

Beliefs in Reincarnation and the Power of Fate and Their Association With Emotional Outcomes Among Bereaved Parents of Fallen Soldiers

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This study investigated the influence of the belief in reincarnation (BR) and in the power of fate (BPF) as potential coping resources in the shadow of loss and bereavement. Ninety bereaved parents, Jews and Druze (a sect that diverged from Islam in the 11th century), whose sons were killed in military action participated in this study. Druze respondents endorsed a belief in reincarnation more strongly than Jews. Druze were also far more fatalistic than their Jewish counterparts and expressed a stronger belief in the power of fate. More Jews than Druze expressed difficulties accepting their son's death and believing he was gone. Druze parents reported experiencing significantly less helplessness, guilt, and anger compared to Jewish controls. The value of enhanced cultural awareness during psychotherapy in a rapidly changing, multicultural world is discussed.

Bereavement following the death of a child is a major universal stressor with potential psychopathological consequences (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2005; Rubin, 1999; Rubin & Malkinson, 2001). In response to such untimely tragedy, grieving parents may feel responsible for their child's death and experience confusion, anger, sadness, and difficulties carrying out daily responsibilities (Davies, 2001; Mizota, Ozawa, Yamazaki, & Inoue, 2006; Shear, Houck, & Reynolds, 2005) that can linger for many years (e.g., Rogers et al., 2008). The experience of such a cruel turn of fate has also been noted as a cause of fury and anxiety (Flanigan, 1992; Ronel & Lebel,

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2006). Malkinson and Bar-Tur (2005) report that the moment of notification of a child's loss is often remembered, even decades later, in minute detail, with intense emotions and somatic reactions similar to those observed in posttraumatic distress. A recent study showed that the violence of the death and the age of the child at death accounted for significant differences in normative grief symptoms. Violent death was the only objective risk factor that significantly predicted the intensity of complicated grief (Keesee et al., 2008). Another universal characteristic of burial and grief is related to liturgical rites associated with the passage of the soul into the afterlife.

GENDER AND PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT

Tarakeshwar, Hansen, Kochman, and Sikkema (2005) examined bereavement and gender and suggested that females are more likely to invoke religion or faith as a bereavement coping mechanism than their male counterparts. Women, more so than men, have been shown to enact an intuitive style of grieving, while men tend to employ a more instrumental style of grieving (e.g., Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 2000; Martin & Doka, 2000). The two bereavement styles vary in two major ways: (a) the level of grief experienced and (b) the grief coping mechanisms preferred. The intuitive style involves intense grief, overt expression of emotion, and seeking others' support, whereas the instrumental style includes milder grief, a more introverted handling of emotion favoring cognitive expression, and greater self-reliance through activity (Martin & Doka, 2000). Little is known about gender differences in mourning among bereaved parents outside North America.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND BEREAVEMENT

In most religions, the death of a human being is related with the ascent of the spirit to a heavenly realm, a process often facilitated by clergy, whose role includes providing support for the bereaved. Dying and religion are inextricably entwined in human experience. Theological doctrines of the world's religions prescribe and contextualize the meaning, rituals, and aftermath of human dying, and religious coping with death has been documented in the scientific literature (Hays & Hendrix, 2008). Evidence regarding the impact of religiosity on mourners suggests that faith may have a significant buffering effect on Asian mourners (Shih, Turale, Shih, & Tsai, 2010), but only a modest effect on American mourners (Higgins, 2002). Very little is known about the relation between religiosity and bereavement in Middle Eastern cultures.

Religiosity is conceptualized in several ways: the totality of a belief system, an inner piety or disposition, or ritual practices (Wulff, 1997). Although religious activity and behaviors (e.g., prayer) are not consistently associated with less death anxiety or grief, the integrity of specific religious beliefs may play a greater role (Fortner, Neimeyer, & Rybarczyk, 2000). A central psycho-spiritual construct in Middle Eastern cultures is the belief in the power of fate (Barakat, 1980), or fatalism (the belief that future events are inevitable or unalterable). In Western culture, a positive sense of control over one's life is considered essential for maintaining health and well-being. Those with a strong sense of control believe changes in their social world are responsive to their choices, actions, and efforts, whereas a sense of powerlessness or fatalism is at the other end of the continuum (Bruce & Thornton, 2004). Little is known about how the socially congruent Middle Eastern construct of fatalism is related to coping with bereavement.

