication from the student that her family was not capable of supporting her emotionally because they had their own emotional problems. Kunene and Makondo (2020) found that in most African cultures, grieving has traditionally never been a well discussed topic. It can be assumed that the same notion exists within this current research findings because the family members of the two students failed to provide emotional support. This brings forward the implication that these students did not have close connections or intimacy with some of their family members to adequately foster emotional support that they needed. It is possible that this applies to all study participants because the other three participants did not communicate that they received emotional

support from their family members. What is not clear from this study is whether the lack of emotional support from family members affected the students' grieving processes, sense of self and their identity as university students.

Peer groups and social relationships are highly influential in the lives of young adults, and this is evident in the way young adults are more open to talk to peer groups than family members (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). This current study found that the students were hopeful that their friends or peers would be supportive during their grieving period. However, the support was provided to a certain extent and by certain friends. Consequently, the students were not entirely satisfied with the quality of support that they received from their friends. For instance, one student indicated that some of her friends came to her home to support her by helping with physical work that needed to be done in preparation for the funeral. Even though she received this support from some of her friends, there was also a sense of disappointment expressed by her. It appears she had so much expectation that certain friends, particularly church friends, and childhood friends, would support her. Seeing that they did not support her, the student seemed to have experienced a sense of disorientation and her identity was challenged as a result. They were separated from these friends during their grieving process. The identity vs role confusion stage is said to be marked by tension between self and society, with university years providing a testing ground (Widick, Parker & Knefelkamp, 1978). There is an indication that the student struggled with identity formation because she did not have support from her close friends. This suggests that the bereaved student had to re-establish her identity as now a bereaved individual without the presence of her old friends.

The study also indicate that two participants experienced tension between self and society. For instance, one participant expressed that she distanced herself from friends and relatives because she did not want to be pitied. Another participant expressed that she distanced herself because her friends were judging her. This finding suggests that when the students' identity formation is challenged by societal expectations, they resort to their autonomous nature. The students then develop their identity around what they consider beneficial for themselves without the influence of intimate relationships.

This current study found that the university supported students in different ways. One student indicated that the university supported her by providing all the study materials

online. Evidently in findings, this kind of support was helpful for some students and not for other students. Perhaps, bereaved students need different kinds of support because some students still failed even though study materials were made available. It is possible that this is related to what various researchers found that every student who have experienced the bereavement of a significant relationship will likely react different to other students depending on their culture, age, gender, developmental stage, socio-economic background, and the level of family support (Barnard et al., 1999; Christ et al., 2002; Harrington & Harrison, 1999; Humphreys et al., 2010; Mallon, 2011, as cited in Wango & Gwiyo, 2021).

In the study by Balk (2001), it was suggested that course instructors should allow students to write makeup tests or exams and to also submit work later than the stated deadlines. It is evident after data analysis that this suggestion was put into practice by the UKZN PMB campus. One student indicated that after she failed some modules, the university allowed her to repeat those modules. Another student indicated that when she was overwhelmed with grief and could not prepare for her test, she provided a letter from her psychologists and her lecturer allowed her to write the test on a later date. There is an indication from these findings that the university provides some form of academic support to bereaved students. However, the support that is provided by the university is more reactive. This finding also puts forward the implication that the university does not offer students further assistance based on the challenges that they experience. This finding is in line with the findings by various researchers who found that there is still limited support that the universities offer to address the problems faced by bereaved students (Kim, Nyengerai & Mendenhall, 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Perhaps, the university should offer personalised assistance to bereaved students that will cater for each bereaved students' needs.

For some students, support from the university came in the form of social support services. Two participants indicated that they made use of the university social support services. In literature, it is highlighted that helping young adults to understand common aspects of grief experience plays a major role in normalizing grief experiences (Palmer, Saviet & Tourish, 2016). Similarly, this study found that two students that made use of university social support services, were able to make sense of their loss and to view the

future differently. This finding suggests that the counselling sessions were helpful during these students' grief experience.

