Violent Loss and Religious Coping: A Multi-Group Path Analysis

Andrea C Walker, Ph.D.
John D. Hathcoat, Ph.D., James Madison University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/andrea-walker/21/
Violent Loss and Religious Coping: A Multi-Group Path Analysis

Andrea C. Walker
John D. Hathcoat
Sean A. Harnas
Violent Death Loss

- Greater risk for complicated bereavement (Hardison et al., 2005)

- Bereavement outcomes depend on ability to make meaning of violent event (Currier et al., 2006)

- Ability to make meaning depends on how one copes religiously (Lichtenthal, 2011)

- When religious, survivors have greater PTG (Currier et al., 2013)

(Left) *The Scream*, painted 1893 by Edward Munch
Meaning making theory suggests that resolving religious belief-experience discrepancies impacts subjective sense of global meaning (Park, 2010) through a process of negotiating these dilemmas.

- **Assimilating** event into existing religious schemas
- **Accommodating** event by changing existing religious schemas
Religious Coping

- Religious coping is “a specific mode of coping inherently derived from religious beliefs, practices, experiences, emotions, or relationships” (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015, p. 25).
  - Positive: maintains current religious beliefs
  - Negative: results in sense of disconnecting from current religious beliefs
Aim of Study

- Aim: To answer the following questions pertaining to these loss types:
  (a) violent death loss
  (b) natural death loss
  (c) non-death related stressors

- What are the differences in religious development and the presence of meaning in life among loss types?

- How does the predicted effect of positive and negative religious coping on both religious development and the presence of meaning in life differ among loss types?
Methods

- Procedures: Cross-section, web-based, survey design

- Participants:
  - N=785 students self-identified as Christian
  - 65% were female (male = 35%).
  - Approximately 63% were White, about 14% African American, and 8% “other”
  - Three groups based on their responses to bereavement-related loss questions:
    (a) “violent” ($n = 113$), death losses due to murder, suicide, and accident
    (b) “non-violent” ($n = 256$), other death losses
    (c) “non-death” related stressors ($n = 416$), no death losses
Instruments

- Religious Coping: Brief RCOPE (Pargament et al., 2011)
  - Positive coping (Alpha=.91)
  - Negative coping (Alpha=.84)

- Religious Schema Scale (Streib et al., 2010)
  - Truth of texts and teachings (Alpha=.89)
  - Fairness, tolerance, and rational choice (Alpha=.66)
  - Xenosophia (Alpha=.66)

- Faith Maturity Scale (Ji, 2004)
  - Vertical (relationship with God; Alpha=.88)
  - Horizontal (relationship with others; Alpha=.77)

- Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006)
  - Presence (Alpha=.87)
Differences in Religious Variables among Loss Type

- Wilk’s lambda was statistically significant $\lambda = .927$, $F(16, 1594) = 3.82$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .037$.

- Non-death related stressor group ($M=18.80$, $SD=5.54$) had on average higher PCOPE scores than the violent and non-violent death groups.
  - Violent ($M=16.68$, $SD=5.89$) ($MD=2.12$, $SE=.59$, $p=.001$)
  - Non-violent ($M=16.50$, $SD=5.89$) ($MD=2.20$, $SE=.44$, $p<.001$)

- Mean differences between the non-violent and violent death groups failed to be statistically significant
Coping and Religious Schemas by Loss Type

- PCOPE and NCOPE had similar predicted effects on religious development for students experiencing non-violent or violent death loss, with the exception of TTT.

- PCOPE predicted higher levels of certainty in TTT for students experiencing violent death ($\beta = .55$, $p < .001$) than both the natural death ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) and the non-death groups ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$).
Coping and Faith Maturity by Loss Type

- **Horizontal Maturity (Relationship with others)**
  - PCOPE predicted greater increases for the natural and violent death groups ($\beta = .75$, $p < .001$) than the non-death group ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$).
  - NCOPE yielded no differences

- **Vertical Maturity (Relationship with God)**
  - PCOPE predicted increases for the non-death group ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) yet failed to be a significant predictor for both the natural and violent death groups ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .06$).
  - NCOPE failed to be a significant predictor for the non-death group ($\beta = -13$, $p = .06$) but predicted increases for the natural and violent death groups ($\beta = .11$, $p = .04$).
Coping and Meaning in Life by Loss Type

- **PCOPE (Positive coping)**
  - For non-death students, PCOPE predicted increases ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$).
  - For both non-violent and violent death groups ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .02$), PCOPE predicted similar decreases.

- **NCOPE (Negative coping)**
  - For non-death students, NCOPE predicted decreases ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$).
  - For both non-violent and violent death groups ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$), NCOPE predicted similar increases.
Limitations and Directions

- Religion informs meaning through a myriad of factors, such as intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity; more examination of this would be of benefit.

- Study would have benefited from qualitative explanations of participants’ subjective experiences of religious development and meanings made.

- Greater diversity of religious backgrounds to compare how coping informs religious development for various groups.
Implications for Violent Loss Survivors

- The power of negative coping!

- “Aha moment”: Traumatic nature of violent loss may have unique utility in facilitating certain kinds of growth (corroborated by PTG research (Currier et al., 2013))

- Implications for family therapists
Take Away

If you are a good man,  
Then reject violence.  
If you are a better man,  
Then detest violence.  
If you are the best man,  
Then transform violence  
Into the heart of oneness-love.

- Sri Chinmoy
References