The role that religious or spiritual beliefs play in bereavement is still unclear. Becker et al. (2007) concluded, following a review of 32 studies on the impact of religious or spiritual beliefs on bereavement, that there is a lack of evidence in the field because of weaknesses in design and methodological flaws. Among the recommendations for future studies on the impact of religion on bereavement offered by Becker and her colleagues was the need to include a control group.

Although empirical research suggests that religious beliefs can be valuable in coping (e.g., see review by Pargament, 1997), few bereavement studies have focused on death-specific religious attitudes, which are believed to play a central role in the grieving process for many people (Park & Folkman, 1997). Benore and Park (2004) proposed that death-specific beliefs are part of a global meaning system and are both important psychological phenomena in their own right, as well as critical for examining how bereaved people cope with death. They described two death-specific religious beliefs as functional components of bereavement: (a) belief in an afterlife and (b) continued attachment (describing people's experiences or perceptions of some form of continued attachment with the deceased). Belief in an afterlife could aid in emotional adjustment to the loss of the departed. People who believe that the most important aspect of their religion is that it offers the possibility of life after death have been found to have more depression and distress (Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, & Thomas-Dobson, 1995), which suggests that belief in an afterlife used primarily as a deferring coping strategy is ineffective. However, when belief in an afterlife is an integral part of one's global meaning, it has been shown to be helpful in the processes of appraisal, coping, and adjustment to bereavement (Benore & Park, 2004). Survivors with a stronger belief in an afterlife tend to adapt more easily to the death of a loved one, reporting good recovery after the loss and feeling comfortable with their understanding of the loss (e.g., Conant, 1996; Hogan & DeSanctis, 1996a, 1996b).

THE BELIEF IN REINCARNATION

The belief in reincarnation (BR), another death-specific belief, and its relation to bereavement and grief has gained little, if any, attention in the psychological research literature. Reincarnation forms one of the foundations of religious mysticism. It is a basic tenet of both Hinduism and Buddhism, which teach that the soul of every person and plant is eternal and returns, after death, in another form (Drury, 1985). The concept is also found in divergent schools of Judaism (Somer, 1997, 2004) and among the Druze, descendants of Muslim Arabs who diverged from Islam in the 11th century but continue to maintain their Arabic language and culture. Today, the Druze number about 800,000 in Syria, 400,000 in Lebanon, and 90,000 in Israel (Qasem, 1995). According to the Druze faith, all human souls were created in one moment, and their number is fixed for all time. Reincarnation (*tanasukh*) is crucial to Druze identity. Believers maintain that when a Druze dies, the soul is immediately reborn in another Druze body, or reborn beyond the human realm into the next ascending realm of closeness to God (Bennet, 2006). Unlike Hindu or Buddhist ideas, subsequent lives are not seen as dependent on action in past lives or as going in a particular direction (Daie, Witztum, Mark, & Rabinovitz, 1992). The physical body is seen as a temporary vehicle for the eternal soul. As a consequence, burials are simple and mourning is minimal. It is believed that faith in Druze reincarnation into other Druze has had a great deal of influence on the solidarity and cohesion of this small ethno-religious minority that does not accept converts and prohibits marriage outside the group (Betts, 1988).

THE DRUZE

In Israel, the Druze community constitutes the smallest of the country's Arab communities. One of the traditions that has helped the Druze survive as a group is probably their loyalty to the state in which they reside. Thus, Syrian Druze identify themselves with the goals of Syria, while most Israeli Druze men serve in the Israel Defense Force and identify with Israeli causes (Daie et al., 1992). Many Druze are convinced that the belief in the transmigration of souls is useful in leading to fearlessness in battle and quote a Druze battle cry, "Tonight my mother's womb" (I'll be killed in battle today, but I shall be instantly reincarnated), which may go some way toward explaining the ferociousness of the Druze in war (Fisk, 1992; Littlewood, 2001). Mourning among the Druze is usually restricted to a short period, and overt grieving at funerals is discouraged (Firro, 1992; Littlewood, 2001).