The study also found that one student accessed private social support services while two students did not seek any social support services. The reason for this finding differs per student. Literature indicates that students find it hard to make use social support services because of fear of stigmatization (Burns, Dagnall & Holt, 2020; Kunene & Makondo, 2020). This is also reflected in this study, one student indicated that she opted to use private social support services because of fear of stigmatization that comes with accessing the university provided services. This finding is significant because this student is the only one who communicated fear of stigmatization and the same student that indicated that she did not seek support from friends or family members because she did not want to be pitied. There is a suggestion from this finding that this student's grief was isolating because of lack of support from intimate family members and friends. Identity vs role confusion stage posit that for individuals to become more independent and to adequately achieve a sense of self, they need encouragement and support from significant people in their lives (Maree, 2021). Perhaps, this student has not yet developed lasting identity not only because she did not receive support from significant people but also because of her constant concern about societal expectations.

The student that sought private social support services mentioned that even if she wanted to access university support services, she would not have known how to go about it because she had no information about where to access such support. Another student also mentioned that she did not receive university social support services because she did not know how and where to access the services. This finding suggests that the university social support services are not easily accessible. The university should consider raising an awareness about their social support services.

Literature indicates that social support services moved online to ensure that they remain available during the COVID-19 times regardless of financial and physical circumstances (Mthlane, Agbenyegah & Dlamini, 2021). This study found that although the social support services were available online, students were not fully satisfied by the service. For example, two students indicated that they would have preferred to have contact sessions because they are more engaging. This suggests that although social support

services moved online during the pandemic, contact sessions are still valuable and beneficial. Perhaps, the university should provide students with an option to choose between online and contact counselling sessions, particularly because COVID-19 restriction has been lessened.

5.7. Suggestions for intervention

Literature that exists on universities' efforts to support bereaved students, shows that universities have limited processes and services that cater specifically for the needs of bereaved students (Kunene & Makondo, 2020). Similar finding was evident in the findings of this current study. Consequently, bereaved students provided suggestions to the university. The first suggestion to the university was that it should make educational psychologist's services available to students. The rationale for this was that it will make it possible for the university to identify students that have challenges. Perhaps, the bereaved students will not struggle in silence and the poor academic performance will be reduced.

The findings reveal that several students were either not aware of where and how to access counselling services on campus or they did not trust that they would be assisted if they came forward. The second suggestion from the students was that the university should provide more awareness about the available social support services on campus. One student mentioned that the university can also consider having boards on campus that have all the information about social support services on campus and contact details that are updated and functional.

One student indicated that university students trust lectures; therefore, the fourth suggestion was that the university should use lecturers to provide awareness. That is, the information about university social support services should not only be written on module outlines or pamphlets, but it should also be verbally communicated to students. Perhaps, this will make it possible for various bereaved students to find the help that they need and ultimately reduce the intensity of their grief emotions. The findings also indicated that there was one student who struggled to communicate her challenges and needs to the lecturers. The fifth suggestion could be beneficial because it is about providing basic communication skills to students. Perhaps, if the university provides

these skills to students, they will be able to communicate with lecturers more easily and express their grief or their needs in a constructive and healthier way.

The sixth suggestion was that the university should provide support groups to students. One student indicated that the support groups will be very helpful for students who come from families that do not encourage expression of feelings and communication about grief. Furthermore, this a potential of positively influencing students' identity within the university and their sense of self because they will meet other students that share similar experiences.

Since it was found that some students were experiencing challenges when learning online because they did not understand the English language very well, one student suggested that lecturers should provide thorough explanations when teaching. This suggestion brings forward the implication that if students are provided with through explanations and given time to ask questions, they will most likely perform better on their academics.

