

ABSTRACTS

Parental bereavement: the crisis of meaning

Wheeler I. *Death Studies* 2001; 25(1): 51-66

For parents, the death of a child, even of an adult child, is unnatural and untimely, reversing the sequence of events. This study looks at two aspects of the search for meaning in parental bereavement — the search for cognitive mastery and the search for renewed purpose. Bereaved parents (176) answered questions about the experience of their child's death and the meaning of their lives since the death. The great majority of the parents were able to find meaning through connections with people, activities — often involved with helping others — beliefs and values, personal growth, and memories of the child.

The role of volunteers in hospice bereavement support in New Zealand

Payne S. *Palliative Medicine* 2001; 15(2): 107-115

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of hospice bereavement volunteers in New Zealand. The

support offered face-to-face counselling, befriending, home visiting, telephone contact, social outings and loan of self-help books and videos. A large part of the article is concerned with the methodology, but it is clear from the response to interviews and questionnaires that, despite some negative aspects, the volunteers, who reported being highly motivated to help others, overwhelmingly regarded their work as valuable and enjoyable. The author remarks, however, that they 'appeared to be largely unaware of the need for specialist training, or supervision, which raises issues about the quality of services provided.'

Assumptive world views and the grief reactions of parents of murdered children

Wickie SK, Marwit SJ. *Omega* 2000-2001; 42(2): 101-113

Child death is perhaps the most incomprehensible of all deaths, and when the child has been murdered the impact upon the parents is particularly devastating. The authors of this article explore the effect such a tragedy is likely to have upon parents: intense anger, the transformation of the world -

in their view - into a place which is no longer orderly or predictable; the unfamiliar social role they may be thrown into by a lack of support from family and friends confused as to what their reaction should be. Compared to parents bereaved by accidents, parents bereaved by homicide showed more negative views of the benevolence of the world, though the survey showed no difference between the two groups with regard to the meaningfulness of the world or the worthiness of the self.

College student bereavement, scholarship, and the university: a call for university engagement

Balk DE. *Death Studies* 2001; 25(1): 67-84

The prevalence of bereavement among college students should impel universities to help bereaved students on their campuses. (One study indicates that 22%-30% of college undergraduates in the USA are in the first 12 months of grieving the death of a family member or a friend.) Clearly, this can have serious consequences, both academic and emotional. In this thoughtful and well-reasoned article, the author argues that universities, which should be

communities of care and compassion, could do much to help bereaved students. He sets out a model for a university-based bereavement centre which would provide accessible, sensitive and effective outlets to help in grief recovery, such as training peer helpers, providing social support groups, and raising consciousness about bereavement.

A woman of many abilities

Sanders C. *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 2001; 9(1): 50-54

This is the second of two articles from an issue of *Illness, Crisis & Loss* devoted to the personal experiences of women leaders in thanatology. (Silverman's article, 'It makes a difference', was reviewed in the last issue.)

Catherine Sanders lost her seventeen-year-old son in a freak accident. Profound grief led her to explore the psychological basis for the continuing agony of loss. As a result of her research she believes that there are many different types of grief, and that there is no prescribed length for grieving. On the basis of her findings she devised a Grief Experience Inventory which is now widely used. **BC**

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

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