



# Influence of Teacher-Counsellors' Personal Experience with Grief on Their Current Grief Counselling Competence in Public Secondary Schools in Kisii County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *Teacher-counsellors are expected to offer grief counselling to grieving students despite the fact that they also encounter personal death related loss. This study was therefore undertaken to explore the influence teacher-counsellors' personal experience with grief has on their current grief counselling competence in public secondary schools in Kisii County. A convergent parallel mixed methods design and Bowlby's Theory of Loss and Attachment were utilized. A sample of 181 respondents who were obtained through simple random sampling provided data using a questionnaire and interview guide. Univariate and thematic approach which was supported by narratives were used in data analysis. The analysis revealed that all the respondents had experienced loss of a loved one. The study established that personal experience with grief improved their competence in grief counselling. Flooding with the painful event of grief helped them to minimize fear as it exposed them to the reality of the phenomenon. The study recommended that teacher-counsellors should have sometimes within the term when they can be exposed to grieving people in hospitals as a way of increasing their competence in grief counselling. Additionally, the study proposed that teacher-counsellors go through grief counselling training by way of seminars, workshops or training institutions or online in order to augment their competence in grief counselling.*

**Keywords:** *Bereavement, Competence, Counselling, Death, Experience, Grief, Personal*

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## **1. Introduction**

All people on earth have experienced or will experience grief as a result of death of a loved one, divorce, separation, breakup, or estrangement, loss of capability, loss of job, change of location, terminal illness, loss of a pet, the loss of safety in harassment incidences and quitting drug abuse among others (Worden, 2018). Teacher-counsellors globally, experience death related loss and therefore grief (Rowling & Holland, 2000). They are expected to teach and provide grief counselling services to students who may need them (Cullinan, 1990).

Grief is an emotive subject and need counsellors to have grief counselling competence so that they can support the psychological wellbeing of grieving students who may seek grief counselling (Imhoff, 2015). Competence is the ability of a counsellor to offer effective counselling services to a client who seeks it in order to facilitate emotional comfort (Swank, 2010). Grief counselling competence safeguards a counsellor from the discomfort that emanates from discussing the topic of grief (American Counselling Association, 2041). Breen (2010) also noted that competence is vital because if counsellors do not have the necessary competence, they may wound the client instead of supporting them psychologically. Despite the

significance of competence when handling the subject of grief, Cicchetti, McArthur, Szirony and Blum (2014) noted that there is insufficient research that focuses on the influence teacher-counsellors' personal experience with grief has on their current grief counselling competence. They recommended more studies to be carried out on this area using diverse respondents from diverse environments. It is against this background that this study was carried out to explore the influence teacher-counsellors' personal experience with grief has on their current grief counselling competence in public secondary schools in Kisii county.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Grief is a distressing event to most people including counsellors. Teacher-counsellors just like any other human being encounter loss and have reactions towards the same. Widespread studies have been carried out on bereavement and grief. Nevertheless, there appears to be dearth of research in the area of the influence personal experience has on teacher-counsellors to offer grief counselling services to grieving students (Arksey, 2018). This may be based on the assumption that to offer grief counselling services, teacher-counsellors have themselves managed their own effects of personal experience with grief. It is also because of the teacher-counsellor's expert role, in which more focus is given to the clients' challenges and welfare. Based on this, the current study filled a gap in research by exploring the influence teacher-counsellors' personal experience with grief has on their current grief counselling competence in public secondary schools in Kisii County. At the same time, most studies on grief counselling as revealed by the literature reviewed are more qualitative and therefore this study filled this gap by employing a mixed methods approach. This made it possible for the researcher to gather the numerical and in-depth subjective opinions of the respondents. Most studies have been carried out in a non-school environment using small samples composed of professional counsellors. The current study filled this gap by using a bigger sample (n=181) of teacher-counsellors with the purpose of establishing if there is a possibility of generalizing the findings to other similar populations.

