

The Current Status of Training of Teacher-Counsellors in Grief Counselling in Public Secondary Schools in Kisii County

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the current status of training of teacher-counsellors in grief counselling in public secondary schools in Kisii County. A mixed methods research design, specifically, a parallel convergent mixed research design was utilized. The sample composed of 181 obtained based on Krejcie and Morgan Table. The respondents were selected through stratified, purposive and simple random sampling. Data was obtained through a standard questionnaire and interview guide prepared by the researcher. Analysis of data was done through simple univariate statistics and themes. The findings revealed that though teacher-counsellors offered grief counselling in various public secondary schools in Kisii County, the majority (93.4%) had no formal training in grief counselling. 63.5% had not attended any grief counselling related training after appointment as Head of Department of guidance and counselling. The 35% who had some post-appointment training was through workshops and seminars. Only 21% of those who had attended the seminars or workshops rated them as satisfactory. All (100%) the respondents felt that there is need for teacher-counsellors to train in grief counselling. The study recommended that teacher-counsellors undergo regular and programmed training in grief counselling to facilitate their competence in this area.

Keywords: *Competence, Grief, Training, Grief Counselling*

Everyone has or will experience a loss of a loved one during his or her existence. When this happens, the psychological wellbeing is distressed. Each individual will experience and react to loss in different ways. Others will regain faster while others will take quite sometimes to adjust to the loss. Others may seek grief counselling while others will not (Thirsk & Moules, 2012). However, providing grief counselling is challenging because death is an emotive topic that require appropriate knowledge and skills in order to execute it (Ober, Granello, & Wheaton, 2012). When a counsellor does not have the necessary skills and knowledge, he or she may hurt the client instead of assisting and therefore worsen the already distressed psychological wellbeing of that client in the course of grief counselling (Breen, 2010).

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Studies have shown that training in grief counselling is the foundation upon which skills and knowledge of the counsellor are acquired (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; Cicchetti, McArthur, Szirony & Blum, 2016; Imhoff, 2015; Ober, Granello & Wheaton, 2012). However, studies carried out in psychology, counselling and other health professional programs found that counsellors' education institutions are responsible for their coursework and programs that address grief counselling (Breen, 2010; CACREP, 2011). Other institutions did not embrace a particular course on death and dying (CACREP, 2011). This makes it challenging to establish the status of training of counsellors in grief counselling because they all came from varied learning institutions. This formed the background upon which this study was born and carried out.

Statement of the Problem

Students in various public secondary schools in Kisii County continue manifesting a distressed psychological wellbeing long after the interment of their loved ones. This is because they return to school and spend most of their time there. They may therefore require to be emotionally supported by teacher-counsellors in order to attain psychological wellbeing. It has been noted by Nyongesa and Kiplagat (2017) that bereavement is the number three cause of school dropout in Kisii County. Apart from dropping out of school, some drop in academic performance, resort to substance and drug abuse; lead a reckless and hopeless life. It is not possible to explain why some of these students continue suffering emotionally yet schools have teacher-counsellors who are responsible for taking care of their emotional needs. This explains why the current study was undertaken to establish the extent to which teacher-counsellors have been trained to provide grief counselling. This is because grief counselling training has been observed to equip counsellors with the necessary skills and knowledge that can be used to support grieving clients. Similar studies on grief counselling training of counsellors have been carried out among masters students, licensed counsellors, family and marriage counsellors and rehabilitation counsellors. Most of these studies were carried out outside Kenya and Kisii County in particular. This gap was filled by this study by exploring the current status of training of teacher-counsellors in grief counselling in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, some literature relevant to grief counselling training of counsellors has been reviewed. Ober, Granello and Wheaton (2012) researched on the grief counselling competence of 39 licensed counsellors in the state Ohio and established that 55% had taken a specific grief counseling course, 73% said the content was infused into at least one other course and 70% of the participants said they completed some level of professional development in grief counseling. Kim (2015) noted through a study on 38 university counselling clinicians that counsellors have mixed levels of preparedness in terms of training to handle grief counselling because of the training they went through in order to develop their competence in grief counselling.

