Grief After Suicide: How Is It Different?

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WORKSHOP OVERVIEW
Suicide Bereavement Clinician Training
- Introduction
- Survivors: Who Are They?
- Themes of Suicide Bereavement
- Tasks of Loss Integration
- Wrap-Up

SURVIVORS: WHO ARE THEY?
Definition of a Survivor

- Language
  - Suicide attempt survivors vs. suicide loss survivors
  - Committed vs. died by suicide
- Previous Definitions of Survivorhood
  - Kin to the deceased
  - Exposure to any suicide
  - Psychological proximity to deceased
- A Broader Definition
  - "A suicide survivor is someone who experiences a high level of self-perceived psychological, physical, and/or social distress for a considerable length of time as a result of the suicide of another person" - Jordan & McIntosh, 2011

Cerel, McIntosh, Neimeyer, Maple, & Marshall (2014) – "A Continuum of Survivorship"

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Continuum Model: Effects of Suicide Exposure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>每个人都有可能感受到某种形式的自杀影响，包括旁观者。</td>
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<td>那些因自杀暴露而出现的反应，可能导致对逝者的消极反应，自我否定或逃避。</td>
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<tr>
<td>人们因与逝者建立的联系而体验到的痛苦，逐渐适应失去。</td>
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<tr>
<td>那些因自杀暴露而出现的反应，可能包括情绪的剧烈波动，对生活重要领域的责任感下降。</td>
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How Many Survivors Are There? – Exposed vs. Survivor

- Exposure - Crosby & Sacks (2002)
  - 7% of U.S. population exposed in a year (22 million each year)
  - 1.1% have lost a family member (3.4 million each year)
- Of those exposed:
  - 3.2% lost immediate family
  - 13.7% lost extended family member
  - 80.4% lost friend or acquaintance
How Many Survivors Are There? – Exposure vs. Survivor

- Cerel, et al. (2014); Feigelman, et al. (2017)
  - About 50% of U.S. population have known someone who completed
  - About 64% have known someone who has attempted or completed
  - 20% self-identified as a “survivor” (Cerel) – based on self-report
  - 35% could be classified as bereaved (“greatly” or “somewhat distressed”) (Feigelman, 2017)
  - Psychological proximity to deceased predicted self-identified survivorhood

Are Survivors at Risk for Suicide?

- Summary
  - Risk of completion increases at least 2-3 fold over all kinship categories
  - Increased risk of suicide in partners bereaved by suicide (Erlangsen, 2017):
    - Compared to general population, 6 – 8 fold increase after 5 years;
    - Compared to all spousally bereaved, 3 – 4 fold increase after 5 years;
    - Highest risk is a 46 fold increase for male spouses who lose a spouse to suicide;
  - Childhood loss of parent (particularly mother) before the age of 21 is a 3 – 5 fold increase

Are Survivors at Risk for Suicide?

- Mothers who lose a child have greater risk for suicide, psychiatric hospitalization (Pitman, 2014).
- Loss of an adult sibling to suicide raises risk of suicide in the surviving sibling (OR 2.44 for men and 3.19 or women) – (Rostila, 2013)
- Workplace (< 100) exposure involves a 3.5 fold increase in risk (Hedstrom, et al.)
Are Survivors at Risk for Suicide? - Conclusions

- Survivors can be at elevated risk for suicide
- Survivors should be more vigilant, but not terrified
- Survivors are not "doomed"
- Survivor families need help in understanding and gaining perspective on their increased risk for suicide

Prominent Themes of Suicide Bereavement

Prominent Themes For Survivors

- WHY? - Making Sense of the Death
- RESPONSIBILITY - Guilt & Blame
  - Role of magical thinking
- TRAUMA & HELPLESSNESS - Shock & Horror
- ANGER - Rejection & Abandonment
- RELIEF - The End Of Suffering
Prominent Themes For Survivors

- SHAME - Stigma
- SOCIAL AMBIGUITY – Isolation & Social Disruption
- SUICIDALITY – Why Go On?
- SORROW – Grief & Yearning
- POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Prominent Themes For Survivors: Family Impact

- Information management – who and what to tell
- Disruption of family routines/rituals
- Communication shut-down
  - Trying not to upset others
  - Anger/ conflict management
  - Blame/scapegoating

