The influence of Losing a Parent in the Development of Anxiety, Depression, and Academic Motivation in Latino College Students

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF LOSING A PARENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION IN LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The current study focuses on understanding how the potential consequences of losing a parent before the age of eighteen influence depression, anxiety, and academic motivation in Latino college students. The study also explored how social support could interfere with these consequences. Five participants were recruited from various universities, and they were interviewed virtually, guided by a phenomenology design. The data was analyzed using a narrative approach. The results show that social support is fundamental to mitigating the consequences of losing a parent at a young age. It is recommended that future research consider the difference between losing a mother and losing a father.
THE INFLUENCE OF LOSING A PARENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, AND ACADEMIC MOTIVATION
IN LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY
SANDRA LUZ GALVAN
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Thesis Director:
DeAnna Harris-McKoy
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression in the Latino Community</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Parental Loss on Depression</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety in the Latino Community</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Parental Loss on Anxiety</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Parental Loss on Academic Motivation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Support</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences of Social Support in Parental Loss</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. METHOD</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology Design</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESULTS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationship with the Parent That They Lost</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationship with Their Surviving Parent</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Support They Received When They Lost Their Parent and Who Provided That Support</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family Grieving the Loss of the Parent</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cultural Expectations Around Grieving</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Feelings About Losing Their Other Parent</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How the Loss of Their Parent Changed Their Life</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Potential Depressive Symptoms After Losing Their Parent</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Potential Anxiety Symptoms After Losing Their Parent</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Their Decision of Going to College After Losing Their Parent</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Their Decision of Being a Full-Time Student or Part-Time Student</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. DISCUSSION</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conclusion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, 1 out of every 14 children under the age of eighteen years old have experienced the death of a parent (Burns et al., 2020). Losing a parent at a young age could be detrimental for the development of these children. Due to the experience of losing a parent and the confusion that accompanies it, many of these children could suffer from mental problems, including anxiety and depression (Tyrka et al., 2008). In research about parental death, there seems to be a deficit in studies conducted with the Latino population. Even though the National Institute of Health (2022) mandates the inclusion of a variety of different ethnic groups in research studies, only up to 9 percent of the minority participants are actually considered to participate in research (Clayton et al., 2019). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the current Latino population in the United States is 18.5 percent, which indicates that Latinos are the largest minority group in the United States. The Latino population has increased during the past ten years, and it is expected to continue growing to 28 percent by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Including the Latino population in research seems to be important and necessary; therefore, this study will be conducted with Latino college students who have lost a parent before the age of eighteen years old and to investigate the influences of losing a parent and how social support could influence the relationship between the loss of a parent and depression, anxiety, and academic motivation.

Theoretical Framework

The ABC-X model created by Reuben Hill (1958) has been a useful tool to understand
the relationship between stress and crisis in a family (Rosino, 2016). The ABC-X model consists of four variables in which (A) represents the stressful situation, (B) represents the family’s resources, (C) indicates how the family interprets the stressful situation, and (X) indicates the intensity of the crisis due to the stressful situation (Hill, 1958). According to Rosino (2016), families should function as a family system supporting each other when facing a stressful situation in order for them to prevent a crisis from arising. Hill (1958) believed that a crisis arises when the roles of the family members change due to a specific event, and the crisis will continue until the family roles get adjusted once again. Betz and Thorngren (2006) stated that the ABC-X model has been effective in helping families identify the resources they currently have and the resources they could obtain to be able to manage the crisis, such as the loss of a parent. When a stressful situation impacts the family, and they are not aware of the resources that they have, it could potentially create a crisis in the family and affect their stability (Rosino, 2016). Hill (1958) found the importance of providing social support to families in crisis and the benefits of receiving this support; furthermore, he stated that families who receive social support are more likely to readjust after a crisis compared to families who isolate from their family and the community.

The ABC-X model has been proven to be useful in informing ethnic groups about the increase in mental illness in minority groups, including Latinos (Schock-Giordano, 2013). The current study will utilize the ABC-X model as (A) the stressor due to the loss of a parent, (B) the social support provided to the child, (C) how the stressor was perceived by the family, and (X) the long-term consequences in Latino college students such as anxiety, depression, and academic motivation.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Depression in the Latino Community

Latinos have the belief that mental illness is not real and does not exist in their culture; instead, they believe a person with a mental illness is simply crazy and a person who might hurt them (Caplan, 2019). Despite these beliefs, statistics show that there is a tremendous increase in mental illnesses among Latinos. A survey conducted in the United States by the National Center for Health Statistics between 2013 and 2016 on participants over the age of 20 years old found that 8.2 percent of Latinos were struggling with depression, which is higher than Caucasians (7.9%), and Asians (3.1%), but not higher than African Americans (9.2%) (Brody et al., 2018). There appears to have been an increase in depression among Latinos since 2013, as demonstrated in Brody et al. (2018). An examination by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH, 2020) found that 12.2 percent of Latinos are struggling with mental issues, including depression; in fact, Latinos reported higher symptoms of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and lack of energy compared to non-Latino Americans. Even though Latinos exhibit higher levels of depressive symptoms, they were less likely to receive treatment for their depression. The OMH (2020) also found that 58 percent of Latinos with depressive episodes received treatment compared to 70.2 percent of non-Latinos. Previous studies have paid attention to the occurrence of depression in Latinos. In the meta-analysis conducted by Mendelson et al. (2008), it was found that out of the 31 studies analyzed, 8 studies did not find a difference in the occurrence of depression between Latinos and non-Latinos, and
23 studies found a slight difference that showed a higher occurrence of depression in Latinos compared to non-Latinos. In research conducted with low-income Latinos, it was found that Latinos with low social-economic status who follow the traditional norms of their Latino culture, such as *machismo* (e.g., men must keep their family safe and be the provider) and *marianismo* (e.g., women must treat their family as the Virgin Mary would do) are more likely to suffer from depression since their family relationships are affected by these cultural norms (Sarmiento and Cardemil, 2009).

Various factors contribute to depression in Latino college students. Arbona and Jimenez (2013) found in their sample of 309 Latino undergraduate college students that discrimination was positively correlated with depression. Low social-economic status has also been found to contribute to the development of depressive symptoms in Latino college students; in fact, having low social-economic status has a higher impact on their depression than being part of a different ethnic group (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997). Acculturative stress (Mayorga et al., 2018), as well as intragroup marginalization (Rischall & Meyers, 2019), have also been found to be factors that lead to depression in Latino college students. This study will add to the research concerning depression and Latino college students by exploring parental loss as a potential contributor.