The study found that only two suggestions were offered to bereaved students. The first suggestion is linked to the fact that several students did not receive the support that they needed from their friends and relatives. It was then suggested that bereaved student should ty to find good friends or close people that will encourage them to study and not to give up. Another suggestion was that the bereaved student should find someone who has also experienced loss. This suggestion brings forward the implication that people who have already experienced loss are easy to talk to and they are relatable.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to highlight the experiences of bereaved UKZN students during COVID-19 pandemic and to determine whether there are suggestions from students that will aid in the development of bereavement program(s) within the UKZN campus (es). To achieve this aim, a total of five bereaved students were sampled. This sample was generated from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus.

This current study had five objectives. The first objective was to examine the kinds of losses experienced by UKZN students since onset of COVID-19 pandemic. Evidently in data, several students experienced more than one type of loss during COVID-19 pandemic. These losses were both death losses and non-death losses. The non-death losses that were reported comprised of loss of friends, social life, and academic routine or contact lessons. Some students experienced indirect losses like job loss by family members which resulted in participants experiencing loss of lifestyle. The students also experienced loss of family members through death. Since some of the family members were caregivers or breadwinners, participants reported that they experienced loss of dependency and loss of lifestyle. Consequently, the type of loss that students' experienced influenced their identity and intimacy. The type of loss further influenced the students' grief responses.

The second objective was to highlight the grief experiences of UKZN students since COVID-19. The analysis of data found that the students went through several emotions of different intensity during their grieving process. Most of the participants reported experiencing emotions ranging from confusion, guilt, numb, shock and fear. It was also found that COVID-19 restrictions played a role in students grieving experiences. For example, one student indicated that it was strange for her not to be able to see the body of the deceased before the burial. A significance finding was that two participants experienced hopelessness. The study found that those students who experienced intense grief responses, they did not only struggle to cope with their studies, but they were struggling to cope with their everyday life. One student indicated that she resorted to drinking alcohol as a way of coping with her loss. A significant finding was that most of the students adopted healthy coping strategies during their grieving process. The study also found that several students were intentional about working through their grief

and they were no longer experiencing intense grief responses. For instance, the students that experienced hopelessness during their initial stages of grief, indicated that they are looking forward to the future. One student also communicated that it is not everything that triggers her emotionally but only special occasions that remind her of the absence of her parents. Social support services were found to have played a huge role in students' grief experiences. Several students communicated that they sought social support services, and they were very helpful.

The third objective was to investigate how grief affects university students' academic lives. The study findings showed that concentration, type of loss, roles and responsibilities that bereaved students acquire after experiencing loss, plays a role in why some students fall behind academically. The findings also revealed that the extent to which students' academics are affected by loss and grief, depends on the bereaved students' timing of communicating needs or seeking support from the lecturers or the university, the type of attachment style, successful resolution of the identity vs role confusion stage, and how the student navigate intimacy vs isolation stage of development. Evidently in data, one participant failed some modules because she was struggling to concentrate after experiencing loss and she only communicated her challenges to lecturers after failing, while another participant with the same challenge was able to pass her modules because she communicated to lecturers that she was struggling to concentrate, and she could not write tests.

The fourth objective was to examine additional mental health challenges experienced by these students in association with their loss. A significant finding was that one out of five participants reported mental health challenges like claustrophobia, panic attacks and anxiety attacks. Although the other participants reported different emotional responses, none of them communicated that they experienced mental health challenges.

The fifth objective was to compile recommendations from students about the proposed suggestions for intervention. The students suggested that the university should make the educational psychologist's services available to all students so it will be easier for the university to identify students that have challenges and who are in need of an intervention. Further to this, the participants suggested that the university should provide more awareness about available counselling services on campus, they should ensure that the

counselling services contact details are updated and functional, lecturers should verbally communicate information about counselling services with students, provide basic communication skills and support groups to students. The participants also provided suggestions to other bereaved students. The first suggestion was that the bereaved student should try to find good friends or close people that will encourage them to study and not to give up and the second suggestion is that the bereaved student should find someone who has also experienced loss because they are more relatable and understanding.