This research aims to examine how belief in transmigration of souls among bereaved Druze affects their distress and relationship to a fallen

son. BR cuts across geographical, political, factional, and class divides within the Druze sect. The anthropologist Littlewood (2001) reported that when asked directly about any personal value for BR, Druze unanimously agreed it had validity in binding together, as a single community, people who were dispersed over four different countries with diverse public policies of their respective governments. Bennet (2006) reports that reciprocal social relations ensue from relationships with discovered reincarnated kin that are actually not consanguine or affine.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is part of a larger effort to examine the cross-cultural relevance of current theories on coping with loss, in general, and Rubin's two-track model of bereavement (1999), in particular. The current study aims at investigating the influence of the belief in reincarnation and the belief in the power of fate (BPF) as coping resources in the shadow of loss and bereavement. Evidence suggests that both problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies employed by civilians under the duress of the suicide bombing campaign launched against Israelis in the early 2000s (the Al-Aqsa Intifada) were consistently associated with prolonged, intense psychological distress. The exception to this was acceptance (e.g., "I learned to live with the situation"), which was the only strategy associated with better psychological outcomes (Somer, Ruvio, Soref, & Sever, 2005). Under the tragic and uncontrollable circumstances of having lost a child in battle and the chronic stress associated with the calamity, BR and BPF could be regarded as acceptance-based coping mechanisms that would be predicted to be advantageous psychological assets. Furthermore, restrained acceptance of Allah's will in the face of loss seems to be an important characteristic of the culturally related Israeli Muslim mourning tradition (Rubin & Yasien-Esmael, 2004).

The following research questions were the focus of the current research. First, do bereaved Druze parents believe more strongly in reincarnation and the power of fate than a bereaved Jewish comparison group? Second, do Druze parents cope better with their son's loss compared to their Jewish comparisons? Finally, compared to Jewish comparison parents, do Druze parents show more acceptance of their tragic loss?

METHODS

Sample

We examined 90 Druze and Jewish bereaved fathers and mothers who lost their soldier sons no longer than 15 years prior to data collection and were

assigned, according to the Israeli military protocol, to a casualties officer (the second author). The sample for this study was nonclinical and was representative of the investigated population.

The response rate was 75%. There were 57 Jewish (63.3%) and 33 Druze (36.7%) respondents. Fifty-three percent of the Jewish parents and 37% of the Druze parents lost their sons during the 1990s; the others were bereaved in the first decade of the 21st century, $\chi^2(1) = 2.222$, ns. The circumstances of death for the Jewish and the Druze soldiers were as follows: combat, 26 (45%) and 14 (43%), respectively; motor vehicle accidents, 9 (16%) and 6 (18%), respectively; training accidents, 9 (16%) and 7 (21%), respectively; terrorist attack, 5 (9%) and 2 (6%), respectively; and suicide, 5 (9%) and 4 (12%), respectively. For 3 Jewish soldiers (5%), cause of death was undisclosed. With the exception of one Jewish soldier who died in the hospital a few days after he had sustained his mortal injuries and one Druze soldier who died 33 days following his injury, all soldiers were killed instantly. Viewing of the bodies is discouraged by the Israel Defense Forces, and none of the families requested it. While Jews and Druze are buried in shrouds, Israeli soldiers of all faiths are buried in caskets.

Jews and Druze were similar in terms of age ($M = 56.57$, $SD = 4.62$, and $M = 57.12$, $SD = 6.42$, respectively), $t(88) = -0.425$, ns; gender (40.4% and 51.5% male, respectively), $\chi^2(1) = 1.055$, ns; marital status (88% and 100% married, respectively), $\chi^2(3) = 4.394$, ns; and economic status (84% and 85%, respectively, estimated their household income as average). The Druze group had fewer years of education ($M = 12.5$, $SD = 2.4$, and $M = 8.6$, $SD = 2.7$, respectively), $\chi^2(1) = 24.416$, $p < .001$, and tended to live exclusively in rural villages (100%), while 83% of the Jews were city dwellers, $\chi^2(1) = 52.974$, $p < .001$, and more Druze than Jews considered themselves religious (55% and 7%, respectively), $\chi^2(2) = 35.255$, $p < .001$. An average of 8.25 years ($SD = 2.91$) had passed since the fall of a Jewish son, compared to the average passage of 7.02 years ($SD = 3.55$) since the demise of a Druze son, $t(88) = 1.79$, $p < .035$.

