

Wish I could see you without closing my eyes: Thematic Analysis of dream content of grieved parents with the perspective of religious, cultural and psychological dimensions

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Summary. Mostly bereaved individuals encounter vivid and profoundly meaningful dreams highlighting the presence of the deceased who can embody and influence the grieving process. Eastern society in general and Pakistan in particular, psychological literature on dreams during grief has been generally ignored. The current study is aimed to investigate the presence of recurring themes in the dreams that embodied the deceased child as a character. In this investigation semi-structured interviews were held with 4 bereaved couples in Pakistan. Generally their age ranges from 24 to 48 years and causes of their wards death includes accident, homicide, illness, and suicide. Each of the respondents stated the dreams that occurred following the death of their loved ones and volunteered to share the experience with the researcher. Thematic Analysis (TA) was applied to identify and describe meaningful patterns from the interview transcripts. Considering the lack of research into this topic, the aim was to look for pragmatic perceptions.

Keywords: Dreams, grieved parents, deceased child, dream analysis, thematic analysis

1. Introduction

In the wake of such traumatic and grieved period who do not desire to see or hear from their departed loved ones? Normally people under study experience and also want to have the same experience in dreams; but this seems to be impossible to some or otherwise. This can and often does happen in our dreams. After death, dreams of our loved ones are quite common. We know how important dreams are to our overall health and well-being, but dreams also play an important role in healing our grief and sometime increasing our grief. During the day, we can distract ourselves with various activities, but when we sleep, we are more relaxed and open. Our unconscious mind is free to wander and process the emotions we may try to avoid during the day (Mendoza, 2019).

Dreaming is indeed a common human phenomenon that has sparked considerable conceptual, psychological, and analytical debate. Psychoanalytic, existentialist, and cognitive psychology theories have been proposed for the purpose and processes of dreams. Irrespective of one's psychological approach to dream research, there is indeed a common consensus that conscious experiences in life, in-

cluding particular events, associated emotions, images, and emotional conditions, affect dream representation (Germain et al., 2013),

Losing a child can be such a stressful experience in the lives of many people and because of which the feelings felt in waking life experienced in shape of dreams, dreams are very significant in the grief process (Cookson, 1990). Along with other psychological traumas the dreams can be distressing in content, and the grieved can relive the trauma of death in their dreams that typically occurs straight after death (Duval & Zadra, 2010). Dreams are a typical reaction to trauma because trauma triggers a high degree of emotional arousal in everyday lives (Hartmann, 2010; Schredl, 2006) (Stoddard, Chedekel, & Shakun, 1996); associated dreams then provide great detail of the emotions that arise from the traumatic experience (Hartmann, 2010). Exposure to traumatic experiences, including a greater occurrence of post-traumatic dreams, nightmares, bad dreams, and recurring dreams, can lead to a plethora of dream-related disruptions. Characteristics associated with the traumatic event itself as well as the person subjected to it can mediate the emergence and frequency of such dream-related disturbances. This was shown in research by Hartmann (1998) who investigated the dreams that appeared after a traumatic experience and discovered that the dreams typically depicted the traumatic event, then the dreams reviewed the particular emotions (terror, fear, or survivor's guilt). The dreams were investigated by Najam, Mansoor, Kanwal, and Naz (2006) of the earthquake victims and noted that, relative to the control group, those who survived the earthquake had dream material that was emotional, vivid, distressing, frightening, and violent. Relevance to death was shown in a study by Kroth et al. (2004), who examined the perinatal bereavement of women and found that trauma sufferers showed higher

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psychological pain and there were more dreams referencing deaths. The bereaved may dream of their death while mourning, and Barrett (1988) explains that this may occur because of the struggle to acknowledge one's morbidity that takes place in waking life. Dreams' frequency and the magnitude of the content differ according to the degree of seriousness of the experience, the degree of vulnerability, and the time frame since the tragedy (Duval & Zadra, 2010). Dreams can also differ with the nature of death, the dreamer's relation to the person who died, and the symbolic representations of death. The dream of trauma sometimes takes the form of a flashback, especially in early grief and in incidents of traumatic deaths, such as homicides, suicides, and accidents, in particular. The dreamer feels helpless and frightened several times (Wray & Price, 2005). Usually, there is a feeling of loneliness when the dreamer awakens from those dreams (Garfield, 1997).

Dreams of the grieving families can provide a plethora of data on their individual grieving experiences (Barrett, 1992; Begovac & Begovac, 2012; Garfield, 1996; Lundin, 1987; Wray & Price, 2005), particularly when the dead person appears as a character in the dreams. Dreams can also be a place where the bereaved and the deceased meet (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2007), it may assist the bereaved to form a relationship with them (Belicki et al., 2003) that will allow the distressed to cope more effectively with the loss (Worden, 2018).

Dreams were viewed in several respects, from being a source of control to the capacity to perceive and communicate with the deceased (Sirriyeh, 2011). Often people conceive of sleep mostly as a moment to reset the body, essentially the brain is indeed very activated during sleep i.e., dreaming. Our dreams experiences may be comforting or disturbing, enigmatic or supportive, and practical or surreal (Cirino, 2018).