**Influence of Parental Loss on Depression**

The loss of a parent is devastating and could be detrimental to the well-being of the person who loses a parent. The loss of a parent has been found to increase the child’s probability of developing depression, specifically during the first two years after the event (Pham et al., 2018). Tyrka et al. (2008) found that the loss of a parent could potentially generate depressive symptoms after going through that experience. The study conducted by Tyrka et al. (2008) about parental loss during childhood, and the consequences on their mental health as adults, that
included 87 Caucasians, 5 African Americans, 4 Latinos, 4 Asians, and 5 people from another race, found that the group of participants who had lost a parent due to death had higher levels of depression compared to the group of participants who did not lose a parent. A longitudinal study by Schoenfelder et al. (2011), with 109 participants of which 73 were Caucasian, 17 were Latinos, 8 were African American, 3 were Native American, 1 was Asian, and 7 people from another race, focused on the relationship between mental health and fear of abandonment on children who lost a parent between the ages of 7-16 years old, and they found that six years later, adolescents and young adults who have lost a parent were experiencing signs of depression due to their fear of abandonment from their romantic partner. The levels of depression were higher in younger adolescents than in older adolescents and young adults (Schoenfelder et al., 2011). Even though these findings were obtained by self-reports from the participants and caregivers, these findings demonstrate the potential consequences on the mental health of a person who loses a parent. Luecken (2000), conducted a study with 30 college students between the ages of 18 and 27 who lost a parent before the age of 16 years old and found that participants who lost a parent and did not have a good relationship with their families exhibited higher symptoms of depression compared to participants who did not lose a parent. A more recent study conducted in Puerto Rico that included 2002 freshman college participants with a mean age of 18.26 found that one of the biggest stressors for these participants was the loss of a loved one; as a consequence, it was found that these participants experienced higher levels of depressive symptoms compared to participants who did not experience a stressful event such as the end of a romantic relationship, the loss of a parent, illness, moving for college, or parental divorce (Reyes-Rodríguez et al., 2013). These results show the need for attention to the Latino community in regard to the
prevention of developing depressive symptoms, and, most importantly, to identify if parental loss could be a factor for depression in Latino college students who have lost a parent.

**Anxiety in the Latino Community**

According to Lima Nogueira et al. (2015), in the Latino community, anxiety disorder is not recognized as a condition they experience; instead, they refer to anxiety as *ataque de nervios*. When experiencing an *ataque de nervios*, the symptoms of anxiety are exhibited, which one can conclude that *ataque de nervios* is considered anxiety. A study about anxiety in adults conducted in the United States found that Latinos are among the groups with higher experiences of anxiety symptoms; also, Latinos are the second group most likely to experience severe anxiety symptoms (Terlizzi & Villarroel, 2020). However, Latinos are less likely to seek professional mental help, out of fear of being labeled as crazy, and in some circumstances, they even think they are crazy for needing mental help (Martínez Pincay & Guarnaccia, 2006). In the United States, Latino children have also been found to struggle with anxiety symptoms. A study of 27 Latino children who were diagnosed with anxiety disorder and 20 Latino children who were not diagnosed, between the ages of seven and thirteen years old, and with at least one parent born outside of the United States, found that the group with the anxiety diagnosis experienced more anxiety compared to the non-clinical group (Valera et al., 2018). Valera et al. (2018) also found that the mothers of the group diagnosed with anxiety reported high anxiety levels for themselves and for their children. Realizing that their children were reporting levels of anxiety and lack of emotional understanding caused an increase in anxiety for the mothers in their sample; additionally, their cultural values such as *familismo* (i.e., being loyal to the family) and *simpatía* (i.e., sympathy) in combination with lack of emotional understanding resulted in high levels of anxiety in Latino children (Valera et al., 2018).
Research by DiPierro et al. (2017) showed that hope plays an important role in how Latinos view anxiety; furthermore, in their sample of 134 Latino students from a charter high school between the ages of 14 and 20 years of age, the study found that those participants who did not have hope in their future success experienced high levels of anxiety; also, they found that hope was not correlated with their religious beliefs, as religion was not found to be a protective factor for their anxiety symptoms.

Studies have found high levels of anxiety in Latino college students. For example, a study conducted by Crockett et al. (2007) with 148 Mexican American college students from two universities in California, and one university in Texas, and between the ages of 18 to 30 years old, found that acculturation stress was linked to higher levels of anxiety in the three universities; however, students from California exhibited higher levels than students from Texas, so the state was a control variable in this sample. Different factors such as discrimination (Juang et al., 2016), impostor feeling (Cokley et al., 2017), and lack of parental bond (Lopez et al., 2000) can also contribute to the development of anxiety symptoms in Latino college students. This study will add to the literature by exploring parental loss as a potential contributor to symptoms of anxiety in Latino college students.

**Influence of Parental Loss on Anxiety**

The loss of a parent could also contribute to the development of other internalizing problems, such as anxiety (Stikkelbroek et al., 2015). When the surviving parent avoids talking to their children about the loss of their parent, they deprive them of the opportunity to express their feelings, which could eventually develop into anxiety later in life (Cait, 2005). In fact, the expression of emotions has been found to decrease anxiety symptoms in children who have lost a parent, or their parents were terminally ill (Howell et al., 2015). Additionally, when a child loses
When assessing anxiety and depression following the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) criteria, Tyrka et al. (2008) also found that the participants in their quantitative study who had lost a parent showed higher levels of anxiety compared to the participants who did not lose a parent. On the other hand, Mireault and Bond (1992) found no differences in their quantitative study using the Brief Symptom Inventory in regard to anxiety between their college sample of participants who had lost a parent before the age of 20 years old (i.e., 98.4% before the age of 18, and one participant at the age of 20), and their control group of 166 participants who had not lost a parent. According to Mireault and Bond (1992), the high psychological adjustment of a college student could be a factor interfering between parental loss and anxiety and depression. However, Mireault and Bond (1992) also found that the participants who lost a parent were more likely than the participants who did not lose a parent to feel more vulnerable to losing a loved one in the future, which in turn provokes anxiety symptoms.