Research Procedure

This research received the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Haifa and was conducted with the permission of welfare authorities in the Israel Defense Forces' Northern Command. The second author, a social worker and a former casualties officer in the Northern Command of the Israel Defense Forces, had approached families from her past professional caseload and invited them to participate in the study. Since the second author was no longer in active or reserve military duty, there were no conflicts of interest or dual relationships. Only families assessed to be emotionally stable enough to warrant safe participation in a study about their losses were invited to take part in this investigation. Couples who were coping with other medical, personal, or economical crises were excluded. The informed consent included an understanding that emotional support would be offered

upon request following data collection. Seventy-five percent of the original participant pool gave informed consent and completed the research questionnaires. To provide Druze respondents with an equal opportunity to participate in their mother tongue, a professional translated all Hebrew language research questionnaires into Arabic. The Arabic translations were back-translated into Hebrew by a second bilingual professional and compared by a third linguist to check for inconsistencies. The translators discussed discrepancies until consensus was achieved.

Pilot trials we conducted with the intended instruments allowed us to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaires. However, inconsistent cooperation due to language difficulties, primarily by Druze respondents, required shortening two of our research instruments and administering questionnaires as structured interviews (for comparison purposes, the same research procedures were applied to the entire research sample). Data were collected in the participants' homes by the second author and her research assistant.

Instruments

Data for this and another separate study were jointly collected via four research questionnaires. Two instruments were selected to gauge the study's independent variables: a biographic questionnaire and a belief in religion, fate, and reincarnation questionnaire. The latter was constructed especially for this study and was composed of new items and items borrowed from existing instruments that, in the authors' judgment, captured best the unique elements of faith relevant to the investigated population. Two additional instruments were chosen to assess our dependent variables: the Inventory of Traumatic Grief, an instrument that was judged to be relevant to the loss of a soldier son, and a brief measure of common grief reactions, the Grief Behavior Questionnaire. Following pilot trials we concluded that, to minimize dropout among our rural respondents and to guarantee optimal cooperation, we needed to use shorter versions of our research questionnaires whenever feasible.

Independent Variables

BIOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire requested background data such as gender, age, marital status, ethnic origin, level of religiosity, and education. In addition, respondents were requested to state the year their son died in battle.

RELIGIOSITY, FATALISM AND REINCARNATION QUESTIONNAIRE (RFRQ)

The RFRQ includes 22 items on a 5-point Likert scale describing the psycho-spiritual constructs of religiosity and the belief in fate and reincarnation. The RFRQ was adapted for the specific cultural context of the

investigated population and included elements from existing measures of religiosity (e.g., "I believe in God," "I adhere to the commandments of my faith"; Schellekens & Eisenbach, 2010) and fatalism (e.g., "Human fate is pre-determined so there is no sense in blame," "No one can escape his/her fate"; Khamis, 2008), as well as a specifically developed measure of BR (e.g., "The spirit lives forever and never dies," "When a person dies he/she is reborn elsewhere so there is no use in mourning"). A pretest was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the RFRQ, with 40 Jewish and Druze respondents participating. The RFRQ's Cronbach alpha scores in the pretest ranged from very good (.87 for the Druze sample) to excellent (.94 for the Jewish sample). The instrument's overall reliability in the current study was excellent (Cronbach alpha = .96 for the entire bicultural sample), as were the Cronbach alpha scores for the RFRQ's subscales (Religiosity, .96; BR, .94; and Fatalism, .82). A varimax factor analysis revealed a single factor for the RFRQ explaining 73% of the variance.

Dependent Variables

INVENTORY OF TRAUMATIC GRIEF (ITG)

The ITG (Cronbach alpha = .95) (Prigerson et al., 1996; Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001) consists of 34 items measuring two categories of traumatic grief on a 5-point Likert scale: separation distress (e.g., feelings of longing and yearning) and traumatic distress (e.g., anger or an attempt to stay away from other people). Internal consistency for this instrument has been reported to be excellent. Both the original Hebrew validation of the questionnaire (Karniel-Lauer, 2004) and its current administration as part of a separate study showed exceptional reliability (Cronbach alpha = .97 and .92, respectively). Nevertheless, to optimize response rate and cooperation, we decided to gauge acceptance of son's death with Items 4 ("I have difficulties accepting my son's death") and 8 ("I still find it hard to believe that my son is gone") of the ITG.