In his study that involved 225 teachers drawn from nursery school through to grade 12 in the State of Kentucky, Ashley (2013) found that most of the respondents had no training related to death and grief issues. They had minimum pre-service and in-service training on grief counselling. Data was collected through an on-line questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics. The status of training of grief counselling training and competencies of counsellors was also sought by Imhoff (2015). A sample of 16 institutions that offered

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masters in counselling were involved. The finding revealed that the respondents lacked grief counselling training although they were involved in working with grieving clients.

Hannon and Hunt (2015) researched on grief counselling training of counsellors in relation to what the counsellors had learnt during their training. Data was obtained through reviewing the existing literature. The study found that most counsellors had not trained in grief counselling. The APA and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) (2013) sheds light on the components of a comprehensive training for those aspiring to be counsellors in USA. It should include course work specifically on death, dying, bereavement and the crisis of death. The training should also include basics of how to work with clientele who are grieving, theories and methods for counseling bereaved clients. These will shape a counsellors' grief counselling competence.

Buckle (2013), sought to find out why counsellors undertook grief counselling training. An interview guide was used to collect data from 25 undergraduate students who were taking a course in death and dying. Data was thematically analyzed. The results indicated counsellors undertook training on grief because they lacked knowledge, the need to be professionally relevant, had experienced personal loss, to increase their comfort level and reduce fear towards talking about grief. In another study, Breen, Fernandez, O'Connor and Pember (2012) sought to find whether six courses (medicine, nursing, counseling, psychology, social work, and occupational therapy) offered at universities in Australia had any aspect of grief counselling. The sample consisted of 25 undergraduate students in various courses. Data was gathered through a questionnaire and analyzed descriptively. The findings revealed that most courses except counselling did not offer even a unit in grief counselling.

Muela (2011) used a sample of 30 masters students in a death, dying, and bereavement education class in a university in the state of California to establish if the trainees had enough grief counselling education. It was a qualitative study that collected data through an interview guide and analysis thematically done. The findings revealed that masters level students in marriage and family therapy programs offered fairly little amount of training in grief counselling. On his part, Breen (2010) sought to find out the grief counselling training of counsellors in USA on a sample of 19 purposively sampled professional counsellors. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that counsellors were not well trained in grief counselling. The study recommended that grief education should be included in teacher training curriculum in order to enhance counsellors' competence. It was further recommended that there is need to conduct future research on the limited or lack of grief education and training in counselors' formal studies.

From the literature revived, it is evident that most of the studies on grief counselling training of counsellors have been carried outside Africa and Kenya in particular. At the same time, most of the respondents were students, family and marriage counsellors or professionally licensed counsellors. Most of the studies were qualitative in nature and involved small samples. Studies related to teacher-counsellors in a school setting were scanty. The current study filled this gap in literature by carrying it out in Kenya among teacher-counsellors using a mixed methods research design.

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METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Kisii County which ranks sixth in death rate in Kenya and has so many bereaved students. A convergent parallel mixed methods design that combined both cross-sectional survey and phenomenological research designs were utilized. The target population was 356 teacher-counsellors. By the use of Krejcie and Morgan table, a sample of 181 respondents was selected through stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected through a self prepared questionnaire and interview guide. Validity and reliability was established through piloting. A coefficient correlation of 0.78 was established. Trustworthiness of qualitative data was determined through member checking and peer review. Analysis of data was done through simple univariate statistics and themes.

Findings

The study sought to establish whether the respondents had taken a course that specifically focussed on grief counselling both during training as teachers or after appointment as Heads of Department. Figure 1 contains the findings.



Figure 1. Taken or not taken a Course Specifically in Grief Counselling

The analysis shows that 7% of the respondents had taken a course that specifically focused on grief counselling while 93% had not taken such a course. According to TC1, grief counselling training was not given prominence during their training as teachers. After appointment as Heads of Department of guidance and counselling, the respondents were required to indicate if they had acquired any training in grief counselling. The result is shown on Figure 2.