**Academic Motivation**

Academic motivation is important to succeed academically, and the guidance of a parent, despite the child’s age, is a key component for a child to develop academic motivation (Singh, 2011). Academic motivation has been defined as the feeling of achieving success, commitment to school (Rodriguez et al., 2013), and the desire to obtain good academic accomplishments despite the difficulty of the assignments and severe feedback from the professors (Singh, 2011). For the purpose of this study, academic motivation will be defined as the desire to enroll in a higher educational institution and the inspiration to graduate.
For the average American student, seeking a higher education could be a difficult decision to make since there are a lot of factors to consider, such as family obligations (Hahn & Price, 2008), and a lot of effort and motivation could be required to take the necessary steps to start this journey. For Latino students, this journey seems to be more difficult to achieve since they encounter other obstacles such as no encouragement from their families to continue with school (Roosa et al., 2012), lack of knowledge about the university resources (Tovar, 2015), and discrimination faced at school (Reynolds et al., 2010). Roosa et al. (2012) found that children in early adolescence get more motivated academically when their parents finish their own schooling, such as graduating from high school since graduated parents are more likely to encourage their children to persist in school. However, the high school graduation rate in the Latino community has been low for several generations compared to other racial groups (National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, 2019). In the Latino community, it has been noticed that there is a shortage in higher academic education as well, and there is a lack of college enrollment of Latino students. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021), 56.2 percent of Latino students between the ages of 18 to 24 enrolled in higher education institutes in 2020. Compared to other ethnic groups, and the average American college student, the college enrollment is lower for Latino students. Many factors could contribute to the low enrollment of Latino students in higher education institutions, such as the lack of financial support and lack of parental support if their parents did not pursue a higher education. According to the NCES (2019), the high school graduation rate in 1976 for Latinos was 60.3 percent compared to African Americans at 73.5 percent, and Caucasians at 86.4 percent, in 1996, the graduation rate for Latinos was at 61.9 percent, African Americans at 83 percent, and Caucasians at 91.5 percent. In 2016 the graduation rate for Latinos was at 89.1 percent, African Americans at
92.2, and Caucasians at 94.5. The school faculty has also been found to contribute to academic motivation in Latino college students; in fact, when students enroll in college and take the time to meet with their professors, counselors, or academic advisors, their Grade Point Average (GPA) score improves compared to students who do not seek advice and support from their institution (Tovar, 2015).

On some occasions, college students have felt unmotivated to seek guidance and support from their institution due to the stress of racism from faculty members, which causes college students to have negative views about seeking higher education (Reynolds et al., 2010). According to Reynolds et al. (2010), it is important for Latino college students to get academically involved and seek support from their institutions, such as requesting meetings with their professors and academic advisors in order for them to feel less stress about college and more motivated to succeed academically. Research has found that cultural beliefs such as marianismo could be a motivation for Latina college students (i.e., female college students) to succeed academically since they take the family responsibility very seriously, including prioritizing their education; in fact, their willingness to succeed academically is a way to show their parents appreciation for everything they did for them (Rodriguez et al., 2013).

**Influence of Parental Loss on Academic Motivation**

The academic motivation of a child could also be affected by the loss of a parent since they are less likely to seek higher education compared to children who have not lost a parent (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Erola, 2020). A longitudinal study conducted by Cas et al. (2014) with participants from 9 to 17 years old found that a year after losing a parent, their academic enrollment decreased, and after five years of losing a parent, their academic enrollment was about 40 percent less, compared to children who did not lose a parent. Perhaps, losing a parent at
such a young age, and the lack of social support, could influence the motivation of Latino students to enroll in a higher education institution. However, Apelian and Nesteruk (2017) found that most of the college student participants in their sample who lost a parent when they were 13 to 20 years old focused all their attention on their education to cope with the loss of their parent.

There are other factors to consider in regard to academic motivation for Latino students. A study conducted with Latino students found that almost all of the Latino participants had many family responsibilities (e.g., cleaning responsibilities and financial responsibilities), and unfortunately, these family responsibilities were interfering with their education and affecting their grades (Tovar, 2015). When a child loses a parent, their family responsibilities may increase. The surviving parent is more likely to ask their child to contribute to the home; for example, girls are expected to do the house chores such as cleaning and cooking, and boys are expected to provide the household income (Gimenez et al., 2013). As a consequence, when these parentless children lose a father or a mother, they are more likely to get married at a young age or focus on gaining money than to seek a higher education degree. In addition to these results, Gimenez et al. (2013) found that children under the age of 18 who lost a parent are more likely to have less motivation for the future. When a child under the age of 18 loses a mother, their academic motivation to seek a higher education declines compared with a child that loses a father (Gimenez et al., 2013). However, other studies have found that the loss of a father is more detrimental in adolescence than the loss of a mother, and that children who lose a father have less academic motivation as well as unsatisfactory grades (Himaz, 2013). Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Erola (2020) found that children get equally affected educationally when they lose either a mother or a father; however, they also found that the older the child is when they lose a parent, the more probability they have of seeking a higher education, which indicates that the longer they spend with their parents alive,
the better it is for their education. Perhaps the social support they received from their parents for as long as they had them was beneficial for the academic motivation of these children. Nevertheless, when a child loses a parent or both parents, their academic motivation is more likely to decline, and parental support from the surviving parent could be a very important element for a child to become motivated to seek a higher education (Roosa et al., 2012). As identified in other studies, it is important to determine what is causing the lack of academic success in Latino students (Roosa et al., 2012); therefore, the current study focuses on identifying if and how the loss of a parent influences academic motivation in Latino college students.

**Social Support**

Social support has been found to be beneficial in many ways, such as protecting against stress, mental health, and physical health (Sarason et al., 1983). Social support has been found to intervene with the development of mental health problems. Roohafza et al. (2014) found that social support interferes with the development of anxiety and depression; specifically, they found that family social support is a stronger protector for these mental health conditions. Social support has been defined as receiving support from people one feels safe with, one can trust, and depend on (Sarason et al., 1983) and as the relationship with family members, including immediate and extended family, as well as friends (Apelian & Nesteruk, 2017). For the purpose of this study, social support will be defined as the action of feeling safe and supported by people one can trust, such as trusted professionals, family members, friends, and loved ones.

In the Latino community, parents provide support to their children by making sure to inculcate them good values such as being responsible and dedicated to their work, which encourages students to succeed academically to honor their parents for their support (Jabbar et
Additionally, Jabbar et al. (2017) found that Latino families are usually involved in their student’s decisions about their careers or about which college institution they want to attend. Jabbar et al. (2017) stated in their results that extended family is also supportive to Latino college students by providing encouragement when they feel like giving up and telling them phrases of affirmation to inspire them to continue with their academic goals. Crockett et al. (2007) found in their sample that students who reported having parental support and peer support were less likely to experience acculturation stress, and they reported lower levels of internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Perhaps this could be the reason why Latino college students are more likely to enroll in institutions that are closer to family members, since the closeness of their loved ones guarantees that they will have the support nearby if they need it (Jabbar et al., 2017).

Some studies, such as the one conducted by Baker (2013), found that the Latino college students in their sample did not have much campus support for Latinos compared to African Americans, and they were less likely to seek help from their professors compared to African Americans; in fact, participants from their sample reported relying on peer support more instead of faculty support even though peer support does not seem to benefit their academic grades. Perhaps the lack of campus involvement from Latinos is due to the many responsibilities they could have outside of campus, such as work and family responsibilities (Baker and Robnett, 2012). According to Baker and Robnett (2012), when Latino college students become more involved on campus, and they join groups and student clubs, they feel more connected and have more probability of staying in college. Another source of support for Latino college students that has proved to be useful to improve their grades has been to take classes from professors who are also Latinos since they feel comfortable interacting with them; therefore, it is beneficial for
Latino college students to begin seeking guidance and support from faculty members considering that faculty assistance has been shown to help improve the student's GPA score (Baker, 2013).