GRIEF BEHAVIOR QUESTIONNAIRE-REVISED (GBQ-R)

The GBQ-R contains 10 items on a 6-point Likert scale and was specifically adapted for this research sample from Gorer (1965) and Tamir (1987). The GBQ-R measures the degree of preoccupation with the deceased and intensity of grief. To adapt the study to our rural respondents, we decided to gauge only grieving emotions as follows: When you are reminded of your son, to what extent do you feel sadness, longing, helplessness, bitterness, guilt, and anger? In this study, grieving indices were used for descriptive purposes. Computing the internal reliability of the GBQ-R was unsuitable because we decided not to use the instrument's unified score; instead, we regarded the above-mentioned indices of grief as separate dependent variables.

Data Analysis Plan

We planned to examine between-group differences in the independent and dependent variables with a series of *t* tests. We also intended to perform a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to examine the impact of ethnicity on loss-related grief indices. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the relationships between the belief in the power of fate and the study's grief indices and between the belief in reincarnation and the same grief indices.

RESULTS

Bereaved Druze parents endorsed a belief in reincarnation more strongly than Jewish parents, $t(88) = -13.968$, $p < .001$, $r = .70$. Druze respondents were also far more fatalistic than their Jewish counterparts and expressed a stronger belief in the power of fate, $t(88) = -12.996$, $p < .001$, $r = .68$. This outcome persisted even when the duration of bereavement was held constant in a multivariate analysis of covariance, with higher BR and fatalism scores among Druze, $F(3, 86) = 144.847$, $p < .001$, and $F(3, 86) = 158.923$, $p < .001$, respectively, thus confirming our first hypothesis.

We further hypothesized that Druze parents would cope better with their son's loss compared to Jewish comparison parents. Acceptance of the son's death was gauged by Items 4 ("I have difficulties accepting my son's death") and 8 ("I still find it hard to believe that my son is gone") of the ITG. Compared to Druze parents, difficulties in accepting their sons' death were more severe among Jewish parents ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.52$, and $M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.43$, respectively), $t(88) = 3.42$, $p < .0001$. Compared to Druze parents, Jewish parents also found it harder to believe their sons were gone ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.43$, and $M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.52$, respectively), $t(88) = 3.23$, $p < .002$. These results confirmed our second research hypothesis.

The RFRQ includes assessments of the extent to which coping with the son's death was aided by BR or fatalism. Using the median as a dividing point, responders were initially sorted into high and low endorsers to allow for a MANOVA that would assess the effects of ethnicity, BPF, and BR on indices of grief. We found no Druze parents who were low endorsers of BPF and BR, and therefore we could not perform the MANOVA as planned. Twenty-one percent of the Jewish parents indicated that BR helped with their coping, compared with 97% of the Druze, $\chi^2(2) = 48.973$, $p < .001$. Twenty-eight percent of the Jews indicated that fatalism helped them cope with their misfortune, compared to 100% of the Druze, $\chi^2(2) = 43.598$, $p < .001$. These findings imply that Druze parents, who believed more firmly in BR and fatalism, showed better adjustment to their family tragedy compared to the bereaved Jewish group, rendering support to our second research hypothesis. Further evidence that Druze respondents (characterized by their belief in the power of fate and in reincarnation) coped better with the loss of their sons can

be seen in the results of a MANOVA on the effect of ethnicity on indices of grief. As shown in Table 1 unlike the Jewish comparison group, the Druze expressed almost no guilt or anger in relation to their calamity. While the Druze reported more sadness over the losses of their sons, they expressed significantly less helplessness, Hotteling trace $F(6, 80) = 19.68, p < .0001$.

The lack of variance in BPF and BR among the Druze impeded the examination of the relationships between BPF and BR and indices of grief. A weak negative Pearson correlation between BR and bitterness was measured among the Druze ($r = -.3, p < .05$) indicating that belief in reincarnation is associated with decreased grief-related bitterness. Among Jewish parents, BR was negatively associated with longing and anger ($r = -.27, p < .05$, and $r = -.42, p < .01$, respectively) and BPF was negatively associated with anger ($r = -.53, p < .01$).