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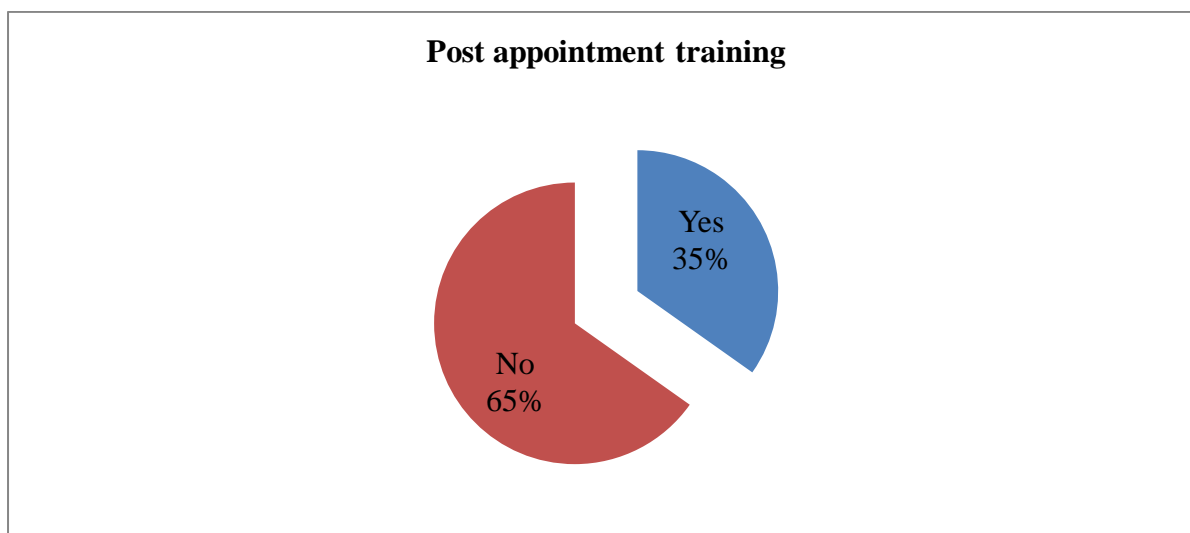


Figure 2. Post-appointment Training

The result in Figure 2 shows that 63 respondents representing 35% had taken some training in grief counselling and 118 representing 65% had not taken any post-appointment course in grief counselling. TC2 revealed through an interview that there is no organized training in grief counselling among teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Kisii County. "Most government agencies and departments employed spur-of-the-moment approaches in managing misfortunes such as grief when situations arise".

The respondents who had received grief counselling training were asked to indicate the methods through which they had attained it. The result is shown on Figure 3.