Regarding seeking professional mental help, Latino college students reported feeling that they are betraying their parents if they talk to a mental health professional; instead, Latino college students are more likely to seek social support from family members, especially from their parents, friends, and romantic partners (Chiang et al., 2004). It is essential to educate school faculty and mental health professionals about the different cultural norms of the students and inform the Latino college students about the resources available on-campus (Chiang et al., 2004).

**Influence of Social Support in Parental Loss**

Social support could play an important role in the lives of Latino college students who have lost a parent. The loss of a family member could really alter the family dynamic, and it could be very difficult for the family to get back to normal without the proper support. In some circumstances, when a child loses a parent with whom they had a close emotional relationship, they feel empty and unlovable, especially if the surviving parent does not try to fulfill the emptiness that their child is experiencing (Cait, 2005). Open communication between the surviving parent and the child is essential to help the child adapt to the loss of their parent, this relationship between parent and child will allow the child to ask questions to better understand what happened and be able to express their feelings (Raveis et al., 1999). Cait (2005) stated that open communication and emotional support from the surviving parent to their child could help the child feel loved, increase their self-esteem, and help them realize that they can also build a close relationship with the surviving parent. A good relationship with family members and friends has been proven to serve as social support for children who have lost a parent (Apelian & Nesteruk, 2017). Roosa et al. (2012) found that in the Latino community, the extended family
could provide as much support as the child’s parents during difficult circumstances, which means that all family members are equally important when it comes to offering social support to one another. Individual therapy and group therapy have also been appropriate to reduce anxiety in someone who has lost a loved one. In a case study about an adolescent who was drastically informed about the death of his friend, it was discovered that the adolescent’s anxiety decreased after completing individual and group therapy treatment (Dutil, 2019). This case study shows an example of the importance and the positive outcomes of providing social support to grieving children. The lack of social support could contribute to the development of anxiety symptoms and lack of security in life that eventually interferes with their social life (Sarason et al., 1983). Children who have lost a parent are at higher risk of not appropriately coping with the loss; therefore, social support from trusted professionals is essential for these grieving children to thrive from the loss of their parent (Fearnley, 2010), as well as the social support from loved ones.

Traditional Latino families have different grieving expectations for men and women, as women are expected to cry loudly and shout the name of the deceased, and men are supposed to be strong for the grieving family and avoid crying for the person they lost (Clements et al., 2003). Some Latinos believe that forgiveness is needed so the deceased can rest in peace and enter heaven; therefore, in some circumstances, rituals are practiced (Esposito et al., 1996). Generally, grieving Latino families tend to receive their social support from their extended family members, friends, and their church (Clements et al., 2003). For example, in the Catholic religion, the family, as well as close friends, pray the rosary for nine days, which Latinos call novena, and after the nine days, the church celebrates a mass in honor of the deceased (Hidalgo et al., 2020). Additionally, in the Mexican community, they create an altar with the deceased
favorite food and drinks, and toys and candy for deceased children, so their loved ones’ spirit visits the altar (Hidalgo et al., 2020). As demonstrated in the ABC-X Model, Latinos who share the same Latino origin, traditions, and religion, among other things, are more likely to feel supported during difficult times (Schock-Giordano, 2013).
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Phenomenology Design

The current study will utilize the phenomenology design, which has been used in qualitative research. Phenomenology has been useful to study drastic human experiences as well as emotional experiences of a specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Phenomenology design in qualitative research is used to search for the reality of lived experiences and the participant’s knowledge of the phenomenon of study (Tarozzi & Mortari, 2009). After the researcher explores and dismisses his or her personal life experience and assumptions of the phenomenon in question, a phenomenological interview that consist of open-ended questions could be used to collect data on the fundamental life experiences of the participants about the specific phenomenon with the certainly that prejudice will be avoided (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A phenomenology design allows the data to be of equal value, which permits the organization of the data into themes and consecutively the observation from different perspectives that help understand how others perceived or experienced the specific phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Participants

The principal investigator recruited Latino college students from various universities using a flyer that was created to invite Latino college students to participate in the current study. There were certain requirements to be included in the study. The participants had to be at least 18 years old, identify as Latino, Latina, Hispanic, or Latinx, have lost at least one parent before the
age of 18, and who is currently a student enrolled in a community college, a 4-year university, or in graduate school. An informed consent form was provided through Qualtrics to selected participants. If participants agreed and signed the informed consent form, they would be directed to a brief survey with the following demographic questions.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender identity?
4. Which of your parents did you lose?
5. How old were you when you lost your parent?
6. Do you currently have a diagnosis of anxiety or depression?
7. Were there symptoms of anxiety or depression before you lost a parent?
8. Are you a community college, undergraduate, or graduate student?
9. Are you a full-time or part-time student?
10. How long have you been in college?
11. What is your Latino origin?
12. What is your email?

If the participants met the criteria required, they were invited to participate in a mini-focus group. The principal investigator sent a scheduler link to the participants for them to complete to find the best time to meet for the mini-focus group. When conducting qualitative research, it is important for the researchers to build rapport with the participants to ensure their full cooperation in the study and to obtain detailed information from the participants (Kennedy-Macfoy, 2013). The researcher from this study identifies as a Latina college student who lost a parent before the age of 18 years old, which assisted in facilitating the interview process and the
rapport building due to sharing the same interest in the topic. Due to challenges in scheduling, two mini-focus groups and one individual interview were conducted by the principal investigator with a total of five participants who had lost a parent before the age of eighteen. Each mini-focus group included two participants, and each group lasted between 30-70 minutes. The participant’s ages ranged from 18 years old to 36 years old. Four of the participants identified as females, and one participant identified as male. Each participant was given a name other than their real name to protect their identity. The following names were utilized as pseudonyms in this study, Frida, Anais, Maya, Daniel, and Ruby, followed by the age they lost their parent in square brackets in the results section. Frida lost her parent when she was twelve years old, she identifies as Mexican, and she is a part-time student attending a community college. Anais lost her parent when she was eight years old, she identifies as Mexican American, and she is a full-time student attending a four-year university. Maya lost her parent when she was eight years old, she identifies as Salvadoran-Honduran, and she is a full-time student attending a four-year university. Daniel lost his parent when he was sixteen years old, he identifies as Mexican, and he is a full-time student attending a four-year university. Ruby lost her father when she was eleven years old, she identifies as Honduran, and she is a part-time student attending a community college.

