

BOOKS

international research literature. For example, in his 'modest proposals' for dealing with the increase in the murder rate in the USA (it has actually declined slightly in the last few years but is still shockingly high) he suggests that the length of the sentences should be increased and that this will act as a deterrent. Sentences for murder in the USA are vastly longer than those in the UK, yet the murder rate in the UK proportionate to the population is a tenth of that in the USA. He dismisses the suggestion that controlling the distribution of guns would make a difference, opining rather sententiously that it is people who kill, not guns. Instead he indicts five factors – the culture of anger, the culture of death, the glamorisation of homicide, the information industry, and fatherlessness.

Unfortunately he does not quote research sources for these statements, tending to go to secondary sources and newspaper reports and, whilst we can be sympathetic to many of the points he makes, the research evidence is much more complex and equivocal than he asserts. What he finds difficult to accept is that if someone is in a rage and has a gun in his hand, his rage will more likely result in death or serious maiming than if the rage erupts when he is bare-handed.

The main value of this book to readers of this journal is the interviews with parents. Five sets of parents, all from California, most of adolescent or adult children, talk about the effect on them and their families of the murder. One is the manslaughter of a 34-year-old son by his wife. Some of the suggestions for how friends can help support the survivors are of practical help. These sections can be recommended to parents of a murdered child of any age who need to feel that others can understand and share their painful experiences, and to those close to them.

Dora Black

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

WRAPPED IN MOURNING

The gift of life and organ donation

Sue Holtkamp

New York: Brunner Routledge, 2002, 218pp. £16.95

Human organ transplant technology depends on the unconditional gift of a donor's organ/s, usually following a sudden and traumatic death. The donor's next-of-kin are not expected to show any

objection to the dissection of the body once brain-stem testing has certified death. Relatives must accept that the bodily functions of the donor will be maintained on ventilatory support until the organs are removed. This non-traditional way to die can challenge the donating family's understanding that this functioning body is legally dead. Coupled with the often difficult decisions about donation, and with issues about relinquishing attachment to the donated part of the loved one that 'lives on', organ donor families are at high risk for aberrant bereavement.

Holtkamp's book is therefore a much-needed addition to specialist bereavement literature, as yet unrivalled in the marketplace. However, she writes from her own phenomenological experience of being a grief therapist and educator engaging with donor families, and her book is a practical manual for those supporting them in their bereavement. While she draws upon North American research to give credence to her arguments, she fails to include a number of important British and European studies, and the solely American context of the book may be inappropriate for other settings.

Wrapped in Mourning is well written and will be a useful background for individuals with an interest in the field, but those searching for a strong, theoretical, contemporary, research-based undergirding will be disappointed. **BC**

Magi Sque

University Senior Lecturer

ABSTRACTS

Bereaved parents' outcomes 4 to 60 months after their children's deaths by accident, suicide, or homicide: a comparative study demonstrating differences

Murphy SA, Johnson LC, Wu L, Fan JJ, Lohan J. *Death Studies* 2003; **27**(1): 39-61

Among the youth and young adult population of the USA, accident, homicide or suicide account for 80% of all deaths. It is estimated that about 80,000 parents are bereaved each year by such deaths, yet little is known about their adjustment over time. Some people claim that the death of a child by homicide is the most traumatic bereavement possible, others that bereavement by suicide is the hardest to accept. The aim of this study was to discover whether one cause of a child's death influences parents' outcomes more than another, and to what extent there is improvement with the passing of time.

Nearly 70% of parents reported that it took from three to four years to put their child's death into perspective, and that it was this, rather than the cause of death, which most significantly influenced their adjustment.

Testing the grief to personal growth model using structural equation modeling

Hogan NS, Schmidt LA. *Death Studies* 2002; **26**(8): 615-634

The belief that loss can result in growth has been hypothesised for centuries. Hogan's Grief to Personal Growth model represents one emergent perspective of the qualitative changes resulting from the loss of a loved one. The model delineates a pathway through grief which indicates that the bereaved experience despair and detachment followed by intrusive thoughts and later by avoidance of intense preoccupation with grief. Social support is shown to help the bereft as they reconstruct their lives. A second path indicates that some bereaved individuals need help to proceed towards growth. The model was tested in a sample of bereaved parents using structural equation modelling as a method of theory-testing. The results are presented within a framework of theory-testing as a mechanism to bridge the gaps between theory, practice and research. Implications for practice are considered. This article is a useful contribution to our understanding of the process of 'reconstruction'.

Notifying individual students of a death loss: practical recommendations for schools and school counselors

Servaty-Seib HL, Peterson J, Spang D. *Death Studies* 2003; **27**(2): 167-186

Although a growing body of literature is focused on child and adolescent grief, less information addresses the needs of school communities with regard to death. This article provides practical recommendations for schools and school counsellors who are faced with telling students of the death of someone close, especially a parent. There are also specific suggestions about to the who, when, where and how of notification. The authors stress the need for school personnel to be educated in how to deal with such situations. They should be aware that the grief symptoms may not begin to emerge until as long as two years after the loss of a parent, and that the grieving may be of greater intensity

and longer duration than that of adults. Although some of the article may have relevance only for the USA – such as the ethical code governing privacy and the role of the school counsellor – in general it should be a useful guide, especially in relation to the need for sensitivity and understanding on the part of the school staff.

'Fret no more my child... for I'm all over heaven in a day': religious beliefs in the bereavement of African American, middle-aged daughters coping with the death of an elderly mother

Smith SH. *Death Studies* 2002; **26**(4): 309-323

This article examines the ways in which the religious beliefs of 30 African American, middle-aged women helped them to cope with the deaths of their elderly mothers. The study found that the women used their belief to move through stages of grief that allowed them to prepare, relinquish control, accept death, and maintain a connection with their mothers beyond death. Themes identified in the study include a belief in the existence of an afterlife where family members would be reunited. The author also stresses the way in which religious beliefs helped the bereaved daughters to cope with the tasks of living in the present while keeping a tie with their mothers which served to enhance both their belief and their fortitude in daily living. As the author points out, however, the study is limited by several factors.

Reconstructing the language of death and grief

Hedtke L. *Illness, Crisis & Loss* 2002; **10**(4): 285-293

The author of this article, a clinical social worker with a special interest in death and bereavement, disagrees with the theory that the finality of death is mediated by the idea of a need to progress through a series of stages or tasks until the bereaved finally come to terms with their loss and 'move on in life'. Instead, she adopts an approach which is more in keeping with current thinking about continuing bonds, encouraging the bereaved to perpetuate the relationship by talking about their dead loved ones and remembering them through, for instance, rituals and celebrations for holidays and anniversaries. 'To know that they will not be forgotten is a source of peace for the dying as well as for the living.' **BC**

Sheila Hodges and John Bush