## 1.2 Research Objective

This study was guided by one main objective, to examine how teacher-counsellors' personal experience with grief influenced their current grief counselling competence in public secondary schools in Kisii County.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework

Bowlby's (1980) theory of attachment and loss was utilized. According to this theory, human beings have a long-lasting emotional union that joins them to another

through time and space for the purpose of security and survival. When the attachment is broken or lost, the person experience grief and psychosomatic confusion and the bereaved goes through four overlapping, flexible stages as he or she tries to regain his or her mental wellbeing. The capability of one to go through the stages effectively may determine his or her recuperation during grief and response towards others who may experience the same situation.

## 2. Literature Review

According to Ashley (2013) and Arksey (2018), personal, experience with loss is one of the factors that influence a counsellor's reaction to clients who present with grief. Through a qualitative study on 15 counsellors, Trish (2014) established that personal loss enabled the counsellor to relate caringly with grieving clients. On their part, Horn, Crews and Harrawood (2013) using a sample of professional counsellors working in a hospice established that personal loss made a counsellor less anxious when he or she encountered with a client who presented with anguish. Oulonova (2012) obtained qualitative data from 15 individuals bereaved through suicide and had been volunteering to counsel others who had been bereaved in the same manner for at least two years. The study established that a counsellor's personal experience with grief made him or her develop grief counselling competence. A similar finding was established by Bienski (2011) who gathered qualitative information from 8 board-certified genetic counselors in New England area. Thompson (2012) focused his study on counsellors' reflection on disenfranchised grief using a sample of professional counsellors and found that personal experience developed a counsellor's grief counselling competence. Contrary to these findings, other studies have shown that personal loss has negative influence on counsellors' grief counselling competence. Using a qualitative approach on a sample of 6 active therapists, Kouristis & Brown (2013) found that personal loss made some counsellors helpless and produce negative symptoms and outcomes that impede their grief counselling competence by reminding them their loss. Through a review of related literature, Wilson & Kirshbaum (2011) established that that when a patient dies in the hands of nurses, it negatively impacts on their psych both while they are in their work environment and outside. A qualitative study by Stacy (2010) on the effects that a student's loss to suicide has on school counsellors revealed that this traumatizes him or her when confronted with a client who is grieving as it recaps them of their personal loss. However, according to Weaver (2010), through a study that gathered data through an interview guide, personal experience with grief had a negligible influence on a counsellor's grief counselling competence. Most of the studies that have been reviewed were qualitative in nature and most respondents were professional counsellors whose sole work was

counselling. By using a mixed methods design, the researcher was able to obtain both the numerical and in-depth subjective views of the participants. From the literature reviewed on how teacher-counsellors' personal loss influence their grief counselling competence, contradictory findings were established. These contradictions called for further investigation of the phenomenon under study making the current study necessary. More research was needed in order to address this inconsistency and give clarity on how teacher-counsellors' personal loss influence their grief counselling competence. The current study was carried out to contribute to the discourse of grief counselling competence of counsellors from a secondary school setting.

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out in Kisii County among teacher-counsellors in various public secondary schools. It utilized a convergent parallel mixed methods design. This was because this design made it possible to verify, cross-validate and agree with data collected by both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This increased the possibility of offsetting limitations inherent in one approach with the potency of the other method (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2014). Teacher-counsellors who had experienced grief and received grief counselling in a period of one year to the time this study was carried out were the target population. Kisii County has 356 public secondary

schools and therefore 356 teacher-counsellors heading the department of guidance and counselling. Out of the 356, 181 were determined through Krejcie and Morgan Table (1970) of determining sample size and simple random sampling used to obtain the 181 teacher counsellors. Since both quantitative and qualitative data were sought for, data was obtained through a questionnaire and an interview guide. Piloting of the research tools was done and this increased their reliability and validity in collection of data. Information that was collected was analyzed through univariate statistics and thematic approach which was supported by narratives. This helped to provide in-depth synthesis of the findings.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

The analysis began with some background information such as; if they had ever lost a loved one, their relationship with the deceased, closeness to the deceased, length it took them to grieve and if they received any grief counselling. This formed the basis on which the influence their personal experience with loss had on their current grief counselling competence. This analysis is displayed on Tables 1 to 4.