**Interview Questions**

Before the interview dates, the researcher practiced the questions with two people who identify as Latinos to ensure the questions were clear and easy to understand. On the days of the interviews, the interviews were recorded and administered virtually through the Microsoft Teams communication platform. All the questions were asked to each participant, who answered every question. The following questions were asked:
1. Tell me about your relationship with the parent that you lost.
   a. How did you and your family grieve the loss of your parent?
   b. What are the cultural expectations around grieving?
2. How did the loss of your parent change your life?
3. Did you experience any depressive symptoms after losing your parent?
4. Did you experience any anxiety symptoms after losing your parent?
   a. Did you or do you also worry about losing your other parent?
5. How did losing your parent influence your decision of going to college?
6. How did losing your parent influence your decision to be a full-time student or part-time student?
7. Tell me about your relationship with your parent (surviving parent).
8. What kind of support did you receive when you lost your parent, and who provided you with that support?

**Analysis**

The results were reviewed using a narrative approach. A narrative approach has been utilized to understand narrative materials (Lieblich et al., 1998). These materials could include life stories, and life experiences of the participants shared during the interview process. Using a narrative approach, a researcher can analyze the data by searching for sections related to the research question; then, the researcher must compare the sections to identify patterns in the results (Butina, 2015).
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

The results from this study are structured following the format of the ABC-X model utilizing (A) as the stressor of losing a parent based on the relationship they had with the parent that they lost. (B) The family’s resources such as social support, including the relationship with their surviving parent, and the support they received when they lost their parent, as well as who provided that support. (C) How the loss was perceived by the family, such as the grieving process and their cultural expectations around grieving, as well as their feelings about losing their other parent. And (X) the potential long-term consequences in Latino college students such as the impact in their lives when they lost their parent, depression, anxiety, and academic motivation to pursue a higher education and becoming a full-time or a part-time student.

Relationship with the Parent That They Lost

All of the participants lost their fathers, and none of them lost a mother. Most of the participants (80%) who participated in this study lost their fathers when they were very young, approximately less than twelve years old, and could not remember much about their childhood with them. However, most of them mentioned not having a good relationship with their fathers.

Frida [12]: “No bad experiences and no good ones either, because I don't... like I said, I don't remember having any conversations with him or anything, you know, like we weren’t close like that.”

Anais [8]: “I don't remember anything, but my grandma does tell me a lot about how he interacted with me. Umm... I don't remember anything significant about how our relationship was, like, I don't... like nothing bad or good stands out about our relationship.”
Maya [8]: “So, I don't really remember much about it because I mean, I was really young and I think when I was like eight years old, probably… I wasn't really close to him… It wasn't that great of a relationship.”

One participant who lost his father when he was sixteen years old remembered having a good relationship with his father; in fact, he remembered having only good experiences with him.

Daniel [16]: “He always was a very respectful father. He always treated us, me and my brothers, with respect, and between me and him, we never argued… I mean, never, we never argued… I mean, I have no… I have no bad memories about him.”

**Relationship with Their Surviving Parent**

All participants from this study stated having a great relationship with their mothers. The codes that stood up more during this question were - close relationship, strong connection, good friend, and best friend.

Frida [12]: “Yeah, I think I have a pretty good relationship with her. Umm, like she's my best friend. I always tell her everything that happens in my life, and she is always there for me whenever I need to talk to someone. Yeah, like she's the only one that knows everything. Literally. You know, that happens to me. So, I do have a good relationship with her.”

Anais [8]: “Umm, well. Uh. She's been like, the one constant that I've had. So… [participant became emotional]. She's just someone that I know that I can always confide in, and I just feel like I have a closer relationship with her because… like she is the one person that hasn't left. And so, I just feel like, that's made a stronger connection… Umm. And my grandma. She's always been there too. I don't live with her anymore. But I still think she is a big part of… Or like who I'm close to.”

Maya [8]: “She has been my rock, like through this, like entire, like college process, high school, middle school… she has always been a very, very, very good friend to me whenever I need to go to her and talk to her about how I feel.”
Daniel [16]: “She's like my best friend, you know, and I have always trusted her. I have always trusted her because she's like I said... she's my best friend.”

Ruby [11]: “I'm very close to my mom... I think it's a good relationship. Well, obviously, like every parent, every mom, you know, and daughter, they always argue and stuff. But I know that at the end of the day, if there's anything that goes down and if I'm in a bad situation or I need some help, I know that I can call her, [participant became emotional], and she'll be there. She'll be the first person that comes to save me or just to be there for me. She is my best friend, like I said, she's my best friend, and I guess watching her struggle... being a single parent, I guess that kind of made me... love her even more... So, I guess that's why our relationship is very like good and... yeah, I just think it's because of that, because of the way she was. I think our relationship is very good. And I know that I can trust her with everything. I know that, like I said, if anything goes down, she'll be the first person that I call and nobody else, not even my siblings, just my mom. She's a very good mom. She's a very good best friend. She's a very good grandma. She's just a perfect person. I guess you can say, and I just really love her.”

Support They Received When They Lost Their Parent and Who Provided That Support

Most participants mentioned receiving social support when they lost their father. One participant who lost her father when she was twelve years old and with who she did not have a good relationship, stated she did not need social support as she feels she was not affected by the loss of her father. Other participants remembered receiving social support from a mental health professional as well as from close family members.

Anais [8]: “I had like a strong support system, and I still do. So, it's like those same people that were there after he left... when I didn't have a relationship with him, were with me when that happened. So, I knew I'd lost somebody, but it didn't feel as such a big loss because of the support system that I had... Umm, well, my mom and my grandma, they were always there. And they're like the dominant figures in my life. And then when my mom got married, he was also. He's also been somebody, my dad now, he's somebody that I rely on too. So, I have my mom, my dad, and my grandma... I do know that my mom took me to this like... I don't know if it was like a counseling center or what it was, but they had
me talking to this person and like I remember, like drawing or playing games or something like that, and then being told with that person there… what had happened… of my dad's passing. And I do remember that they were like asking me like, “how do you feel? Are you OK?” Like, based on what's happening. I do remember that, and like I said, my mom was always there. So… she was the person that was there with me and... Yeah, I think that's it.”

Maya [8]: “I think I had like one other person that I talked to about it, which was my school counselor in like... 10th grade, cause my uncle had passed away, and at that time it just reminded me of my dad because he was his brother. And so, at that point, like a lot of my feelings, started coming back. And so, I talked to her. I had a few sessions with her and talked to her about it. So, she was like a support system for a specific part. But my biggest supporter was always my mom.”

A different participant who lost his father at age sixteen mentioned receiving support from family and friends, and fully focusing his attention on his schooling to cope with the loss of his father.

Daniel [16]: “OK. Yeah, that's a very good question because, uh, I never went to a psychiatrist or psychologist and stuff… it probably sounds funny, but it was the life… you know, when I say life… it’s my friends, my family… probably the most important part for me to deal with this specific situation of my dad... of his death, was being in school. At least for me, it’s everything. [referring to school]. And I think for me, school was the top of the most important things to get through this situation. And of course, my friends and you know, like I said before, time heals everything. And I think that's how I kind of worked or handled this situation.”