Looking at the above study findings, it can be concluded that students experienced different types of losses during COVID-19. In addition to this, the losses were both direct and indirect. This research clearly illustrates that those students who experienced loss through death of any caregiver, experienced intense emotions that affect their academic performance, dependency, sense of self and their everyday life. This finding raises a question of whether non-death losses affect students the same way. Counselling as a coping strategy was effective in assisting the students to process their loss. Perhaps, it can be concluded that it is important for the university to prioritize such services to bereaved students and to develop various other programmes that will assist bereaved students to process and deal with their loss in a healthier way.

6.1. Strength and limitations

6.1.1. Credibility

Smith (2015) indicates that for research findings to be utilised in practice and to be incorporated into care delivery, it is essential to evaluate the quality of research. This current study then made triangulation, respondent validation, neutrality, audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions to assist in reducing threats to credibility.

According to Tracy (2010) triangulation encompass the use of multiple theoretical frameworks. Hence, multiple theoretical frameworks were also used in this study to identify and report data in themes that are credible. Furthermore, triangulation was achieved by recruiting participants from different departments within the university.

Incorporating different groups of students, helped gather different perspectives or experiences of students from different departments.

6.1.2. Dependability

Dependability is the appropriateness and the application of methods used in a study and the integrity of that research study conclusions (Coleman, 2022). Taking this into consideration, the researcher conducted literature review into different theories and approaches than only choosing one that they are familiar with. Furthermore, the researcher had practice interviews before the study commenced to assess how they ask questions. This is because the researcher was aware that their skills, perceptions, and efforts can affect the credibility of the study. These efforts therefore helped the researcher to demonstrate rigour in their work (Coleman, 2022). Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the questions were not asked in a way that will lead the students to answer in a certain manner. In this way, the study was able to gather rich data about students' feelings, perceptions, and behaviour (Chabangu, 2014). Another way that enabled rich data to be collected was by using audio recordings and verbatim transcripts. The use of this tools provides an opportunity for the raw data to be scrutinized and for a detailed picture to be revealed (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Gray, 2018, as cited in Coleman, 2022). In addition to this, answers and details about the questions asked by the researcher are provided when reporting the findings to provide a thick and contextualised description.

One way of promoting dependability in qualitative research is through multiple coding (Coleman, 2022). This means that more than one qualitative researcher independently analyses the study data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, as cited in Coleman, 2022). This multiple coding was used in this study in a form of having not only the researcher but also the supervisor of this master's research to review the data to maximise the reliability of the conclusions. As Burnard (as cited in Coleman, 2022) argues, this process therefore made the analysis to be more rigorous and reduced the possibility of bias.

3.9.3. Confirmability

“Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers”(Anney, 2014, p. 15). One of the best ways to overcome misinformation in qualitative research is to employ good interviewing techniques (Wallendorf &Belk,1989; as cited in Anney, 2014). As this study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to allow the students to feel free to speak while probing and following up on what they were communicating. This kind of validation is important because it allowed the researcher to confirm their understanding of what the interviewee was articulating during the data collection process (Coleman, 2022). Furthermore, the researcher was paraphrasing where communication was ambiguous (Coleman, 2022).

An interview guide was used to direct the conversations between the researcher and the participants. In this way, reliability was enhanced as there was control and uniformity within the interview process. At the same time, the researcher ensured that the interviews are not very dependent on the interview guide by probing where it was necessary. This was done to ensure that reliability is not compromised by having participants not feeling free to share full accounts of their experiences (Coleman, 2022).

3.9.4. Transferability

Transferability is concerned with whether findings are applicable in other contexts, while replicability determines whether the way the report is done conveys what an individual would have witnessed if they were observing (Stiles, 1993, as cited in Coleman, 2022). Therefore, the use of audio recordings and full transcription in this study offer an incredible opportunity for replicability of the study. Further to this, description of the study participants demographics and location of the study was provided. This provides an opportunity to future researchers to be able to compare this current study sample with their sample. Therefore, increasing the transferability of the study.