Data gathered and analysed as displayed on Table 1 shows that all the respondents (n=181) had experienced loss.

**Table 1: Whether the respondents had ever experienced loss of a loved one**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	181	100
No	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The study sought information on whom the respondents had lost. The result is displayed on Table 2.

**Table 2: Whom the respondent had lost**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Father	40	22.1
Mother	19	10.5
Sister	18	9.9
Brother	18	9.9
Child	22	12.2
Close Friend	39	21.5
Spouse	2	1.1
Neighbour	23	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The analysis shows that 40 (22.1%) respondents had lost a father, 39 (21.5%) a close friend, 23 (12.7%) a neighbor,

22 (12.2%) a child, 19 (10.5%) a mother, 18 (9.9%) a brother, 18 (9.9%) a sister and 2 (1.1%) a spouse.

The study also sought information on the closeness of the person the respondents had lost. Table 3 displays the analysis.

**Table 3: Closeness to the person who died**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very Close	135	74.6
Close	32	17.7
Fairly Close	12	6.6
Not as Close	1	.6
Not Very Close	1	.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The analysis shows that 135 (74.6%) of the respondents were very close to the deceased. 32 (17.7%) were close, 12 (6.6%) were fairly close, 1 (0.6%) was not as close and 1 (0.6%) was not very close.

The research inquired from the respondents if they received any grief counselling when they experienced personal loss. Table 4 shows the result of the analysis.

**Table 4: Whether received any grief counselling**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	59	32.6
No	122	67.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

Results on table 4 show that 122 (67.4%) did not receive any grief counselling while 59 (32.6%) indicated that they had received.

after which the two were merged to have a common opinion and therefore reflect the influence personal loss had on their current grief counselling competence.

After obtaining the background data from teacher-counsellors on personal experience with loss, the next part analysed information on the influence this had on their current grief counselling competence. Quantitative data was analysed and the findings shown. Qualitative data was also analysed and the narration of findings was reflected

Being an emotive topic, the researcher wanted to establish if personal experience with loss made teacher-counsellors relaxed when undertaking grief counselling in public secondary schools in Kisii County. The findings are shown on Table 5.

**Table 5: Makes me relaxed when in grief counselling**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	61	33.7
No	120	67.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The analysis shows that 61 (33.7%) of the respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them relax while 120 (67.3%) indicated that it did not.

*student is going through (Personal communication, January, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018).*

TC2 commented that;

*Losing somebody dear is not a one plus one affair. It drains one emotionally. Even if all seems to be well, any encounter with a similar situation becomes a reminder of what happened. It is sometimes scaring and the picture of what happened flashes back. Some of us hold back tears because of knowing what the grieving*

A remark made by respondent TC12 was that;

*My personal experience exposed me to a painful situation which made me psychologically adjust to receiving such happenings. My ability to overcome my own grief removed fear in me and therefore created some degree of competence when supporting a grieving student (Personal communication, September, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018).*

From the analysis and narrations resulting from interviews, the study found that personal experience with loss did not make most teacher-counsellors relaxed when providing grief counselling to grieving students in their respective public schools in Kisii County.

The respondents were asked to point out if personal experience with grief instilled confidence or not. Table 6 shows the findings.

**Table 6: Instills Confidence in me**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	22	12.2
No	159	87.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The result shows that 159 (87.8%) of the respondents indicated that their personal loss did not instill confidence in them when they talked over the issue of grief with a grieving student. Those who indicated that personal loss instilled confidence in them when they were counselling a grieving student made up 12.2% (N=22).