Self-motivation was also used by some participants to process the loss of their fathers.

Daniel [16]: “No, no, no, I kept telling myself… you know, you can do it. Keep moving. Keep trying. keep fighting. And like I said, it was the total opposite for me because this made me want to keep fighting even more for everything. Yeah… the main and most important relationship of all is the one that you have with yourself.”

Maya [8]: “Oh, I want to add on to what Daniel said, like about not letting yourself feel that way because I did that too… I also didn't like, try to let myself feel all those emotions that I was feeling until
I was like, older, until I finally got to like talk about what happened.”

Overall, participants mentioned receiving social support mainly from their mothers, who they said have been their comfort and encouragement during difficult situations.

Maya [8]: “She's been the person that I like, run to whenever I have a problem, or I need advice for... and like she's basically been my support system. Like whenever the whole thing was going on where I started telling her how I felt, and I started telling her like what I went through whenever he wasn't there, like, she was always very understanding. She never judged me.”

Daniel [16]: “Umm, so you know, my mom was, she’s always... been my support but most importantly... how can I say it, she's like my best friend, you know, because she always has supported me, I mean, she supported me at that time when my dad passed away, and I wanted to act strong in front of her.”

Ruby [11]: “I called my mom, I told her how everything was. She talked to me, and she was like, “so how did it go?” And I was like, “oh”, and I told her how I felt, you know. So, I guess my support system was always my mom. It was always her... My mom was everything. Nobody else.”

**Family Grieving the Loss of the Parent**

A participant who lost her father when she was eight years old remembered close and extended family getting together to grieve the loss.

Anais [8]: “…the whole family was over at my grandma's house.”

Some of the participants remembered close family members grieving for the loss of their fathers, such as grandmothers, mothers, and siblings crying about the loss of their loved ones.

Anais [8]: “…my grandma was obviously grieving and, like, crying... like, besides her, her and his sister was there too. And they were... I know they were like grieving and crying, but I just didn't understand why until I got a little older.

Frida [12]: “Umm, I remember when my mom told me. Or actually, she didn't even like, sit me down and tell me, like she... I remember somebody called her and told her that he had passed and
then she started crying. I think it was more like she was on her own… she was just, like, not focusing on us. She was more focused on her, you know because she was… she was hurting.”

Daniel [16]: “…my mom, of course, she cried a lot but… She was very uh, careful with this part of uh… showing, showing her feelings or this, this side, probably.”

Cultural Expectations Around Grieving

Since some participants lost their fathers when they were very young, they do not remember much about the cultural expectations around grieving. However, some participants were able to remember some cultural traditions their families did when they lost their fathers.

Frida [12]: “I do know that… I’m not sure how it works because I’m not Catholic, but I know that, you know, after like nine days or something, like that, they have a mass for… you know, the person that died. And… And they brought in… When… At his funeral. When we buried him, umm, they brought mariachis… to the funeral, so yeah, that's another thing they did.”

Daniel [16]: “Mexican people or as a Mexican person, we tend to embrace death, but in a good way, you know, because we have uh, we have Dia de Los Muertos, day of the dead… But the part that I… I remember a lot… is my mom going to church and praying a lot for him. And how can I say it… in Mexico, We say it like… she made a misa, you know, like for him… For his soul and for… probably… to rest in peace and all this Mexican cultural, you know, things that moms usually tend to do and but, in this case, that's the only part that I remember.”

Other participants shared their knowledge about the cultural expectations around grieving.

Anais [8]: “Umm… Not from my dad’s passing, but I do know that, like the Catholic religion has, like, a certain number of days, I'm not sure how many, but they pray the rosary in honor of that person. Umm… It's like, uh, It's more than just a rosary. There's like, singing involved as well, like prayers. But they do that for like a certain number of nights after the person passes.”

Maya [8]: “Umm, we just pray, we don't… we don't, we're not Catholic, so we don't have like a mass for them or anything like
that. So, we'll have like a regular funeral and like, just like words of... umm. Like, their eulogy and people talking about them, and then we just pray.”

Ruby [11]: “It's just grieving and just making sure that their family and loved ones are like in, you know... Good mentality, good health. Just making sure that they're not going in a rough direction cause it's hard losing someone, so... I mean, them just crying, just crying with one another... making sure that they’re okay. That they mentally don't go through a rough path just because someone died, you know? So probably pray for them, and they go over to their houses to make sure that they're fine. So, I guess you can say that's what we do as, I guess, Hispanic people.”

**Feelings About Losing Their Other Parent**

For the participants in this study, thinking about the possibility of losing their mother was very emotional and difficult to even consider. After asking this question, a few participants stated feeling distressed just to have a conversation about losing their mothers.

Daniel [16]: “Umm, probably yes and no because I don't want to think of... this idea of losing my mom because that really scares the hell out of me. You know? It's way different, I think. I don't want to sound mean or rude, but it's way different... but yeah, the process or ... even the simple idea of...thinking about it. Gives me chills, you know? But yeah, it's kind of different. I mean, losing a dad it's another whole different thing... Yeah ... that would be the end for me probably.”

Maya [8]: “I was scared that something could happen to her. I mean, her job was pretty like... she would come back, and she would tell us about it, like... one time, she got hit in the back of the head and she, like, passed out or something, uh, at her job because they were trying to rob the place that she worked at. And like, I was scared out of my mind. I was like, “mom... that's scary”. Like, “if I lose you, like, I already lost my dad, and then I wasn't even close to him. And if I lose you, and I'm really close to you, and I'm really attached to you. That would be the end of my world.”

Ruby [11]: “Ohh yeah, of course. Losing my mom is something that I’d never want to do. I guess because I'm very close to her and like she's like my best friend, so, obviously, if I ever lose her, it's...it's going to be, like, the worst day of my life.”
Researcher: “Mmhmm, yeah. Did you think about that when you were 11 years old?”
Ruby: “Yeah, obviously, and I would get very, very sad because she was the only parent that was there for me.”

How the Loss of Their Parent Changed Their Life

The participants from this study were impacted by the loss of their fathers in different ways. The participant who had a good relationship with his father stated being ready to move on from his father’s loss; however, he mentioned it being difficult because his mother keeps bringing up those memories that he is trying to forget. Some other participants did not have a good relationship with their fathers; therefore, they stated that their father’s loss did not change their lives.

Anais [8]: “Umm, I don't... I don't think it had that much of an impact on me. Umm, because I just... I don't remember what our relationship was like before he left, and umm, all I remember like a brief phone conversation. So, I don't really think we had... that huge of a relationship... So, I don't think I was affected by his death.”