Indigenous social cultures believed dreaming to be a pathway to yet another realm such as the spiritual realm. Such cultures would also claim that much of their divine beliefs would come from dreams. They may recognize the holy, and grant access to the mystical to spiritual realms. As of the 21st century, psychologists researched dreams because the religious significance of dreams has brought healthy development to the fore. Nevertheless, several independent psychologists say the work on the psychology of religion and dreaming is quite minimal in documentation (Sirriyeh, 2011).

Another set of dreams that can be considered common are those whose theme is the death of a beloved family member, a parent, siblings, offspring, or the like. Two types of these dreams must be differentiated at once, (1) some wherein the dreamer appears unperturbed, (2) and others in which he feels intensely grieved at the loss of the beloved person, even displaying this grief by getting emotional and bursting into tears while asleep (Freud, 1900).

The Islamic community assumes that various ways of dreaming will help individuals interact with their religious martyrdom. They aim to give the dreamer a comprehensive understanding of both the life of the martyr and its consequences for the future. Various forms of dreams may influence Muslims' future lives entailing, but are not restricted to: revealing a successful life, encouraging them to improve socially or spiritually, and informing them of imminent dangers. Through one distinct dream, decisions made by Muslims can be as important as deciding on a future spouse.

The overarching aim behind such dreams is to give a deeper glimpse into the truths to the Muslims that are not possible in the waking world (Sirriyeh, 2011).

Religiosity was thought to diverge between cultural contexts. In eastern cultures, Islamic adherents deem dreams exceptionally. Their significance was highlighted in the Sacred Scriptures of Islam. There are 24 verses in the Qur'an addressing dreams and dreaming, with complete record of 7 dreams (Salem, 2010). A second component of beliefs among Muslims is that dreams are ways of getting religious messages is the Hadith (A record of Prophet Muhammad's accounts) that has a complete part about dreams and dreams (Salem, Ragab, & Razik, 2009). Moreover, the Islamic dream model postulates that there are three main types of dreams, (1) most divinely guided (spiritual dreams), (2) those influenced by the satan, (3) and those prompted by the dreamer's earthly spirit (Sirriyeh, 2011). In general, dreams are regarded as either signal of great events to come, support and encouragement, or warning signs of vulnerabilities, potential harm, or terrible news (Salem, 2010, as cited in Sirriyeh, 2011).

Dreams act as a pivotal channel in the Qur'an, just like in the Jewish Torah and the Christian Bible, through which Lord Almighty interacts with individuals. Dreams provide moral guidance and security, make people aware of imminent danger, and provide visionary insights into future possibilities. Even though three major faiths vary considerably on many other subject matters, on this particular point they find substantial agreement: dreaming is considered to be an important and useful source of knowledge, and encouragement (Bulkeley, 2002c).

A 2014 study in *The American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Care* explored the affect of grief dreams on the family of the deceased and concluded that "dreams of the deceased often occur, can be extremely significant and can be further healed from loss." Themes in the dreams comprised, "memories or encounters, the deceased free from disease, memories of the deceased's illness or time of death, the deceased in the hereafter looking healthy, relaxed and at ease, as well as the deceased sending a message." The participants identified dreams as helpful in the inevitability of death (Mendoza, 2019).

Patricia Garfield, the author of *Dreams in Bereavement* (1996), categorizes four of the utmost form of grief dreams. The first is the dream of visitation in which the dead person happens to come to spend some time with the grieving. Next is the dream message. Here in dreams, the deceased appears to give us details, warn us of a predicament or just tell us they adore us. Reassurance dreams, the third type, are ones in which the message is reassuring and affirmative. Most grief dreams are constructive. However, Wray's final type of dream category is the trauma dream, which can be upsetting. These tend to occur when the death has been above all disturbing as with homicide or calamity (Mendoza, 2019).

Grief dreams are certainly not limited to these four types. Many times, dreams are combinations of different elements. For example, a visitation dream may also be a reassurance dream. Joshua Black, a dream researcher, divides dreams into two categories, specifically, "before we know about the death, and after we know." The prior tends to reflect our anticipation of the loss. The latter is characterized by receiving the knowledge of death before having been told in waking life. The news is typically delivered by the deceased and is

Table 1. Demographics of the participants (N = 8)

Participants	Gender	Age	Duration of Marriage	No. of Surviving Children	Time Since the Child's Death (in Years)
1	M / F	60 / 58	35 years	7	5
2	M / F	47 / 40	22 years	1	10
3	M / F	50 / 45	17 years	0	3
4	M / F	40 / 39	20 years	1	2

described as them saying goodbye or some other message of comfort (Black, n.d.).

Clinical psychologist Jennifer Shorter defines visitation dreams as “striking emotionally intense dreams in which a recently deceased loved one returns to provide guidance, reassurance, and/or warning.” These experiences are unique, powerful, and sometimes life-changing (Ni, 2016). Dreams help grieved to heal. Several dictionary definitions correspond to the four ways that dreams help us grieve, (1) to make sorrow less painful, (2) to be repaired and restored, (3) to settle and restore harmony, (4) to cause a person to become healthy and whole.