Respondent TC6 noted that;

*My personal loss was therapeutic. It assisted me to have perseverance. It helped me to adjust and accommodate the fact that there is nothing one can do even if I grieved and thought about it indefinitely. Supporting others go forward, to me is a great thing and certainly helping grieving students is something I execute with passion because I practically know what they are going through (Personal communication, September, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018).*

Respondent TC5 stated that;

*After going through personal experience with loss, I promised that my personal experience would not be in vain. I would do everything at my disposal to try and stop somebody else going through the same sort of pain. Losing a loved one who had so much to give and so much to offer made me appreciate life and the time that I have on this earth. It made me want to, more than ever, help grieving students I see in pain and get them to look at the positives in their lives and really evaluate the happy events (Personal communication, September, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018).*

The researcher was keen on establishing if personal experience with loss made them keep away from grief counselling. The analysis is shown on Table 7.

**Table 7: What makes me keep away from Grief Counselling?**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	20	11
No	161	89
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The result shows that 161 (89%) indicated that personal experience with loss helped them not to keep away from grief counselling while 20 (11% indicated that it made them to keep away.

Respondent TC1 had this to note;

*After accepting the reality of death and the subsequent grief, I adjusted and it no longer burns. That strong feeling is no longer there. It only reminds me that I was once under a similar situation but*

*may not trigger painful memories to an extent that I can avoid the topic when supporting grieving students (personal communication, September, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018).*

The researcher inquired from the responded if personal experience with grief did not disturb or disturbed them when counselling grieving students. The result of the analysis is shown on Table 8.

**Table 8: Disturbs me when in Grief Counselling**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	46	25.4
No	135	74.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The result shown on Table 8 indicates that 135 (74.6) % of the respondents pointed out that personal experience with loss did not disturb them while 46 (25.4%) revealed that it revitalized their memory and therefore upset them when they were involved in counselling a grieving student.

Respondent TC3 made the following comment;

*The truth is that death is hurting but with time, I came to realize that however much one may want to stagnate in it, there is no reverse and it will*

*always happen. So I graduated from a state of denial to that of acceptance. This makes me not to be distressed when supporting a grieving student (personal communication, January, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019).*

The study sought information on if personal experience with grief made the respondents feel that death was part of human experience. The responses are analyzed and shown on Table 9.

**Table 9: Makes me feel that Death is part of Human Experience**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	124	68.5
No	57	31.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

From the analysis 124 (68.5%) respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them understand that death is part of human experience while 57 (31.5%) disclosed that it did not make them understand it to be part of human experience.

Respondent TC6 had this to comment;

*Personal experience with loss provided feelings that were considerate on the distinctive needs of grieving students because of their own personal loss. They pointed out on the significance of open conversation between me and the grieving student (Personal communication, September, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018).*

*Students feel things more powerfully and may not have the critical thinking abilities or expressions to show it. I try to assist them in identifying their grief and discussing it. Long term communication connection is essential; many people forget about the death after two weeks. Most students do not, and they agonize greatly when people don't understand why they aren't over it yet. I think that when hopelessness actually sets in, when everyone else appears to have moved on with their lives and the child can't, they rage over the perception that everyone has forgotten their loved one ever existed (personal communication, January, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019).*

Respondent TC10 in particular described the experiences with grieving students who had struggled after the loss of a loved one by saying:

Data on whether personal experience with grief caused discomfort when involved in grief counselling was collected. The findings are shown on Table 10.

**Table 10: Causes Discomfort when in Grief Counselling**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	50	27.6
No	131	72.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The analysis displays that 131 (72.4%) of the respondents revealed that personal experience with loss did not cause

discomfort in them when in grief counselling while 50 (27.6%) indicated that it caused them discomfort.

Another aspect that was sought for was on whether personal experience with grief made them verbalize their own grief easily or not. Table 11 shows the findings.

**Table 11: Makes me Verbalise my own Grief easily**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	93	51.4
No	88	48.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

From the data analyzed 93 (51.4%) of the respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them to freely verbalize their grief with a grieving student. 88 (48.6%) indicated that personal experience with death did not make them freely verbalize their personal experience with loss.