6.3. Recommendations

6.3.1. Policy and practice

This current study findings revealed that bereaved students are in need of all the support that they can get from the university. As a recommendation, the university should take into consideration the suggestions that were provided by the students in this study. Plans should be made to develop programmes that provides bereaved students with an opportunity to meet with other bereaved students on campus and share their experiences. Programmes and counselling services that are already offered by the university, should be reviewed to ensure that they continue to address bereaved students' needs.

6.3.2. Research

Literature highlighted that there is still limited contextual research on experiences loss and grief among university students during COVID-19. Perhaps, future researchers can conduct similar research on this phenomenon at different universities in South Africa. Since this current study only sampled five participants; future research can look into sampling more participants. Multiple data collection techniques can also be adopted. In addition to this, future research can also focus on conducting research on the services that are offered by the university and the university's plan to assist bereaved students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Gatekeeper's letter



25 August 2021

Nkateko Bella Makwarela (SN 215080763)
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Pietermaritzburg Campus UKZN
Email: 215080763@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Nkateko

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), towards your postgraduate degree, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"UKZN student's experience of loss, grief and bereavement during COVID-19 pandemic."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with students (Taking in account the regulations imposed during lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. Zoom, Skype or telephone interviews recommended) on the Pietermaritzburg Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using the 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Registrar.

Dr KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 7971 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za Website: www.ukzn.ac.za

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 3: Consent form



INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research: University of KwaZulu-Natal students' experience of loss, grief and bereavement during Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic.

Principle Investigator, Affiliation and Contact Information:

Miss Nkateko Bella Mabunda,
UKZN MA research psychology/ Student psychologist
Tell: 079 304 3267, Email: 215080763@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Additional Investigators and Affiliations:

Mrs Adelaid Nozipho Ndlazi
Research supervisor, UKZN lecturer and Counselling Psychologist
Tell: 082 355 4367, Email: ndlazia@ukzn.ac.za

Institutional Contact:

Human and Social Sciences Research Council (HSSREC) Research office
University of Kwazulu-Natal
Tell: 031 260 8350/4557/3587, Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

Hello, my name is Nkateko Bella Mabunda. I am a master's student here at UKZN. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study related to your experience as a bereaved/ grieving university student. We are asking you to participate in an in-depth interview while you are at the university.

We are doing this research study to find out about the challenges experienced by university students who have lost someone while they are in university. We want to know if there are any suggestions that they would like to make to the university about the kind of support that they expect to get from the university.

2. Description of the Research

You will be required to sign this consent form if you agree to participate. We will then ask you to participate in an interview on any date that is suitable for you and it will be audio recorded. The researcher will ask you to sign on this consent form for that too. During the interview, the researcher will ask you to describe your experiences after experiencing loss.

Subject Participation

We estimate that ten participants who are UKZN PMB campus students, have experienced loss and are bereaved during COVID-19 will enroll in this study. Participants must be able to give a written consent to participate in the study. Your participation will involve only one in-depth interview that is estimated to take between 20 minutes to an hour in length.

3. Potential Risks and Discomforts

During the interview we will ask questions regarding your life and experiences. Talking about these things might be disturbing or emotional. However, you are not obligated to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering. The researcher will refer any person to the nearby mental health clinic if they feel they need psychological / mental support.

4. Potential Benefits

It is hoped that this research will be of benefit to universities and students by aiding and understanding more about the support that is needed for bereaved students in universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are no direct benefits to your study participation.

In case you need to make use of counselling services, the PI will refer you to the UKZN counselling service (Child and Family Centre). Alternatively, you can make use of the free online psycho-social support services below:

Lifeline: Counselling line at 0861 322 322, www.lifeline.co.za

SADAG: Counselling line at 011 234 4837 / 0800 567 567, www.SADAG.org

COVID-19 Counselling: 0800 786 786

5. Confidentiality

Pseudonyms will be used to protect all the study participants identity. We will not use your name or any identifying information when reporting or discussing the data. All collected information (electronic, printed and audio recorded) for this study will be secure and confidentially kept. The audio recording will be stored in a secured place. It will then be coded and transcribed for easy analysis. When we are done using the audio recording, it will be stored for a period of five years then after it will be destroyed accordingly.