Grief dreams make grief less painful by overcoming shock. Early grief dreams assist survivors to overcome death’s shocking torment. Most of the grief dreams highlight that grief is regulated by visions during sleep that carries steady pain adjustment. Grief dreams are mended and revived by sorting emotions. With the support of grief dreams, after the incapacitating effect of grief, people experience the return of emotions: they are emotionally healed and revived. Grief dreams are considered a beneficial part of the denouement process of grief to stabilize and bring stability with an inbuilt relationship. Grievers know this feeling – often expressed as relief or peace – as the point where an inner sense of connection with the deceased is reinstated. Grief dreams offer transcendence by building bridges for survivors to the future to allow a person to become healthy and intact. As Aristotle said, “Hope is a waking dream”. He thought of hope as a reawakening sense of faith in the future, like a waking dream. Healing is regarded as a sense of hope. Hope begins to emerge with the prospect of potential opportunities after the bleak months of deep sorrow. Grief dreams also hold vivid images of the mourner’s promising new life.

2. Aim and methodology

The research is aimed to explore and explain existing, non-scientific dream-related practices and beliefs among grieved parents through direct investigation not conditioned by any

Table 2. Demographics of the Lost Child (N = 4)

Pseudonyms	Age (in Years)	Gender	Cause of Death
Waheed	34	M	Heart Attack
Fahad	16	M	Drowning
Colby	17	M	Homicide (Murder)
Ahsan	16	M	Suicide

existing theoretical frameworks of dreams. Investigating the research from an established psychological perspective on dream theories was purposefully avoided during this process to prevent tainting the research results with the arguments surrounding such theories. The research was carried out from modernity, socially constructionist viewpoint, using a qualitative approach.

There is a gap in the literature when it comes to dream analysis of grieved parents. To address this void in the current dream study, the researcher investigated using semi-structured qualitative interviews of dream-related perceptions and beliefs of a purposefully selected group of participants. The data gathered from the interviews were susceptible to qualitative analysis using thematic analysis. The dream experiences that the participants shared were between 50 to 300 words as suggested by Domhoff (2000), who stated that when scoring dreams, they must be between 50 and 300 words.

Research question includes:

1. Have you ever dreamt of a departed soul? How do you make sense of your dreams? What do you do to interpret or understand your dreams? Are these dreams helpful for grief recovery?

3. Results and discussion

The participants’ comments were recorded during the interviews. The data obtained from the interviews were then subject to qualitative content and thematic analysis. Major themes were categorized. Then, the extracted dataset was used to formulate comprehensive narratives, define important components, and monitor the response spectrum, convergence, and divergence within category and theme. Where responses concerning cultural or gender classification demonstrated a substantial difference, these were recorded. This whole procedure was repeated so all the transcripts of the interviews were successively analyzed, categorized, and specifically coded in terms of religion and spirituality and contemporaneous dream beliefs, experiences, and practices. The details of the participants and lost child are shown below in Table 1 and Table 2 consecutively.

3.1. Dream beliefs and dream affects

3.1.1 Religious faith and grief dreams

Many mourners seek comfort and reassurance in their religious beliefs and intuitively turn to the familiar traditions and religious practices that supported them in the past. Even the ones that identify themselves as ‘marginally religious’, often experience significant comfort in returning to the rituals of their old childhood religious practice (Wray, 2005).

The theory of Islamic dreams claims that there are three kinds of dreams, those influenced by God (spiritual dreams), those prompted by the devil, and those intrigued by the dreamer's earthly spirit (Edgar, 2004). Dreams can act as a medium for spiritual encounters and spiritual contact, and that through dreams God can deliver alerts, messages, or replies to prayers to a sleeping person (Nell, 2012).

Of the 8 participants, 4 of the participants claimed to have perceived religious effect following the dream, as the following excerpts from the interviews conducted proved in the words of the participants themselves:

'Whenever I miss my son, I bow down in front of Almighty Allah. I have a very strong belief that He listens to my prayers and He answers my prayers by granting me peace'. (Participant 1 - mother)

'Dreams are messages from Allah. And I share my dreams with my moulvi (spiritual healer) who then guide me as to what that dream means. Mostly they are reassuring. I get guidance and reassurance from Allah. (Participant 2 - mother)

'In my dream, I saw some divine light guiding me to see life again, to enjoy every bit of it (because I left my job after the death of my son)'. (Participant 3 - father)

'I realized that regularly going to Mosque, offering prayers five times a day, giving charity has assisted me in my sorrow. I have found that there is peace and comfort in praying, and people in Mosque especially care for me' (Participant 4 - father)

The interviews indicate that out of 8 participants only 3 participants (2 mothers, 1 father) seek out and received guidance related to their dreams from elders of their family and many a time advice from religious authority figures e.g., spiritual healers.

However, only one father communicated this view that he did not personally experience any religious message or association from his dream occurrences, as is depicted in these excerpts:

'In my dreams, I couldn't see any religious message, I just see my son happy and lively (Participant 2 - father)

From a *sociological perspective*, it was claimed that dream content not only reflects an individual's intrapersonal elements, but that thematic elements represent wider cultural values and mitigating factors in the dreams of specific individuals. In this respect, the inner world of people as expressed in dreams seems to reflect exogenous cultural, social, and religious standards. So many shifts in cultural views will be mirrored in related dream shifts (Nell, 2012).

In contrast to modern Western beliefs, many indigenous African and Asian cultures and civilizations perceive dreams not as being induced internally or comprising a portal providing information about the dreamers = related to the perceived world. They may instead serve as a means of contact with another realm, for example, the world of the deceased or a world of spirits. Sometimes traditional belief systems can contribute to psychological distress and complicate aspects of traumatic stress (Nell, 2012). As Prophet Muhammad says, bad dreams come from Satan, and people should avoid talking about these dreams and would instead "offer a prayer" and "seek refuge from [the dream's] evil with Allah." For over a decade anthropologists working in every region of the world have extensively documented the significance

of the dream as a major source for the religious beliefs and practices of traditional people (Tylor, 1870; Lincoln, 1935; Grunebaum and Caillois, 1966; Tedlock, 1992).