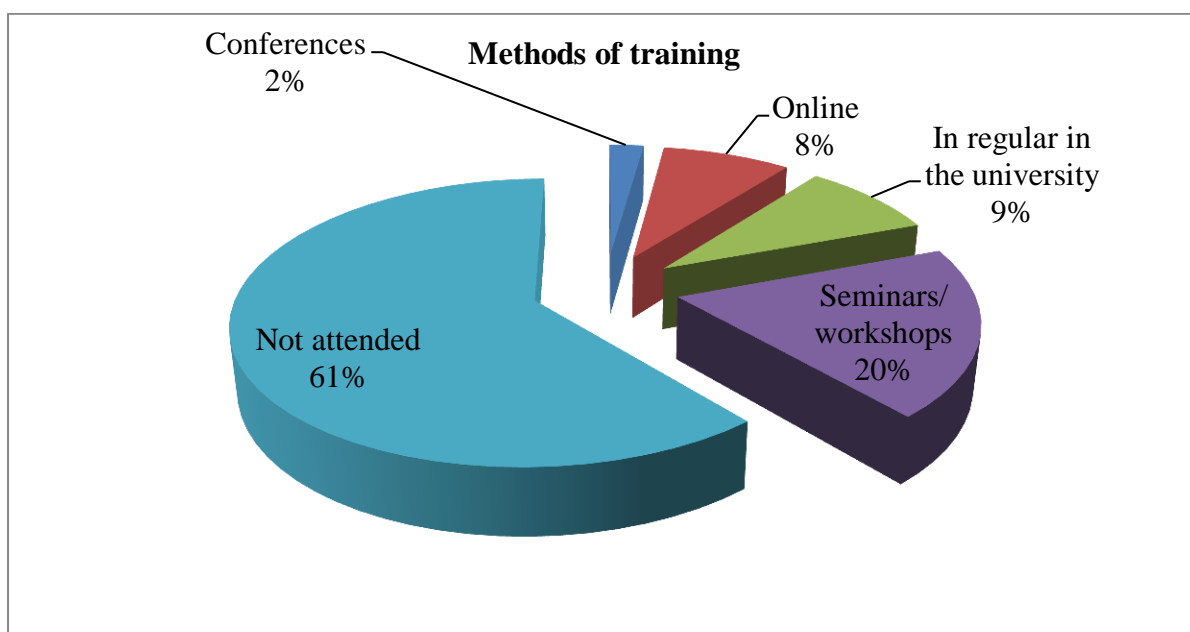


Figure 3. Methods of Training

The respondents indicated that 2% had trained through conferences, 8% through online studies, 9% through classes in the university, 20% through seminars or workshops and 61% had not attended any grief counselling training.

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The study sought information on the adequacy of the grief counselling they had received. The result is shown on Figure 4.

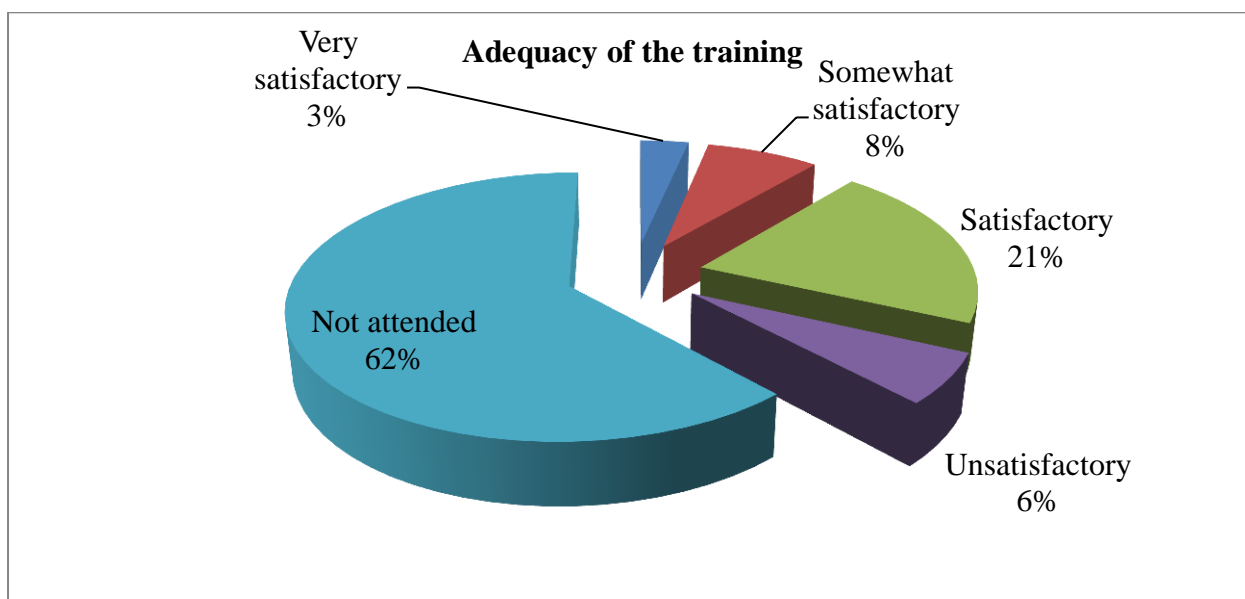


Figure 4. Adequacy of the training

From the analysis, 3% of the respondents indicated that it was satisfactory, 6% revealed that it was unsatisfactory, 8% pointed out that it was somewhat satisfactory while 21% exposed that it was satisfactory. According to respondent TC3, the training was not satisfactory because most seminars or workshops were skewed towards trauma and disaster management resulting from burning of schools.

The respondents were asked to say if there was need for grief counselling among teacher-counsellors. The result is shown on Figure 5.



Figure 5. Need for training in Grief Counselling

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From the analysis shown on Figure 4, 173 respondents representing 95.6% affirmed that there is need for teacher-counsellors to train in grief counselling while 8 respondents representing 4.4% felt that there was no need for training in grief counselling. Respondent TC7 said that because death is a continuous and inevitable eventuality to every human being, teacher-counsellors needed to train in grief counselling because they were likely to offer such services in their respective schools.

