

Abstract

The present study investigates a bereavement training programme with a group of volunteer lay counsellors. In South Africa, the number of orphans resulting from an increase in parental deaths from natural causes, such as AIDS and non-natural causes, for example violence, is increasing rapidly. The increasing number of bereaved children is creating a demand for professional support services that cannot be met by the present number of trained professionals. To address this imbalance, the training of lay counsellors is proposed. It is thus relevant to train those who are willing to help with the necessary knowledge and skills in a bereavement training programme.

The present study involves ten volunteers from a Community Centre. Qualitative research methods are employed to analyse the data that is gained from the pre- and post-training responses to the interviews and Case Examples. Content analysis is used to elucidate the themes that emerge from the collected data. The results of the present study indicate that perceptual and developmental changes have occurred within the volunteers following the training programme, however, it is evident that further training is necessary because of the limited ability that the volunteers demonstrate in practically transferring the knowledge to new cases. In terms of this finding it is clear that factors such as language, age, educational level and personal experiences of death are important criteria to consider in the selection of volunteers for a bereavement training programme. Furthermore, traditional African perspectives of death, cultural differences and HIV/AIDS awareness need to be incorporated into future bereavement training programmes. In terms of the outcomes of the study, a positive outcome is the revision of the Bereavement Programme for children, taking cognisance of cultural sensitiveness, to make it more applicable within the local context. The results of the study also highlight the limitations and implications of the present research, which are discussed and recommendations for future research are made.