Frida [12]: “Umm, I don't think that it affected or changed my life. Yeah, for the same reason that we didn't have, like, a relationship. So yeah, it didn't really change nothing. You know, everything was the same after a few days. Yeah, because it's not like I missed him because he was never really there. So yeah, I didn't get that, the feeling wasn't there, because, you know, it was just like any other day. You know, we would not see him for months and, you know, so yeah, it didn't really affect me or anything.”

All of the participants' parents were separated before the participants lost their fathers. Therefore, all of the participant’s mothers were single mothers when the participants were growing up. As a consequence, a few participants had to take over other family roles in addition to being a child.

Maya [8]: “I had to take on a lot of responsibilities, like to try to help her out while she was balancing multiple jobs. Umm, but I did try to help her as much as I could, like trying to do chores and stuff...
like that, so I did. I feel like I had to grow up a little... umm. Sooner than my siblings did, since my mom would like sometimes ask to help her over. I was like in my teenage years. She’ll ask... “Hey, I need you to help me with this and this. And I need you to help me with your siblings doing this”. So, I feel like it made me mature faster than a usual kid would.”

Ruby [11]: “It was very hard for my mom because you had to play both roles, so obviously, she was always working. Umm… she was always working obviously, so it was very hard for me and my oldest sister because whenever she was working, we were taking care of our youngest siblings because my mom was... she was a type of person that she didn't want to leave us with anybody you know. So, for my mom, it was very hard because she had to play both roles, and me and my oldest sister were the ones that got... had it the hardest. So, I believe that's why me and her we’re very, like, independent. And we grew up very fast because of that... my oldest sister, she was doing the most because she was the oldest, you know, like I said, in a Hispanic house. Well, I don't know in your household, but in our Hispanic household, It was always the oldest helping the mom do everything. So, my sister was... my oldest sister was basically my mom’s right hand, and I was just like the assistant of my sister, you know.”

**Potential Depressive Symptoms After Losing Their Parent**

The researcher used the DSM-5 criteria to ask about depressive symptoms. The participants who did not have a relationship with their fathers stated they did not experience any symptoms of depression when they lost their fathers, not even sadness, while other participants remembered feeling sad for a few moments. A participant who lost her father when she was eight years old, mentioned feeling sad when it happened, but she remembers quickly moving on from that experience.

Anais [8]: “I don't think it was so much depression as much as sadness for maybe a few moments, I really don't... I don't think at that age I could have really grieved him, especially not knowing him, because I don't remember. Besides that, like when I found out... crying for maybe like... 10 minutes and then...like Frida said, it was just like... “well, it happened”. Like, we move on like it didn't... I don't think I experienced any depression because of it.”
Another participant who lost his father when he was sixteen years old remembered feeling sad about losing his father, but he also remembered motivating himself to avoid feeling depressed.

Daniel [16]: “I never felt that type of feeling. I mean, it was the total opposite for me, and it made me want to keep fighting, and even more, you know, for my goals in life and, you know, I needed to move on, move on, move on, and keep trying, keep trying and not feel guilty, not feel depressed, not feel sadness. I mean, I didn't allow myself to… I mean, it probably sounds awkward or silly, but I didn't allow myself at that certain time to be sad or being depressed.”

**Potential Anxiety Symptoms After Losing Their Parent**

The researcher used the DSM-5 criteria to ask about anxiety symptoms. Most participants stated they did not experience any anxiety symptoms when they lost their fathers. One participant who lost her father when she was eleven years old shared that her faith in her religion was protecting her from experiencing any depressive and anxiety symptoms.

Ruby [11]: “No anxiety. No worries. I feel like it's also because, like I said, my family is very religious. So… I always put like my faith in God, so I think that all of those things you're asking me, I never really had them because… I was very happy. I was never like sad. You know, I was never going through anything wrong or anything like that, cause, all because of my religion, yeah.”

Another participant who lost her father when she was eight years old stated experiencing anxiety symptoms and even some depressive symptoms that she started noticing when her parents separated. Interestingly, another participant who lost his father when he was sixteen years old realized how his symptoms of hyperactivity correlated with potential symptoms of anxiety, which in some circumstances, Latinos describe as feeling nervous.

Daniel [16]: “I didn’t feel that kind of anxiety. It was more… uh like you said before, this hyperactivity, uh when I tend to reach the top of my anxiety, no not anxiety, it's the hyperactivity but…”
Researcher: “Is it being nervous? Were you like, just feeling nervous? Is that what you were experiencing or no?”
Daniel: “Yeah, probably more nervous. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Because I tend to get nervous in every single situation when I don’t need to get nervous, it can kind of be confused with this hyperactivity and with the nervous part. But it tends to be like the same thing; I guess, no.”

Their Decision of Going to College After Losing Their Parent

The participants who lost their fathers when they were less than twelve years old mentioned that the loss of their fathers did not influence their decision of going to college. Instead, they mentioned feeling more motivated to pursue a higher education.

Anais [8]: “I don't think it was so much his passing. As much as the people around me who always encouraged me to do so, but I don't think it had anything to do with him.”

Ruby [11]: “It was about showing people that a single mother of four was able to raise good, successful kids. So, I was doing everything for my mom… So not because of my dad, it was just because of my mom.”

Maya [8]: “I guess it was kind of just what pushed me to do like better than him. And like I always had my mom, telling me like, “you need to do better than us”, like talking about my parents. So, it like, pushed me to do the best I could and finish high school to be able to get into college and to be able to get my degree.”

On the other hand, the participant who lost his father at age sixteen mentioned that losing his father was his motivation to enroll in college and make his father proud.

Daniel [16]: “You know, this is another very good question because that's exactly what pushed me to go to college. I always keep telling my dad… “I made it. I'm studying…. so I gave you that”… ese gusto a el… yeah for him, so I made it for and specifically for him.

Their Decision of Being a Full-Time Student or Part-Time Student

In some cases, the loss of their fathers did not influence their decision of being a full-time
or a part-time student, while in other cases, the participants felt encouraged by their mothers to become full-time students.

Daniel [16]: “Oh no, I think it's very heavily related with that part, mainly because of my mom, because my mom always keeps trying to tell me... “You need to finish your university at this specific time, and your career depends on only four years”... but also its heavily related, like you said with my dad, the specific words that my dad ... used to tell me, that “you need to finish your university and get your degree on whatever you want to study, but please do it... don't lose the opportunity to study and... and reach your goals and your degree.” And yeah, I think it's heavily related, at least for me, with the words that I keep trying to remember in my mind that my dad used to tell me every single day. Yeah.”

Maya [8]: “I agree with what Daniel said. I think it was very well correlated, um, because my mom is the same way. She's like, “you need to have” like... she literally like... planned out my whole life, the three years that I'm going to be in school like, “by this year... you need to have graduated already”, and I think she does that because she doesn't want... like me or my siblings to end up like them, that that they don't have like a... like a college education. So, they're not allowed to have the same like job opportunities as we would. So, I feel like being a full-time student is very influenced by my dad...because my mom wants us to succeed and she doesn't want us to, you know, like...somehow end up like him.”