*not to feel they are the only unlucky people in the society who experience misfortune. They are not the only ones, which is calming to know that there are other people in the same situation (personal communication, January, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019).*

Respondent TC3 stated;

*My responses would have been different before my personal loss. With time, the pain doesn't go away but it gets easier and makes it easier for me to verbalize my personal grief. I have gone through some period since I was bereaved and I still have moments of why, how and if and all other psychological issues. But I now know that it doesn't matter what I do now, the deceased can never reappear. It left a massive void although the grief lessened. I found it very useful to verbalize my grief. The verbalizing made them*

The findings in this study did not have a clear stand on whether personal experience with loss made them verbalize their own grief easily or not because nearly a similar number of respondents accepted that it did and another similar number indicated that it didn't. However, findings from interviews strongly indicated that personal experience with loss made them easily verbalize their own grief while counselling grieving students in public secondary schools in Kisii County.

The researcher sought to establish if personal experience with loss caused uneasiness in them when executing grief counselling. Table 12 shows the findings.

**Table 12: Causes Uneasiness**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	159	87.8
<b>No</b>	22	12.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

The analysis shows that 159 (87.8%) of the respondents indicated that personal loss reduced their uneasiness when they counselled a grieving student while 22 (12.2%) indicated that their personal loss made them uneasy.

*recall being sad with the loss, but did not know how to express my feelings. But my situation helped me to deal with grieving students with less uneasiness (Personal communication, September, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018).*

From interviews, respondent TC1 noted that;

*Personal loss made me less anxious and a better helper in addressing loss among grieving students. When I encountered loss that involved my own close relatives, it was really painful. It was very difficult to communicate my feelings. I*

Respondent TC8 commented that it made him uneasy when supporting a grieving student.

*When I encounter a grieving student, I feel all nervous and shaky and feel that if I can't help them then they're going to feel that too. The memory of what happened to me and now to a*

*student makes me feel that they are suffering a lot of pain (personal communication, 5<sup>th</sup>, January, 2019).*

The study sought to establish if personal experience with loss had or had no effect when counselling grieving students. Table 13 displays the findings.

**Table 13: Had no effect**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	8	4
<b>No</b>	173	96
<b>Total</b>	181	100

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

From the responses given on Table 13, 8 (4%) of the respondents indicated that their personal experience with loss had no effect on their current grief counselling competence while 173 (96%) indicated that it influenced their current grief counselling competence. All (n=12) respondents who took part in interviews indicated that individual experiences with previous loss influenced their

current grief counselling competence in varied ways when supporting grieving students in public secondary schools in Kisii County.

Another aspect the researcher was interested in was if personal experience with loss made them feel empathetic or not.

**Table 14: Made them feel Empathetic**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Yes</b>	87	48
<b>No</b>	94	52

Source: *Study Findings, 2019*

Information contained on Table 14 reveals that 87 (48%) exposed that personal experience with loss made them empathetic and 94 (52%) revealed that it did not make them empathetic. Respondent TC10 remarked that;

*Empathy set in and I want to feel for that student. It made me develop the ability to better empathize with the student and to show compassion. The experience better prepared me to consider that the student may need to be sought after and provided with support (personal communication, 6<sup>th</sup>, January, 2019).*

This study found that those who revealed that personal experience with loss made them empathize were nearly equal with those who revealed that it did not.

## 4.2 Discussion

From the result reflected on Table 1, all respondents (n=181) had experienced the death of a loved one. This clearly indicates that death is a universal inescapable life event to everybody. Whereas other forms of loss may not happen to everybody, loss resulting from death will eventually or has occurred to everyone. From the findings, all participants (n=181) had experienced the loss of various loved ones. It is possible that others had experienced loss of more than one category of close person and therefore grieved in multiple periods. Most of the respondents (n=135) representing 74.6% revealed that they were very close to the deceased. This may have hurt

them a lot because the degree of closeness to the deceased is one of the variables that influence the magnitude of grief (Andres & Murillo, 2016). The degree of attachment is great when one is close to another. Therefore, when loss occurs, the grief is great and may take a long time to diminish. Results on shows that 122 (67.4%) did not receive any grief counselling while 59 (32.6%) indicated that they had received. This could be an indication that most bereaved persons do not receive grief counselling and it is possible that some still have unresolved grief long after experiencing personal loss. This finding confirms a finding by (Kouriatis & Brown, 2013) who established that most counsellors and people are uncomfortable with the topic of death and may shun it because some may not know what to tell the grieving. It is therefore possible that most bereaved students do not receive any grief counselling and thus may be keeping the pain long after interning their loved ones.