DISCUSSION

The first item the researcher sought to establish was whether the respondents had taken a course that specifically focused on grief counselling while training as teachers or during post-graduate programs any of them may have undertaken. The study found that 93% of the teacher-counsellors had not taken a course that specifically focused on grief counselling. Only 7% of the respondents indicated that they had taken a unit that had some components of grief. Therefore, the study established that most teacher-counsellors had not undertaken any formal training that specifically focused on grief counselling but they were involved in grief counselling in their respective public secondary schools in Kisii County. This finding was consistent with that of Mitchell and Murillo (2016) who conducted a similar study on the grief counselling competence of social workers. Their study found that 61% of the respondents had not taken a course that specifically focused on grief and loss while 35.8% had taken a unit that included grief and loss but not in a substantial way. This implies that studies related to grieving were not given prominence yet death is a reality and inescapable to all human beings. From the respondents who were interviewed, it was evident that most teacher-counsellors did not take a course that specifically focused on grief counselling. Those who had some training in the aspect related to grief counselling got it through a course that focused on trauma and disaster management yet death is a unique type of traumatizing event that requires specific attention (Ober, Granello & Wheaton, 2012). The finding was also consistent with that of Imhoff (2015) who established that, most counsellors have not taken a course that specifically focused on grief counselling. From this finding, it is clear that teacher-counsellors offer grief counselling in various secondary schools in Kisii County although they had no formal training. It is therefore important that grief counselling is given more emphasis by counsellor and teacher training institutions because on a daily basis, counsellors will encounter grieving students since death is bound to occur from time to time.

Another component this study sought was if the respondents had any post-appointment training in grief counselling. The breakdown in Figure 2 shows that after being appointed as Heads of Department, 65% of the respondents had not attended any grief counselling training since their appointment while 35% had attended. This result shows that although schools appoint teacher-counsellors to head the guidance and counselling department, few are concerned with induction courses either within the institution or through seminars, workshops or supervision outside school. This could be an indication that there is less emphasis on the aspect of grief counselling training possibly because most trainers were not themselves trained and because it is an emotive topic which most people are not at ease to discuss (Ober, Granello & Wheaton, 2012). The researcher was for the view that grief counselling training be part of the requirements for appointment to head the guidance and counselling department because grief will always be there among students and some may require these services. The majority of those who were interviewed revealed that they had not attended any post-appointment course in grief counselling. Most of them revealed that most government agencies and departments employed spur-of-the-moment approaches in managing misfortunes. They did not have a laid down procedure that was frequently applied in terms of skill empowerment towards tragedy management even when there was no adversity.

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Andanje, Chepchieng and Kyalo (2013), recommended that because counsellors play a significant role in meeting the physical, emotional, social, vocational and academic challenges of students, those appointed to provide counselling services should be trained in grief counselling after appointment. The finding of this study supports this recommendation because cases of grieving students are always there and will need a well trained and competent grief counsellor. The few who had attended post- appointment seminars or workshops were not taught grief counselling as a course on its own but it was infused in trauma and disaster management and was sparked by unplanned seminars emanating from burning of schools and accidents caused by school buses. The researcher found it unique that despite the central role teacher- counsellors play in their respective schools particularly in meeting the psychological needs of grieving students, schools were reluctant to spend in equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge that could make them competent in handling grief related issues among students.