Another participant who lost her father when she was eleven years old shared that she wanted to become successful as soon as possible to be able to compensate her mother for what she did for her when she was growing up.

Ruby [11]: “Uh, like I said... my dad not being present in my life was nothing really big for me. I went to school as a full-time student because I wanted to become successful for my mom, I wanted to give back to my mom, like for everything she did for me. Everything she was able to give me, I wanted to give back to her, so everything I do and... all the education that I'm taking in, as you know, young adult is so that later on in life, in a couple of years, say two or three years, I will be able to give everything to my mom that she wants, you know, take her on vacations, buy her anything she wants because she was always able to do it for me.”
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Losing a parent at a young age has been found to increase the possibility of developing depression and anxiety (Tyrka et al., 2008), as well as impacting their academic motivation (Kailaheimo-Lönnqvist & Erola, 2020). However, there is not much research conducted with Latino participants. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the potential consequences of parental loss before the age of eighteen in Latino college students, and how social support influences the development of these symptoms.

Utilizing a phenomenology design, the data was organized into themes that provided the opportunity to understand the experiences of the participants after losing their fathers. The themes found related to the loss of a parent were, crying, family getting together, not a good relationship, no relationship, good relationship, no good/bad memories, a lot of responsibilities, sibling responsibilities, and household responsibilities. The themes found related to social support were, mom, grandmother, counseling center, school counselor, friends, best friend, school, stepfather, self-motivation, church family, and religion. The themes found related to depression, anxiety, and academic motivation were, feeling sad, hyperactive, anxious, nervous, emotional, mom as a motivation to pursue a higher education, making father proud, encouraged, and successful. The ABC-X model was used to structure the interview questions, which allowed the facilitation of the discussion.

The findings of this study suggest that social support provided to the participants when they lost their parents was essential to prevent the development of depression and anxiety.
symptoms as well as academic motivation at the time of their loss. All of the participants in this study lost their fathers and were living with their mothers at the time of the loss. The responses given by the participants in this study raise the question of whether losing a mother compared to losing a father could be emotionally detrimental to the participants since they mentioned having a stronger connection with their mothers and because they affirmed being motivated to pursue a higher education due to the support and encouragement they received from their mothers. These results are similar to Gimenez et al. (2013), who found that losing a mother before the age of eighteen influences the child’s academic motivation compared to losing a father since mothers are more likely to be involved with the children’s development and daily parenting, so when losing the mother, it is more difficult for the father to adapt to the responsibilities that the mother fulfilled. Most of the participants mentioned not having a good relationship with their fathers, which could potentially be the cause that their loss did not have a tremendous impact in their lives. Even the participant who had a good relationship with his father stated not being affected by his loss. Perhaps, this could be because all of the participants’ mothers were single mothers when they were growing up, so the participants were not living with their fathers when they lost them.

The participants shared how their families processed the loss of their fathers as well as some cultural traditions practiced in the Latino community. While some families were open to expressing their pain and crying for the loss of their loved ones, others were very private in how they were feeling, mainly because they wanted to protect the participants from suffering due to the loss. Some cultural traditions were performed to grieve the loss of their fathers. Some of these traditions included praying the rosary for nine days for the soul of their loved ones, dedicating a mass for the person they lost, visiting the family to assure they are safe and their
needs are met, and praying together for one another. These traditions are commonly used in the Latino community, as stated in Clements et al. (2003) and Hidalgo et al. (2020).

The participants from this study mentioned that their lives were not impacted by the loss of their parents. Since most of the participants from this study did not have a good relationship with their fathers, they believed that losing them was sad, but they quickly recovered from that experience. In addition, since all of the participant’s mothers were single mothers when the participants were growing up, some participants found the need to take over the household and parental responsibilities due to their parents’ separation. As stated in Gimenez et al. (2013), surviving parents find it necessary to ask their children to contribute to the household responsibilities. In addition, most participants mentioned not experiencing depressive or anxiety symptoms when they lost their fathers; however, some of them mentioned experiencing some of these symptoms when their parents separated, and others experienced anxiety symptoms later in life. As stated in Cait (2005), anxiety symptoms could present later in life if the child does not receive the opportunity to express their feelings about the loss of their parent. Additionally, the participant who had a good relationship with his father could potentially have experienced anxiety symptoms as he mentioned feeling hyperactive and nervous. According to Lima Nogueira et al. (2015), Latinos feel more comfortable accepting they feel nervous than accepting they are experiencing anxiety symptoms.

For some participants losing their father did not influence their decision to pursue a higher education; instead, they mentioned that their mothers were the encouragement for them to enroll in college. Another participant said that he wanted to go to college to prove to his father that he followed his advice. Being a part-time student or a full-time student was not related to
losing their parent; once again, their mothers were the ones motivating them to be full-time students and complete their education as soon as possible.

The possibility of losing their mothers was difficult to even consider for some of the participants in this study. All of them mentioned having a good relationship with their mothers and even consider them a best friend or sharing a great connection with them. In fact, their mothers were their primary social support during difficult situations. The results indicate that after experiencing a stressful situation such as the loss of a parent, connecting with family and friends, having a strong support system, and relying on resources such as the help from a mental health professional, is essential to protect the children and surpass the crisis so the family can readjust.

There were three limitations in this study. The first one being the small sample size. Despite the researcher’s attends to recruit a reasonable sample size, it was very difficult to find Latino college students interested in participating in this study. Perhaps, Latinos are not interested in participating in research studies, or Latinos who lost their parent before the age of eighteen are less likely to enroll in college. Participants in this study were mostly females; therefore, the results provided in this study are only represented by one male participant. Additionally, all of the participants lost their fathers, and all of them still had their mothers. It is possible that the participants from this study did not show high symptoms of anxiety and depression at the time of their loss because of the negative relationship or lack of relationship between the participants and the father that they lost. These negative relationships could have interfered with the results of this study.

Future studies should consider examining why Latinos are not participating in research studies despite the increase of this population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
Also, future studies should consider the inclusion of more male participants when researching the potential consequences of parental loss, as it is believed that Latino males are expected to grieve differently than females (Clements et al., 2003). More importantly, based on the responses from the participants from this study about their worry about losing their mothers, it would be essential to investigate if losing a mother is more impactful on the mental health of the child than losing a father.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the severe consequences of losing a parent at a young age is essential to providing the necessary support to these children. Latinos are still impacted by the belief that mental health problems do not affect them. As a result, in some circumstances, they lose the opportunity to use the resources around them to avoid being labeled. This study provided an understanding of the experiences lived by Latino college students when they lost their parents before the age of eighteen, and how their social support was fundamental to helping them cope with their loss.
REFERENCES