6. Authorization

This study involves an interview that will be audio recorded. I would like to ask for your authorization to record this interview. If you decide not to give consent to be recorded during the study interview, unfortunately you cannot be part of the study. However, if you do decide to give consent for audio recording at the end of this form, it will mean the following for you:

I agree to take part, authorize the use and disclosure of my recording and findings of this study for education, presentation or publication.

7. Compensation

This study will not compensate you to participate in it.

8. Voluntary Participation and Authorization

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to join. If you do not join, your relationship with the faculty or the university will not be affected in anyway

9. Withdrawal from the Study and/or Withdrawal of Authorization

You can leave the study any time you want if you decide that you don't want to continue. There are not penalties for leaving the study early. Any information collected before withdrawal will be included in the study.

10. Cost/Reimbursements

You will be given R50 airtime to thank you for your time.

I consent to be audio recorded during the interview.

Yes

No

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature:

Date:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study

Yes

No

Name of Participant (print): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Name of Witness (print): _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____
Person Obtaining Consent: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Note: A copy of the signed, dated consent form must be kept by the Researcher and a copy must be given to the participant.

Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview guide

In-depth interview guide

Investigator: Nkateko Bella Mabunda, MA research psychology student

Participant's demographics

Study ID code:

Date of interview:

Sex:

Age:

Level of education:

Was the loss related to COVID-19?

Introduction

(Time approximately 20 minutes-1 hour)

Thank you for taking time to talk with me today, I hope you are well. Before we begin with our interview, do you have any questions that you would like to ask me?

Please note that the information you provide today will remain completely confidential. It will help in the improvement of the support provided to bereaved students within the UKZN campus(es).

(NB: The questions in this interview guide highlight themes to explore and the way the participant responds, will determine the flow of the interview. The questions will be asked in a thoughtful and empathic manner, given the sensitive nature of the topic).

A. COVID-19 experience

COVID 19 has affected all of us in different ways. Since early 2020, we have been living in a state of uncertainty, regarding our jobs, families, studies, businesses. We had to find ways to adjust and make the most of our lives during this period.

1. Please describe how the COVID 19 has affected you?
2. Please elaborate on aspects of your life that were mostly affected, e.g., relationships, business, work etc.

A. Grief experience and psychological wellbeing

- 1.1. What kind of loss (es) have you experienced?

- 1.2. Was the loss sudden or anticipated?
- 1.3. Please describe your reactions to the loss (then and now).
- 1.4. Please describe your feelings during this process
- 1.5. Describe the impact that the COVID 19 has had on your experience of your loss and grief.
- 1.6. Looking at your mourning process, explain how it was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its regulations.
- 1.7. Describe how your loss and grief process has affected the different aspects of your life (school, work, relationships etc.)
- 1.8. What do you think about the future after experiencing loss?

B. Coping strategies and level of support

1. Please describe how you coped with your grief.
2. How did you cope with the different aspects of your life (work, relationships, school etc.?)
3. What kind of support did you receive from your family, and other sources? (Friends, other students etc.)
4. What kind of support did/do you receive from the university/department?
5. Please comment on the support you received (Relevant, helpful?)

C. Students' suggestions

1. What kind of support do you think bereaved students need from the university?
2. What kind of interventions would benefit and improve the lives of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to suggest or add?

D. Closing

We have come to the end of our interview. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me.