The respondents who had received some training in grief counselling were asked to indicate the methods that had been used in the training. The result indicated that 2% had trained through conferences, 8% through online studies, 9% through classes in the university, 20% seminars or workshops and 61% had not attended any grief counselling training. This finding indicates that the more frequently used technique was seminars or workshops. This observation was also made by Ruttah (2014) who established that although most teacher-counsellors were not adequately trained to counsel students in secondary schools, some of them have attended workshops and seminars on guidance and counselling. The aspect of post-appointment training through various methods was supported by Swank (2010) who noted that continuous counsellor development through on-the job training is significant. This means that schools and other training institutions should be encouraged to organize seminars or workshops towards the same. Based on this finding, there is need to tailor compulsory grief counselling training seminars or workshops to all teacher-counsellors at short and regular intervals so that teacher-counsellors can relevantly in an informed way meet the psychological needs of grieving students.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the adequacy of the training they had got. According to the result, 3% found it very satisfactory, 6% unsatisfactory, 8% somewhat satisfactory and 21% satisfactory. This finding is consistent with that of Imhoff (2013) who found that the grief counselling training that was offered to counsellors was inadequate and unsatisfactory. This may inform course developers to consider giving grief counselling serious attention because it is an event that was prevalent. Most seminars have not clearly come out to prepare counsellors for grief counselling. There is more emphasis on other traumatic events such as fire and accidents and less emphasis on death. In fact most trainers on trauma and disaster management shy off talking about grief. There is need to harmonize the courses offered in grief counselling by training institutions and workshop providers so that any inference arrived at after research can easily give a factual reflection on its adequacy. This observation was made by respondent TC3 who observed that most seminars have not clearly come out to prepare counsellors for grief counselling.

The respondents were asked to indicate if there was need for teacher-counsellors to undertake a course in grief counselling. As per the analysis on Figure 4, 173 respondents representing 95.6% affirmed that there was need for teacher-counsellors to train in grief counselling while 8 respondents representing 4.4% felt that there was no need of training in grief counselling. From this analysis, it is evident that the respondents felt that there was need for counsellors

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providing counselling services in various public secondary schools in Kisii County to be given training in grief counselling. This finding is supported with a recommendation made by Swank (2010) who observed that continuous counsellor development through on-the job training is paramount for counsellor competence. The researcher noted that because grief could affect the performance and psychological wellbeing of grieving students, there is need for all teacher-counsellor to train in grief counselling.

CONCLUSION

From the preceding findings and deliberations, the following conclusions were arrived at. Grief counselling is a reality in various public secondary schools in Kisii County. It is an emotive topic that requires knowledge and skills to help the grieving normalize. These knowledge and skills are obtained through training. Although teacher-counsellors offered grief counselling, the majority had not trained in grief counselling. Those who had some training got it through a course on trauma and disaster management with more focus being on burning of schools and accidents involving school buses. Because all schools have bereaved students, it is necessary that all teacher-counsellors take a course in grief counselling because they were likely to offer such services in the course of their career as counsellors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to the Ministry of Education and Kisii County leadership. Grief is unavoidable occurrence in all public secondary schools in the country. Therefore, teacher-counsellors will be required to provide grief counselling from time to time to grieving students when need arises. In order to competently, handle grief counselling, all teacher-counsellors ought to train in grief counselling before or after appointment as HoD of guidance and counselling. This can be done through workshops, seminars, online studies or enrollment in counsellor training institutions which offer a course in grief counselling. This will equip them with the necessary theoretical and practical skill in supporting the psychological wellbeing of grieving students who at times drop out of school or in academic performance.

This study recommends that principals allocate some funds to sponsor teacher-counsellors to seminars, workshops, conferences or formal learning through attending classes in universities or online studies for the purpose of empowering them with knowledge and skills in grief counselling.

The County government through its Ministry of education should sponsor teacher-counsellors to courses that promote the competence of teacher-counsellors in grief counselling. This can be done through encouraging and supporting regular seminars, workshops or conferences related to grief counselling. The County government can partner with the universities that offer courses in grief counselling to bring some of their experts or lecturers in designated centres in the County where they can have frequent training and brainstorm on this psychologically distressing subject that affect the psychological wellbeing of most learners. This study recommends that higher learning institutions make grief counselling course core to all teacher trainees. This is because the trainees will meet grieving students in the various schools they will be teaching and counselling. These institutions should engage all teacher trainees in practicum activities on this issue so that they can promote the required competence in them.

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This study explored the extent of training of teacher-counsellors on grief counselling. The majority of the respondents indicated that while training as teachers, they did not take any unit that focused mainly on grief counselling. Only a small fraction had taken some course that focused on grief counselling. Future studies should investigate why some teacher-counsellors had taken a course that focused on grief counselling while others had not yet most of them were from nearly similar teacher training institutions. Future studies should also investigate the propensity of grief counselling training offered and the content of what is taught in seminars/workshops.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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