The analysis shows that 61 (33.7%) of the respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them confident while 120 (67.3%) indicated that it did not. This finding confirms the finding of Kouristis & Brown (2013) and Stacy (2010) who established that personal loss does not cause comfort to the counsellor when confronted with a client who is grieving as it recaps their experience with grief. The failure by teacher-counsellors to calm when supporting the psychological wellbeing of grieving students could be occasioned by the rekindling of memories of their own experience with death. The researcher observed that although some teacher-



counsellors support the psychological wellbeing of grieving students, their grief may not have fully diminished and thus get revived more often. This may explain why they did not calm fully when they provided grief counselling in their respective public secondary schools in Kisii County. The finding was contrary to that of Ashley (2013) that found that personal loss made the therapist relaxed when counselling grieving clients. These divergent findings may call for other studies on the same variables in different settings with the aim of further findings for the purpose of generalization. From the analysis and narrations from interviews, this study found that personal experience with loss did not help most teacher-counsellors accept the reality of death and the subsequent grief and therefore when counselling a grieving student, it made them not confident to offer such services. This finding is agreement with the findings on Table 5 that showed that personal loss did not make teacher-counsellors relaxed when executing grief counselling. These findings could be as a result of the rekindling of the teacher-counsellor's personal experience with loss.

The result shows that 161 (89%) indicated that personal experience with loss helped them not to keep away from grief counselling while 20 (11% indicated that it made them to keep away. Based on the responses, this study found that personal experience with loss assisted most teacher-counsellors in public secondary schools in Kisii County not to keep away from counselling grieving students and therefore the experience made their competence grow. This finding contradicted that of Wilson & Kirshbaum (2011) who found that when a patient dies in the hands of a nurse, it negatively impacts on their psych both while they are in their work environment and outside. This means that studies have not established a common finding on whether personal experience with loss helped counsellors not to keep away from counselling grieving students or not. This therefore calls for more studies on the same construct in diverse settings for the purpose of generality.

The result shown on Table 8 indicates that 135 (74.6) % of the respondents pointed out that personal experience with loss did not disturb them while 46 (25.4%) revealed that it revitalized their memory and therefore upset them when they were involved in counselling a grieving student. From these responses, this study established that personal experience with loss made them not to get disturbed when they were involved in counselling grieving students. This implies that their personal experience may have psychologically helped them to adjust and accept grief as part of human occurrence. This finding is contrary to that of Stacy's (2010) who established that personal experience with loss made counsellors upset when they encountered and got involved in counselling grieving clients. This finding implies that exposure to a situation however painful it may be, may possibly make some teacher-counsellors' grief counselling competence grow

because of the cognitive adjustments that such happening is bound to happen but life has to continue. These contradictory results may call for more studies on the same variable but in different settings to pave way for generalization of findings.

From the analysis 124 (68.5%) respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them understand that death is part of human experience while 57 (31.5%) disclosed that it did not make them understand it to be part of human experience. Therefore, this study found that personal experience with loss made the respondents grow professionally in the line of grief counselling because it made them understand that death is part of human experience. This finding was supported by the finding of Trish (2014) who found that counsellors who had experienced personal loss may have been made to understand death as part of human experience and therefore made their grief counselling competence grow. Their personal experience with loss may have given them exposure to grief which made them adjust to such happenings. The convergence of findings with those of the reviewed study may indicate and support the fact that personal experience with loss made teacher-counsellors understand that death is part of human experience.