Prominent Themes For Survivors: Family Impact

- Coping Asynchrony
  - Differences in grieving styles
  - Changes in psychological availability
- Anxiety about it happening again (esp. for parents)
  - Problems with separations
  - "Are we cursed?"
- Interpersonal Strain & Loss of Cohesion is Result
Post-Traumatic Growth After Suicide

- Changed identity
- Changed relations with others
- Changed outlook on life
- Growth

Tasks of Loss Integration

Tasks of Loss Integration & Goals of Postvention

- Containment of the trauma & restoration of control
  - Bio-rhythms
  - Management of intrusive images, memories
  - Creation of a "narrative" of the suicide - Psychological autopsy & sense-making activities
    - To understand the mental state of the deceased
    - Sort out realistic responsibility for the death and develop a realistic perspective about the multiple causes
    - To learn to live with the "blind spot" – not having all the information
Tasks of Loss Integration & Goals of Postvention

- Self-dosing - Cultivating analgesia and finding psychological sanctuary
  - For “grief pangs” & traumatic reliving
  - Dual Process Model of grief – Alternating movement “towards” the grief and “away from” the grief
- Learn social management skills
  - Eliciting support from helpful social networks
  - Avoiding/managing “toxic” people

Tasks of Loss Integration & Goals of Postvention

- Repair and transformation of the relationship with deceased
  - Idea of “continuing bonds” in thanatology
  - Dis-identification with the deceased
  - Internalizing positive connection with the deceased
- Develop a “durable biography” of the deceased
  - Cultivating memories from others
  - Honoring the life, not the death
- Reinvestment in living – reactivation of the “exploratory system”

Two Final Thoughts

- Postvention is Prevention
- It Takes a Village to Journey with a Survivor
WRAP-UP

- Questions?
- Comments?
- What will you take with you?
Professional Reading List


2. American Association of Suicidology – Clinician-Survivor Task Force (2018): [http://cliniciansurvivor.org](http://cliniciansurvivor.org). The AAS Clinician Survivor Task Force provides support and resources to clinicians and professional caregivers who have experienced the suicide loss of patients, loved ones, students and/or clinical colleagues.


83. Song, I. H., Kwan, S. W., & Kim, J. E. Association between Suicidal Ideation and Exposure to Suicide in Social Relationships among Family, Friend, and Acquaintance Survivors in South Korea. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 45(3).


SURVIVING AFTER SUICIDE LOSS

Recommended Readings for Suicide Loss Survivors


Linn-Gust, M. *Do they have bad days in heaven? Surviving the suicide loss of a sibling*. Atlanta, GA: Bolton Press, 2001 (Chellehead Works 2002).


Wroblewski, A. & Reidenberg, D. *Suicide: Why? 85 Questions and Answers*, 3rd Ed. SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education), 2005. (http://www.save.org/)
**Book Services:**
These book services specialize in a wide range of books related to loss and bereavement, for children, adolescents, and adults.

- Centering Corporation – Omaha, NE – Telephone - 866-218-0101 http://www.centering.org/

**Organizations and Online Resources:**
All of these groups have resources for survivors.

- Alliance of Hope - Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors — bit.ly/hopeall — Internet community focused on 24/7 peer assistance for the suicide bereaved
- Canadian Association for Suicide prevention – Survivor Resources: http://suicideprevention.ca/coping/survivor-support/
- G.R.A.S.P. – Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing – see http://grasphelp.org/ – support groups and resources for parents bereaved after the drug overdose of a child.
- Parents of Suicide and Friends and Families of Suicide - http://www.pos-ffos.com/ - online web resources for parents bereaved by suicide, and other family members/friends bereaved by suicide (siblings, children, spouses, friends, etc.).
- Samaritans Grief Support Services – 41 West St., 4th Floor - Boston, MA 02111 Telephone: 877 870 4673. www.samaritanshope.org/
- Samaritans of Rhode Island – Telephone: 401-272-4044 - www.samaritansri.org/home.htm
- SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) - 8120 Penn Ave. S., Suite 470, Bloomington, MN – 55431 – Telephone 952- 946-7998.
- SOLOS – Survivors of Loved Ones to Suicide, Inc – http://www.solessupport.org – online support community for suicide loss survivors
- After A Suicide Resource Directory – a comprehensive listing of support resources for suicide survivors. – bit.ly/afterasuicide