In many traditional cultures dreams have been considered overt, experience-based confirmation of a supernatural world (see reviews in Bulkeley, 2008a; Mittermaier, 2010). Many traditional people have interpreted their dreams as instances where the soul of the dreamer saunters beyond the body and interacts with the gods and spirit beings of the spirits world (e.g., Gregor, 1981; Lohmann, 2003a,b,c).

The Zuni and Quiché Maya cultures studied by Tedlock (1992) see dreams from holy ancestors as direct communication. The Tikopia (Firth, 2001) in Polynesia, sees many dreams as the direct contact of ancestral spirits to the dreamer. In the terminology of the cognitive science of religion, the characters infesting these dreams can be identified as supernatural agents (SAs): non-human entities with autonomous powers and intentions.

A very negative perception of dreams emerged from the manuscripts of Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine, who was a talented yet disturbed church father. His outlook toward dreams changed considerably after a very vivid dream in which he was accused and brutalized for having a greater interest in the classics of literature as opposed to biblical literature. He cautioned against false dreams in particular, and the likelihood of supernatural activity working through dreams. He correlated witchcraft with dreams and regarded any excessive attention paid to dreams as superstitious (Ullman & Zimmerman 1987, as cited in Nell, 2012).

Major cultural and gender disparities have been noted. And although the belief that God or another exalted source or being was behind those dreams appeared to have prevailed among a substantial percentage of the respondents, the belief that the Devil or any other sinister force, and many a time superstitions could affect such dreams appears to be entirely present, as such notions were expressed by one of them except for a single reference by a grieved mother (Participant 2) who stated the belief that black magic and witchcraft might affect dreams:

'I cannot share my dream of my deceased son, as it was some black magic and if I narrate my dream here, something bad will happen and I will be in evil eyes' (Participant 2)

3.1.2 The emotional affect of dreams

Garfield (1996) holds that bereavement and its associated affective response (grief) are intense conscious experiences that can affect the quality of dreams. While not backed up with scientific evidence, some historical records are compatible with the widely held assumption that dreaming of the dead can become an essential element in the process of healing (Garfield, 1996, as cited in Germain et al., 2013).

The emotional responses associated with depression and anxiety, which are usual in grief, were analyzed separately and observed to have been linked to particular dream themes. Depressed people appear to suffer adverse emotional reactions in their dreams (Cartwright, 1996; King & DeCicco, 2007; Mancuso et al., 2008; Nejad, Sanatinia, & Yousofi, 2004).

Dreams that included the image of the dead person seem to be recalled more often than other dreams throughout an individual's life span due to their emotional affect (Barrett, 1992; Begovac & Begovac, 2012; Bulkeley, 2009; Bulke-

ley, Broughton, Sanchez, & Stiller, 2005b; Bulkeley & Hartmann, 2011; Hendricks, 1997; Hoffman, 2009; Stevenson, 1992; Trask-Curtin, 2012; Wray & Price, 2005; Wright et al., 2013).

One mother shared:

'Once my son Colby was with me in the dream but he didn't utter a word, yet I shared to him how much I miss him. He looked me in my eyes and put his head on my shoulder and we cried together (Participant 3)

The same mother reported:

'I saw him sitting in my vehicle. At that point, he stared at me. I was aware that I was dreaming. I knew he is my son he is no more in my life. There were thousands of emotions in his eyes. I can see that sparkle. He told me that he was here to say that he loved her and farewell to her. Then he vanished (not in the car anymore) (Participant 3)

The dreams of having deceased in it may result in emotions that they had real contact with the deceased's spirit (Bulkeley, 2009; Garfield, 1996; Hinton et al., 2013; Hoffman, 2009; Kwilecki, 2011; Ryan, 2006). This notion of having real contact with the spirit of the dead person can prompt the grieving to rise with a profound sense of wonder, renewal of self, and a sense of comfort in the current moment that they might not otherwise have experienced (Adams, 2004, 2005; Hendricks, 1997; Hoffman, 2009; Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2007; Kuiken, Lee, Eng, & Singh, 2006; Ryan, 2006; Trask-Curtin, 2012; Wray & Price, 2005). Such visitation dreams can be of great benefit in the grieving process because they can encourage a stronger belief of afterlife (Adams, 2004, 2005; Bulkeley, 2009; Stevenson, 1992; Sormanti & August, 1997) and help find personal significance (Adams & Hyde, 2008; Ryan, 2006; Trask-Curtin, 2012).

These dreams can also be seen as unhelpful to certain cultures in the grieving period. For instance, Cambodians believe in the Cambodian culture that seeing the deceased in your dream means that the departed spirit is roaming and has not yet progressed on to reincarnation (Hinton et al., 2013). Cambodian culture also believes that the deceased's soul will influence your soul and make you sick (Hinton et al., 2013).

For the bereaved, dreaming of the dead may be very disturbing because it does not seem to regulate when they occur. Dreams provided people with comfort and if they did not experience dreams of their deceased loved one, they would have had a tougher time with the loss

Loconto (1998) reported that the bereaved cherished the dreams they had with the deceased in them rather than having no dreams at all about them.