To test the third hypothesis predicting that bereaved Druze would show milder symptoms of grief and anger, we compared our two research groups on GBQ-R items describing the following reactions of emotional distress: sadness, longing, helplessness, bitterness, guilt, and anger. Responders were divided into high and low endorsers in a procedure identical to that described earlier. While none of our respondents of either ethnicity reported low levels of sadness and longing, more Jews than Druze reported experiences of helplessness (82% and 52%, respectively), $\chi^2(2) = 8.707, p < .05$; guilt (35% and 6%; respectively), $\chi^2(2) = 21.372, p < .001$; and anger (60% and 9%, respectively), $\chi^2(2) = 33.580, p < .001$. There were no differences between the two ethnic groups as far as the experience of bitterness was concerned (Jews, 63%; Druze, 68%), $\chi^2(2) = 2.997, ns$. Regardless of their cultural background, bereaved parents expressed elevated levels of sadness and longing and similar degrees of bitterness. However, grieving Druze showed milder symptoms of helplessness, guilt, and anger, thus rendering partial support to our third hypothesis.

TABLE 1 Multivariate and One-Way Analyses of Variance for the Effects of Ethnicity on Grief Behavior.

	Jews		Druze		ANOVA	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F(1, 85)</i>	η^2
Sadness	4.76	0.58	5	0	5.39*	0.06
Missing	4.93	0.26	5	0	2.45	0.03
Helplessness	4.35	1.20	3.66	1.73	4.76*	0.05
Bitterness	3.89	1.42	3.38	2.09	1.87	0.02
Guilt	2.87	1.62	0.56	1.16	49.88**	0.37
Anger	3.64	1.67	0.75	1.48	65.49**	0.44

Note. η^2 = effect size.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Additionally, *t* tests revealed no significant gender effect on the various grief indices and no interaction between gender and ethnicity. ANOVAs performed on the independent variables of ethnicity and gender and the dependent grief variables yielded no significant outcomes.

DISCUSSION

BR and BPF were not unique to the Druze respondents, but in response to our first research question we found that bereaved Druze parents believed more strongly in reincarnation and in the power of fate compared to their Jewish counterparts. This is in line with a previous report showing that while less than 10% of Druze seemed to have firmly accepted memories of a past life, all respondents stated that they had been reincarnated (Littlewood, 2001). The psychological substitution of the dead relative by the hypothetical reincarnation thereof seems to occur at a fairly early stage in the grieving process. Mourning among the Druze was reported to be restricted to a short period, and overt grieving is usually discouraged (Abu Rokun, 1988; Firro, 1992; Stevenson, 1980). A probable psycho-sociological interpretation would be that having reincarnation beliefs to account for violent deaths in war advantageously lessens socially wasteful mourning in the context of a central religious tenet that already provides solidarity and unity for a community under immediate threat. This study showed that BR and BPF also have clear advantages as coping frameworks under the stress of grief.

Our data suggest that when examined in contrast to the comparison group, those who believed in reincarnation and were more resigned to the power of fate reported better adjustment to their family tragedy, thus rendering support to our second research hypothesis. In Littlewood's study (2001), Druze spoke of reincarnation beliefs as support for the bereaved person. Though few of the personal characteristics of the dead are believed to continue in their soul, enough is believed to survive to lessen the loss of the loved one's identity. Psychological theory deriving from Western experience argues that the reality of the loss has to be accepted, and only then, based on acceptance, can emotional pain be worked through, resulting in a psychological disengagement from the departed (Rando et al., 1991). Druze ideas would seem to contradict this Western conceived process of mourning. Our data show that despite the apparent denial of the finality of death inherent in the Druze BR, fewer Druze expressed difficulties accepting their son's death and believing their son was gone compared to their Jewish counterparts. These findings suggest that when traumatic loss occurs within a coherent framework of meaning that dialectically accepts both the permanent separation from the corporeal son and his immediate rebirth (with the implied hope for a reunion), acceptance of the horrific news is more bearable. While a minority of the Druze parents struggled with acceptance of their

tragic loss, a large majority of the bereaved Jewish parents refused to accept the reality of the permanent separation from their beloved son.