Appendix 5: Agreement to offer counselling (CFC)



CHILD AND FAMILY CENTRE
DISCIPLINE OF PSYCHOLOGY
20 Golf Road
Scottsville 3209
PIETERMARITZBURG
033 260 5166
cfc@ukzn.ac.za

06/12/2021

Dear Ms Makwarela

Thank you for showing interest in our services. I am acknowledging receipt of your request to refer study participants for your research, should they require counselling services. The Child and Family Centre grants you permission to refer these participants. Since they are UKZN students, we will refer them to UKZN student support service.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Nozipho Ndlazi (Acting CFC Director)



Appendix 6: HSSREC ethical approval letter



19 January 2022

Nkateko Bella Makwabela (215080763)
School of Applied Human Sc
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear NB Makwabela,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003477/2021

Project title: University of Kwazulu-Natal student's experience of loss, grief and bereavement during Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

Degree : Masters

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 10 November 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 19 January 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/ms

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix 7: Deviations

15 November 2022

University of KwaZulu-Natal Human Social Sciences Research Council

Human and Social Sciences Research Council (HSSREC) Research office

University of Kwazulu-Natal

Tell: 031 260 8350/4557/3587, Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

NOTIFICATION OF PROTOCOL DEVIATION

Protocol Title	University of KwaZulu-Natal students' experience of loss, grief, and bereavement during Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic
HSSREC Reference number	HSSREC/00003477/2021
PI	Nkateko Bella Mabunda
Supervisor	Adelaide Nozipho Ndlazi
Student No	215080763
Participants age	21, 22, 23, 23, 35

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter serves to notify HSSREC of the protocol deviation

As per the proposal/ protocol, there is no incentive or reimbursement to the participants, however, the participants were reimbursed with R50 airtime. The participants were reimbursed with airtime so they can be able to contact the PI and the Child and Family Centre in case they need counselling or directions to CFC.

The ICF and Advertisement poster was updated to reflect this change.

Kind regards,

Nkateko Bella Mabunda

Student no: 215080763



15 November 2022

University of KwaZulu-Natal Human Social Sciences Research Council

Human and Social Sciences Research Council (HSSREC) Research office

University of Kwazulu-Natal

Tell: 031 260 8350/4557/3587, Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

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PI	Nkateko Bella Mabunda
Supervisor	Adelaide Nozipho Ndlazi
Student No	215080763
Participants ages	21, 22, 23, 23, 35

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter serves to notify HSSREC of the protocol deviation

As per the proposal/ protocol, in-depth interviews were to be held online via Zoom or WhatsApp, however, the interviews were conducted at the Child and Family Centre as it was more convenient for the participants as they were back on campus and the COVID-19 restrictions were lessened. Further to this, contact interviews increased rapport and the credibility of the study.

Kind regards,

Nkateko Bella Mabunda

Student no: 215080763



15 November 2022

**University of KwaZulu-Natal Human Social Sciences
Research Council** Human and Social Sciences Research
Council (HSSREC) Research office University of Kwazulu-
Natal
Tell: 031 260 8350/4557/3587, Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

**NOTIFICATION/APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS TO THE
ICF AND ADVERTISEMENT POSTER**

Protocol Title	University of KwaZulu-Natal students' experience of loss, grief, and bereavement during Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic
HSSREC Reference number	HSSREC/00003477/2021
PI	Nkateko Bella Mabunda
Supervisor	Adelaide Nozipho Ndlazi
Student No	215080763

Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter serves to notify HSSREC amendment to the ICF, Advertisement poster, interview location and incentive.

The ICF was amended to include the R50 airtime reimbursement/ incentive. The study title was incorrectly written on the ICF, this was corrected to correspond with the approved proposal. Any other information stating that the interview will be held online was also changed as the place of interview was changed from online to contact (Child and Family Centre).

The advertisement poster was amended to provide participants with more details about the study, place of interview and the incentive.

Please find the enclose, updated ICF's and advertisement poster for approval and notification.

Enclosure:

Appendix 1: Advertisement poster_clean

Appendix 2: Advertisement poster_Tracked changes

Appendix 3: Informed consent form_clean

Appendix 4: Informed consent form_Tracked changes

Kind regards,

Nkateko Bella Mabunda

Student no: 215080763