One mother reported that one day she was taking nap when she dreamt of her son:

'I saw him walking ahead of me on some bridge. There was heavy flood-water gushing under the bridge. I was so fearful. I called him by his name but he did not look back. Then I attempted to follow him, yet I was unable to move. I froze. I shouted to him, yet he continued onward. As he drew nearer to the end of the bridge, he started to gradually vanish. At that point, he was no more. I remained there, sobbing. At the point when I woke up, I could feel the tears spilling down my face' (Participant 3 - mother)

3.2. Dreams following a traumatic death

Dreams are a typical reaction to traumatic sufferings (Stoddard, Chedel, & Shakun, 1996) because trauma causes a high degree of emotional agitation in waking life (Hartmann, 2010; Schredl, 2006); similar dreams provide further tremendous descriptions of the emotional responses resulting from the traumatic incident (Hartmann, 2010). Traumatic dreams are most often unfavorable and distressing (Duval & Zadra, 2010; Hartmann, 2010; Hartmann, Zborowski, Rosen, & Grace, 2001), and even entail inner feelings of pain and regret (Hartmann, 2010).

Only one father from the present study reported:

'In my dream, I saw my son died of suicide once again. I was standing at the corner of the room, seeing him hanging himself with the fan. I wanted to stop him, but my legs and feet were frozen. I could not move my body. I felt guilty watching that and I thought that I have so much guilt inside me. I was thinking during this dream (talking to her wife in the dream who is also struck) we are unable to grant every wish of him. He was last born but we are unable to provide him a happier life. He was kept hanging with fan and I and my wife are just discussing his life' (Participant 4)

Hartmann (2010) describes temporarily distinguishable phases in trauma victims' dreams: Immediately after trauma dreams contain the event itself, which evolves into a dream containing a central image evoking strong emotions of terror or fear during the next phase. Instead, dreams analyze regret or humiliation and they often involve sadness or grief (Hartman, 1984, as cited in Germain, 2013).

Significant traumatic incidents including their related effects are approached in conventional, localized manner and belief systems deeply rooted in history. Nightmares and dream experiences following trauma are viewed through a lens of cultural norms that have a vital impact on the dreamer's self-esteem and well-being along with personal beliefs attached to dream content (Schubert & Punamäki, 2016).

3.3. Gender differences in dreaming pattern

It was found that older parents (*participant 1 and 3*) reported dreaming of their loved ones more often than young parents (*participant 2 and 4*). Likewise, it was also found that mothers significantly dreamt more of the lost child compared to fathers of the study. Various factors such as the age of the dreamer, gender, education, symptoms of grief, the severity of PTSD, relationship to the deceased, length of time one knew the deceased, and the contexts of their death may affect the dreams of the deceased and the frequency they appear as imagery. In a study by Klugman (2006) who explored Post Death Contact, it was observed that females considerably dreamt more of the deceased (88.4%) compared to males (76.5%).

3.4. Dream categories and description

Garfield (1996) when researching the key theories of grief, discovered three general phases common to each of which are numbness, disorganization, and reorganization. Garfield (1996) separated the typical dream themes and indicated the stage at which they would occur (numbness, disorganization, and reorganization), but noted that sometimes dream themes would overlap.

Themes were selected from earlier studies like Barrett's (1992), Domhoff (2015), Garfield's (1996), and Garfield's Revised Dream Themes (Black et al., 2016) were used. Dream themes were not exclusive of each other as a dream could have multiple dream themes.

The following four major and sub-themes extracted from dreams:

(i) Visitation dreams

One of the major themes that emerge from the sample dreams is that of visitation dreams. Of all major kinds of grief dreams, the visitation dream is possibly the most strengthening and certainly the most frequent type of grief dream. In visitation dreams, the dreamer usually just spends time with the deceased; there are no prophetic messages or warnings associated with these dreams (Wray, 2005).

These dreams where the deceased acknowledges the death being real is more characteristic of the theme called Back-to-Life developed by Barrett (1992). The theme of Back-to-Life has been stated to be very closely related to Garfield's (1996) Alive-Again theme. This finding is in agreement with previous findings by Belicki et al. (2003), who found that Alive-Again and Back-to-Life dreams tend to occur shortly after the loss of a loved one.

The sample characterized their dreams of the deceased as 'visitations', and stated dreams of the deceased helped them feel more connected with the deceased. While rarely explored in the literature of empirical dreams, dreams seem to have a unique relationship with death and this connection can indicate more about the influence of dreams.

One participant reported:

'He was in my room. And when I looked at him he said mom I was here to leave to say goodbye to you. I went so early and died suddenly and he said he loves me. I hugged him. After then I suddenly woke up as if from a deep sleep. I felt the joy came back to me. You know those feelings and experience has occurred so sudden that it was the most mysterious thing I had felt in my life to go from one state to another because of a dream' (Participant 3 – mother)

Commonsense rationalize these visitation dreams as a Divine figure uses the dream situation to support us amidst extremely heart-rending and straining affecting occurrences: bereavement and our imminent deaths. From a Freudian standpoint, these are characteristic of wish-fulfillment dreams: we suffer the loss of a loved one but then we have a visitation dream and our desire for being with the beloved is satisfied and there is an intense emotional resolution.