The Druze rejection of the permanency of their deceased's departure does not necessarily mean that psychologically "unhealthy" grieving mechanisms of denial or dissociation are employed. Our comparative assessment of feelings of grief showed that bereaved parents of both ethnicities expressed substantial feelings of sadness and longing for their fallen sons and similar degrees of bitterness over the untimely tragedy. BR and BPF do not promise immunity from the pain of premature separation from a loved one. However, the Druze showed lower levels of helplessness, less guilt, and a smaller degree of anger, thus rendering support to our third research hypothesis.

Previous studies have found problem-focused coping to be at least minimally effective in negative association with stressful situations (e.g., Sharkansky et al., 2000; Suvak, Vogt, Savarese, King, & King, 2002). However, the results of the current study imply that a fatalistic approach that tends to accept calamities as inevitable developments beyond the control of humans appears to be associated with fewer psychological symptoms. An earlier study on the coping of Israelis under the chronic threat of terror (Somer et al., 2005) showed that the reappraisal of the chronic, inescapable, and uncontrollable situation and the distancing from its horrors associated with an acceptance strategy of coping was the only effective (as well as the most commonly used) way of coping employed. There is little problem-focused coping could contribute to ameliorate grief over the loss of a loved family member. It is conceivable that in the face of the uncontrollable and irreversible tragedy, culturally ingrained fatalism may have aided our Druze participants in their emotional adjustment. While we demonstrated that bereaved respondents high in BPF fare better emotionally, fatalism may have an adverse outcome among survivors directly exposed to the threats of war (e.g., Ehlers & Clark, 2000; Khamis, 2008; Stallard & Smith, 2007). Further research is needed to decipher the differential roles that fatalistic views may play in coping with various stressors in diverse cultures.

Several limitations should be taken into account when considering our findings. First, data for this study were based exclusively on self-report measures. Although self-report measures are much easier to administer, especially in cross-cultural research, it is possible that our instruments did not sufficiently gauge the multifaceted nature of enduring attachments to the fallen sons and the adjustment to their demise. Despite the fact that we took great care to back-translate all of the measures, it is possible that the concepts presented held different meanings for the Hebrew speaking Jews and Arabic speaking Druze who agreed to participate in this research study.

Second, many of our respondents were not culturally accustomed to sharing personal emotional information, let alone reporting this in a research setting. While pilot trials with the original instruments allowed us to evaluate

the reliability of questionnaires, inconsistent cooperation, primarily by our rural respondents, caused us to shorten two of our instruments and administer the questionnaires as structured interviews. It may very well be that we did not have an “ideal” college-educated respondent sample, yet we trust that we optimally adapted our investigative methods to the realities of this unique and culturally diverse sample.

Third, the representativeness of the study was limited by the sampling method, driven primarily by the professional acquaintances and contacts of the second author; thus, it may reflect an unknown sampling bias. Future research on the subject should be longitudinal, to compensate for the cross-sectional nature of this study, and should include larger samples to guarantee better generalizability.

This study marks the first step in exploring how culturally contextualized beliefs in reincarnation and the power of fate may help the bereaved. It is also one of the few studies on Druze religious beliefs, traditionally regarded as esoteric if not secret, and their impact on mental health. The field of culture-sensitive mental health practice and research has been a focus of worldwide interest (e.g., Comas-Díaz, 2011; Hays, 2009). In the era of a multicultural world, culture is seen to be as important as biochemistry in the emergence of psychopathology and its treatment. This study adds to the growing body of literature on the importance of cultural context in understanding not only psychopathology, but also effective resources for coping with stress in adverse situations.

In today’s multicultural world, more effort is needed to bolster awareness of biases and cross-cultural blindness and to improve the ability of mental health professionals to promote knowledge and skills important to the cultures of those with whom they work. In doing so, effort and practice is needed to alter the automatically favorable perceptions of the educated, privileged, or majority group and the perceptions of those whose historical roles in society have been viewed negatively (Vasquez, 2005, 2007).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

More research is recommended to assess the impact of cultural beliefs on the construction of loss and grief and on indigenous ways of coping with grief. This would be a complicated endeavor, as results of studies investigating cross-cultural issues in mental health often consider different phenomena with mostly heterogeneous groups of respondents with various symptoms and a range of capacities to respond to Western-style research. However, it is an important goal to explore useful psychological resources unknown to Western psychology, as well as to identify unique factors related to the promotion of psychological well-being in cross-cultural psychotherapy.

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