The analysis displays that 131 (72.4%) of the respondents revealed that personal experience with loss did not cause discomfort in them when in grief counselling while 50 (27.6%) indicated that it caused them discomfort. This study established that personal experience with loss by the respondents encouraged their personal growth and therefore made them not to be uncomfortable when offering grief counselling services. This finding was contrary to that of Kouristis and Brown (2013) who found that personal loss made the counsellor to be helpless and produced negative symptoms and outcomes. Based on this disagreement in findings, more studies are required to find out if personal experience with loss caused discomfort on a counsellor when supporting grieving clients in diverse locales.

From the data analyzed 93 (51.4%) of the respondents indicated that personal experience with loss made them freely verbalize their grief with a grieving student. 88 (48.6%) indicated that personal experience with death did not make them freely verbalize their personal experience with loss. According to the researcher, the verbalization of their feelings could be an attempt by some of the respondents to also pour out their hidden grief as a way of relieving themselves. This is in agreement with the findings of Thompson (2012) who established that counsellors' personal experience with loss positively influenced their practice and competence in grief counselling.

The analysis shows that 159 (87.8%) of the respondents indicated that personal loss reduced their uneasiness when they counselled a grieving student while 22 (12.2%) indicated that their personal loss made them uneasy. This

study found that most respondents did not feel uneasy when offering grief counselling to grieving students in public secondary schools in Kisii County because their personal loss had made them psychologically adjust to such situations in life and accept death as finality in life. This finding concurs with that of Horn (2013) which established that when counsellors had experienced personal grief, they became less anxious when they encountered a client who presented with grief. This harmony in findings may be an indication that personal experience with grief among teacher-counsellors may have made them psychologically adjusted and therefore to some extent accommodate the pain associated with grief as they provided grief counselling services in schools among students.

From the responses given on Table 13, 8 (4%) of the respondents indicated that their personal experience with loss had no effect on their current grief counselling competence while 173 (96%) indicated that it influenced their current grief counselling competence. All (n=12) respondents who took part in interviews indicated that individual experiences with previous loss influenced their current grief counselling competence when supporting grieving students in public secondary schools in Kisii County. This finding contradicts that of Weaver (2010) who established that personal experience with grief had negligible influence on counsellors' grief counselling competence. The researcher's view was that it may have not been practically possible for one to experience loss and fail to have a feeling or effect when a similar situation occurred to others that could likely reawaken the pain they went through when they had their personal experience. These contradictory findings may call for further exploration on the influence of personal loss on the grief counselling competence of counsellors in varied fields for the purpose of generalization.

Information contained on Table 14 reveals that 87 (48%) exposed that personal experience with loss made them empathetic and 94 (52%) revealed that it did not make them empathetic. This calls for more studies to unfold what influence personal loss had on counsellors' empathy. Those who revealed that it created an empathetic feeling

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- Breen, L. J. (2010). towards the bereaved student are supported by a study by Trish (2014), who found that personal experience with grief enabled the counsellor to relate caringly with grieving clients because he or she was at one time hurt. The researcher found it unusual for some teacher-counsellors' not to have developed emphatic feelings to grieving students as a result of personal experience with loss because it is one of the core aspects that any counsellor needed to have. However, the narrative could be supporting the fact that personal loss may have made more teacher-counsellors acquire a compassionate feeling towards grieving students because they understood the situation these students were in.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

There is need to expose teacher-counsellors to more practical grief counselling activities through practicum in order to facilitate the development of their competence. This is because the study established that their personal experience with grief developed their competence in grief counselling competence. This exposure can be arranged by the Ministry of Education and the County department of education with the Ministry of public health so that at specific times, teacher-counsellors can visit grieving people in hospitals. These practical sessions will develop their competence in grief counselling

### 5.2 Recommendations

This study investigated personal experience with loss and how it influenced teacher-counsellors' current grief counselling competence while supporting grieving students in public secondary schools in Kisii County. The time frame on the length they were bereaved to the time they started counselling grieving students was not defined by the current study. Future studies should investigate the influence of the length of time teacher-counsellors experienced personal loss and the influence this had on their grief counselling competence.

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