Garfield (1996) suggests that during the numbness stage the bereaved would have "Alive Again" dreams. Alive Again dreams are those dreams where the deceased appears alive to the dreamer and the dreamer is surprised to see them alive. Dreaming that the deceased is still alive as in the Alive Again dreams is common in the early stages/phases in grief (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2007) and is said to reflect the denial of the loss in waking life (Lundin, 1987).

Ahsan's father is deeply disturbed by his son's suicide. He shared:

'Once I dreamt of Ahsan. He was not well. He was so at unease that I can feel his pain. But what can be done? He has chosen this for himself. I shared this dream with my wife. And I told him that he will suffer in the after-life

too, he will daily die and he will be punished. Because in our religion suicide is haram (prohibited in Islamic law). I know for sure he has reached his place but he is not at ease. We prepare ourselves for real-life abode but this is not how' (Participant 4 – father)

Death is commonly explained by the deceased as not being real. In Dying Again dreams the deceased is seen suffering from the symptoms that caused death either as it happened or in a distorted way (Garfield, 1996). The deceased is seen dead throughout the dream or they are seen suffering from the symptoms that caused death either as it happened or in a distortion.

(ii) Reassurance dreams

Many times, dreams are combinations of different elements. For example, a visitation dream may also be a reassurance dream (Mendoza, 2019). Reassurance dreams are unique in that they are always consoling and comforting dreams (Wray, 2005).

Participants of the study, all mothers ($n = 4$) reported seeing their deceased child, talking, and communicating with them. And two fathers reported having the same experience.

The following respondents reported that their dreams provided them considerable support and comfort when struggling with a loved one's loss as the following extract shows:

A mother shared:

'My son speaks to me mostly. Mostly he is communicating something... a message mostly. He tells me things about situations in my life and how to handle them. Once he said to make a Facebook page and help people who lost their children' (Participant 3 – mother)

Advice-Comfort-Gift dreams occur when the deceased give advice, comfort, or a gift. These dreams are often described as vivid or real and are said to feel like an actual visitation. During the reorganization stage, Advice Dreams can help the dreamer in problem-solving in waking life and maybe the root of folk traditions that state that loved ones or ancestors continue to speak through dreams (Garfield, 1996).

This indicates that dreams may appear to be very useful in helping almost many participants to overcome sorrow over a loved one who has died. The study results have suggested that this strategy would be proven useful in other situations as well where an individual should be motivated to communicate the dream with his spouse who is devastated by the loss too, thereby helping these people cope with their sorrow, as this extract points out:

'Seeing Colby happy made me satisfied too. This dream helped me to cope with the grief over the death of my son much better. I even told my husband the dream and it benefited him too... both of us are getting better with each passing day' (Participant 3 – mother)

The interaction between the grieved parents and the deceased is typically comforting as shared by the following female participants of the study.

'In my dream, I saw my son when he was 20 years old getting married. He was tall, smart, and energetic. He looked so young and healthy. He was smiling and chat-

ting with his sisters, father, and cousins. I felt so relieved to see him young, because his image of last few hours, very pale and dull had destroyed him' (Participant 1)

Saeed's dream reassures his mother that her son is restored, healthy, and looking as he did in his youth.

One father shared his dream:

'I saw Fahad in a crowded place, might be in heaven, because it was a beautiful place. He didn't say anything but he looked healthy and at peace' (Participant 2)

Colby's mother recounted:

'I saw my son dressed as a gentleman wearing tie and bow. He was dressed in white. He was looking so smart, fresh and I smell his fragrance as if he came out of a daisy garden. I started asking questions, to which he handed me a note and when I was opening that to read, he vanished. And in haste I read through the lines, he wrote smile mom' (Participant 3)

During the reorganization stage dreams of Young-Well-Again dreams can occur (Garfield, 1996). Young-Well-Again dreams occur when the deceased is seen as young and healthy. The deceased is often found to have elegant clothes, shining hair, and a radiant face.

Mother of Fahad shared:

'My son, I and my husband are standing near running water, a small riverbank area. My son was watching the water. It's a beautiful day and we are happy. I noticed that Fahad was looking at something in the distance or he might be lost in some deep thinking, and then there were two-row boats rowing toward us. Fahad started happily waving at two men who were rowing the boat as if they were old friends. As the boats moved nearer, I recognized them as my father and my uncle who died a long time ago. I saw my son, who in the meanwhile was looking happy; he was also smiling. And I thought in the dream that they have come to take me. Instead, they signaled my son, to which my son climbed aboard with much joy. I screamed out to him, but he looked over at me and smiled, and then he waved as if he was saying to me, "Mother I am fine," and then I watched him disappear' (Participant 2)

Taking-a-Journey dreams occur when the deceased or dreamer takes a trip without the other (Garfield, 1996).

Mother of Ahsan shared:

'I dreamed that I walked upstairs to my son's room. I opened the door quietly to see a beautiful round table and placed on them were lit candles. I was surprised to see all and at the same time, I was also happy to see my son. Upon seeing him I said, "Why did you have to die? To which he gets hold of my hand and asked me to sit on the nearby chair. He said mother I want to put my head on your lap. I need some rest. And afterward, I do not remember my dream.' (Participant - 4).

Two fathers reported that the deceased child delivers words of comfort to him. Fathers narrated that his offspring comforted him in dreams, for example:

'Once I dreamt of my son, who came to me and said that he is doing okay. He said he was happy and contented, and requested me to stay hopeful. I was quite reassured after this dream' (Participant 1 - father)

'One night, a few weeks after my son's death, I had a dream in which my son came to me and told me he was Okay' (Participant 3 - father)

(iii) Dead, Dying or ill

Death is commonly explained by the deceased as not being real. In Dying Again dreams the deceased is seen suffering from the symptoms that caused death either as it happened or in a distorted way (Garfield, 1996). Dead, Dying, or Ill was chosen as it expands Garfield's (1996) Dying-Again definition to include them being either ill or dead the entire dream, in addition to them dying again. Therefore, the definition for "Dead, Dying, or Ill" is the deceased may be dead in the dream, may die in the dream, or may be suffering from physical symptoms in the dream. Sometimes, the deceased is not seen suffering, but the dreamer may have a feeling that the deceased is ill and needs help.

One participant shared:

'I have always seen my son upset in dreams as if he is ill and not well. He is in pain and unrest mostly. I tell him to go hospital but he is not listening to me' (Participant 1- father)

One mother reported:

"In my dreams, he seems quite frail just like I saw him in his last moments" (Participant 1)

(iv) Precognitive dreams

Dreams will provide you with a wealth of knowledge regarding one's current mental state, fears, and future hopes. But will they even foresee events that may not have so far took place? In simpler words, precognitive dreams will be any dreams which provide people with knowledge regarding the future you might not otherwise have (Raypole, 2020).

One mother reported:

'I have bad dreams mostly. Just like before the death of Saeed, I dreamt that my whole family was gathered at my place. They were hugging each other and all were crying. There were males too. All were sitting and crying' (Participant 1).

According to the same participant:

'Dreams can give us a message and they are true dreams too. See this was the dream that I saw before the death of Saeed. Whatever happened at Saeed's funeral was the same that I saw in the dream. It was the recurrence. People were crying in each other arms. All I saw before in a dream. All went real' (Participant - 1)

First, all prophetic dreams are also message dreams. Participant 1's (mother) dream offers a prophetic message about some family gathering is an example of a prophetic message dream. Second, prophetic dreams are dreams in which the dreamer is somehow made aware of an event before it occurs. Third, although we do not fully understand this phenomenon, we do know that prophetic (or precognitive) dreams have been recorded throughout history by nearly every major civilization. Many ancient cultures believed that dreams contained omens for the future, and often, the gods would convey prophetic messages through dreams. The Bible is filled with prophetic dream stories—ranging from

the soldier's dream of Gideon's victory over the Midianites in the book of Judges to the Gospel of Matthew's chilling description of the foreboding dream of Pilate's wife (which she shared with her husband but was ignored): "Have nothing to do with that innocent man [Jesus], for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him" (27:19). The litmus test of a prophetic dream, of course, is whether the prophecy comes to fruition.

Finally, even today, a great number of perfectly rational people all over the world believe our loved ones can appear in dreams with messages, warnings, and even predictions of future events. Some cite the experience of *déjà vu*—the feeling that we have been in a certain place or have experienced a certain event before—as evidence of prophetic dreams. That is, we had a similar experience in a dream, so what appears to be a new place, event, or experience, is familiar to us because we have already "been there" in a dream.

(v) Dream as a coping tool

The most disturbing element of grief is our feeling of helplessness. People who are mourning feel powerless and irritated that nothing can be done to alter the horrific events that contributed to their current suffering. Even though it is true that there are indeed things that will relieve the pain associated with the tragic loss, the healing forces of our dreams can be tapped into. Most grieving people find profound meaning and consolation in their dreams of deceased loved ones. Most mourners, in truth, hope and pray for such dreams (Wray, 2005).

The participants shared the following experiences:

'In my dream, I saw Saeed working somewhere. The place was mysterious. One thing for sure that he was peaceful and after this dream, I was quite comfortable because I knew we will meet one day in the same place, which was some heavenly place. I am so thankful for every precious moment of my dream because I got to see my son' (Participant 1 – Mother)

'When I think of my dream, I feel extremely happy and more optimistic about my own existence' (Participant 1 – Mother)

One participant recalls a visitation dream that brought her a great deal of comfort. She stated:

'Colby kept my hands in his hands in the dream. We sit close, next to each other. It was completely silence around us. I felt the warm feeling of his hands, and I rubbed his hand. Afterward, when I woke up from my dream I felt totally warm, secure, loving, and not lonely. My dream brings positive energies to me' (Participant 3 – Mother).

'Seeing Colby so relaxed in my dreams make me refreshed for the whole day even weeks. I am so prepared to meet him. God is watching, He will place me with my son someday. I'm prepared' (Participant 3 – Mother)

'The dream of my son has taught me how to pull myself out through my grief period. I do believe that he is no more with us but after the dream, I felt that eventually, I'll be with him someday. I believe that this is also a blessing from Almighty because God gave me the opportunity to spend time with my son. I talked to him a lot and afterward, I thanked God' (Participant 1 – Father)

'I saw my son's funeral in my dream. When I woke up I was so miserable, so blank, stared at doors, and roof. Got no one to talk to. He was my only son. He was so young. I thought that I would never feel complete again. I even now hate my life even this world. They tried to take away everything from me (Participant 2 – Mother)

'In my dream, I heard my son, I saw him in front of me, I had not forgotten a bit about him. Even I remember the dress he was wearing. This was among the most lifting dreams I have had; it leaves me feeling so happy to wake up' (Participant 3 – father)

'The dream continues to remain with me for days when I wake up. I feel it when I sit alone, I feel it when I sit in the sunlight, and I feel it when I am driving. I feel so happy and contented to know that I saw my son and had to speak to him' (Participant 4 – mother)

'The dream I saw prompted me to progress on in my grieving process and it further helps me in letting go of remorse and accountability for my son's suicide' (Participant 4 – father)

In an enthralling and glorious moment, the dichotomy of death and despair fades away, and we are provided with a few special moments with our loved ones. And therein resides the incredible potential of the grief dream. Grief dreams, will, therefore, serve as gentle nudges that our beloved one is still part of our life. And that these dreams will assist in the excruciating adaptation process that is part of every journey of grief

The majority of the participants reported positive post-dream reactions and felt that their dreams impacted their bereavement process. Participants reported they feel comfortable, contented, optimistic, peaceful, refreshed, positive energies were channelized, they feel lifted, whereas few reported blank, discomfort, miserable, and heartbreak when awake.

The distinctive effects of the dreams on bereavement practices included greater acknowledgment of the loved one's demise, consolation, faith, sorrow, and quality of life, among many others. It could also be asserted that learning to cope with a loved one's loss is primarily a divine task, as it involves questions regarding the purpose of life and immortality (Neill, 2012).

4. Implications

Although dreams are a popular topic in the literature of grief, further investigation is required to determine who is experiencing them, what patterns and themes are happening, and whether they are aiding one's grieving process.

Hence more the researchers will be able to research dreams during grieving, the more health care providers and professional therapists will be able to stabilize the experience for the grieving and use the dreams as a healing resource in therapeutic settings.

Furthermore, a comprehensive case study can be conducted to see how dreams benefit us.

5. Conclusion

Most participants stated that their dreams were relaxing or both pleasant and distressing, and few reported solely disturbing dreams and it was erratic for participants to advocate only negative themes. Even those who re-counted

having a negative themed dream of the departed often also reported a positive themed dream. This is an analogous pattern to the findings of Wright et al. (2014) who found that 55.3% of their bereaved sample reported their dreams of the deceased to be only pleasant, 31.1% to be pleasant and disturbing, and just 6.8% reported only disturbing dreams. It may be that the deceased's unpleasant dreams are attributed to one's grief and as recovery begins, the deceased's dreams become more pleasant over time, as Garfield suggested (1996).

Prevalent dream themes included visitation dreams, reassurance dreams, dead, dying or ill dreams, precognitive dreams, and dreams as a coping tool. These themes substantially overlap with older iterations of dream content for bereavement.

It was concluded from this study that although some participants seemed to regard their dreams as void of any religious connotations, dreams still endorse significant spiritual and religious relevance for at least some participants and that these dreams also constitute a source of motivation, awareness, encouragement, and also guidance on decision making and lifestyles. Nearly all participants affirmed that they often contemplate their dreams for awareness, and even their actions and decision making are based primarily on certain dreams. It was also indicated that dreams sometimes formed an essential innate resource in coming to terms with grief.

Even though dreams are challenging to study scientifically, considering the sheer fact of their psychological and cultural proliferation they are a significant topic for neuropsychology as well as a scientific theory of religion. By understanding why someone might dream about their deceased loved one and another may not provide a deeper understanding of the purpose of dreams and how the quality of dreams affects the experience of grief. Further extensive data can be collected to verify the relationship between dream content and specific type of traumatic death.

In Islam there are sayings of Holy Prophet (Peace Be upon Him) about dreams which connotes: "With the endings of Prophets, and I being the last, doors of prophethood are sealed, and no prophet will come hereafter. So besides sealing of prophethood doors the doors of revelation through angels and also closed/sealed and 'Mubashraat (Intuitive dreams)' are left. On inquiring what is Mubashraat the prophet said, "Good dreams with some clues". Another practice is of 'Istikhara (consultation with Almighty in dreams)' in which indications are appeared before starting an event. This practice is to reach at correct decision or to understand whether the practice is going to be good and bad. In the Holy Quran, dreams are explained as revelations through which future was correctly predicted. Prophet Joseph (Peace be upon Him) explained that the dreams as a true prediction because the events unfolded in the same sequence and affects. In eastern society it is also believed that visit of deceased in dreams and going with them in dreams means you are going to die etc. but it accounts to myth only and may be sometime true by stroke of luck and unluck (Ghamidi, 2016).

Even though dreams can impact us profoundly, so can our understanding of our mortality. We are scared of death, we wait for death, we plan for death, and we try to fight death. We are particularly worried about a paradox that we never witness explicitly until, eventually, we do.

The findings of this study should, however, be considered tentative and preliminary, and further research needs to be done to extend, modify or challenge the findings made here, particularly in terms of cultural, gender, and age-related variations in dream beliefs and practices. While much more work needs to be done, the results are of practical importance nevertheless. In their research, King and DeCicco (2009) note that if their observation that participants considered dreams relevant was replicated in additional populations, it would have important consequences for the incorporation of dreamwork in therapy and counseling, as it demonstrates the public's possible openness to such approaches.

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