

## B O O K S

the World Cup in 1966, but I don't imagine this will be a problem with children of today.

We see a great many books for young people with a bereavement theme. Some stand out because they are grabbing tales in their own right. This one has an arresting first sentence and is about things to which children can relate: relationships with teachers and peers, school trips, football, pop music, and even the serious dangers of accepting lifts from strangers. It is good to see football there – more bereavement books seem to be about girls than boys.

However, it is a girl, Dawn, who is the main character, still grieving for her sailor father who died

at sea two years ago. The body was never returned. She relates badly to her stepfather and, strictly against her mother's instructions, she revisits the now derelict house in which they lived with her father. There she stores her reminders of him. She is very good at creative writing and produces a parallel story of a girl at the time of the Crusades whose father is killed. All this is skilfully woven into the main narrative of how her beloved teacher and others realise her plight and help her through. This is a good story; it held me and I enjoyed it. The protagonists are ten years old but this book might be appreciated most by children somewhat older. ●

*Mary Bending*  
Teacher and Bereavement Counsellor

## A B S T R A C T S

## Stress, social support and quality of life of bereaved spouses

Cheng BB, Ma JL. In: Tse JWL, Bagley C (eds). *Suicidal Behaviour, Bereavement and Death Education in Chinese Adolescents*, ch 7. Aldershot, Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2002

Reports of research into bereavement in China are seldom reported in English language journals. Although this sample of 70 bereaved spouses in Hong Kong who were interviewed six months to two years after bereavement, cannot be said to be

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## A B S T R A C T S

representative of all Chinese widows and widowers, it does throw light on some of the problems encountered by this group. These include:

- the difficulties faced by young parents when left to bring up young children on their own, particularly if they have not assumed responsibility for child care in the past
- the high proportion (81%) of Hong Kong widows and widowers who now live alone
- and the fact that only 33% had contact with a relative at least once a week.

This lack of social support is highlighted by the fact that 61% strongly desired emotional support but the authors infer that they do not seek it from their family or from caring professionals because they do not wish to burden their families and they see the professionals as too busy.

Although bereavement service is an integral part of hospice care, which has been promoted in Hong Kong since the 1980s, there are still relatively few bereaved people who know of or receive this type of support. Death, we are told, is still a taboo subject in Hong Kong and 'people may be ignorant of the needs of the bereaved'. Indeed 11% were distressed at being blamed and the authors attribute this to the Chinese tradition of attributing unfortunate events to the fault of the victim.

**Colin Murray Parkes**

### The grief evaluation measure (GEM): an initial validation study

Jordan JR, Baker J, Matteis M, Rosenthal S, Ware ES. *Death Studies* 2005; **29**(4): 301-332

This article describes the development of the Grief Evaluation Measure (GEM), a new instrument designed to screen for the development of a complicated mourning response in a bereaved adult. The GEM provides a quantitative and qualitative assessment of risk factors, including the mourner's loss and medical history, coping resources before and after the death, and circumstances surrounding the death. It is designed to provide an in-depth evaluation of the bereaved adult's subjective grief experience and associated symptoms. Results indicate that the GEM's internal consistency and test-retest reliability are high. The GEM demonstrates good concurrent validity for established measures of bereavement, trauma, and physical and psychiatric symptoms, and good predictive validity for mourner-adjustment one year after initial assessment. While the authors of the article believe that the GEM offers the most comprehensive clinical assessment tool for bereaved individuals currently available, they mention areas of weakness that need to be

addressed. They discuss plans for future development and invite other researchers to collaborate with this work.

### Long term bereavement processes of older parents: the three phases of grief

Malkinson R, Bar-Tur L. *Omega* 2004-5; **50**(2): 103-129

This study is based upon interviews with 47 elderly bereaved Israeli parents who had lost their sons in war or during military service. The interviews provided the writers with detailed and extensive information on the bereavement processes that parents experience over a long period of years, which affect their relationships with one another, with their surviving children, with friends, at work, and with others. They identify and describe the many phases in these processes: the immediate, acute phase; grief through the years; and bereavement in old age. Though the article is repetitive and the study is based on a small sample, it shows very clearly that, for most parents, grief for the loss of a son, though it naturally changes over the years, is felt for the remainder of their lives.

### New Dawn: grief and the 'nation form' in Iceland

Arnason A, Hafsteinsson SB, Grétarsdóttir T. *Mortality* 2004; **9**(4): 329-343

The management of death and grief in Iceland has undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades. Organisations supporting bereaved people have been established round the island, and a specialised palliative care unit opened with the National Hospital. This paper focuses especially on the establishment and work of Ny Dögun (New Dawn), an organisation that supports bereaved people and those who work with the bereaved. It is particularly interesting in that it describes the changing attitude towards death within a nation in which the suppression of grief has been the norm, perhaps linked to the struggle of the Icelandic people for survival in a harsh climate. The growth of Ny Dögun, moreover, has taken place during a 13-year period of right-wing government, involving the privatisation of many previously state-run enterprises and the rolling back of the welfare state.

### When Isaak was gone: an auto-ethnographic meditation on mourning a toddler

Ironstone-Catterall P. *Omega* 2004-5; **50**(1): 1-21

Dr Ironstone-Catterall's two-year-old child died quite suddenly one night, from causes which are still unknown. As she and her husband put him to

bed he was his usual bright, happy, active self: the next morning, when she came to wake him, he was already in a state of *rigor mortis*. Taking as her starting point Isaak's death, she describes, in this very personal account, how she struggled to come to terms with her loss, not least in view of the dearth of literature on mourning a toddler. She asks questions about what it means to grieve for a child; what social, cultural and professional demands complicate this process; and what it meant suddenly to become a 'non-parent'. She also discusses what helps and hinders the process of producing a narrative around the loss of a toddler as a means of consolation, so that the death may be turned into something which can be communicated both to the self and to others.

### Childhood mourning: prospective case analysis of multiple losses

Kaufman KR, Kaufman ND. *Death Studies* 2005; **29**(3): 237-249

Multiple losses within a short time period make one question life and can influence one's coping skills. But what are the effects on a child, and what should be done when the next loss occurs? This study addresses the case of a six-year-old child who experienced the loss of five close relatives, including three grandparents, within a period of 18 months. The boy in question seems to be exceptionally sensitive and mature, and his parents – a psychiatrist father and a business executive mother – were very perceptive and far-sighted in encouraging him to participate as fully as he wanted to, both in the events preceding death, in the case of one grandparent after a long illness, and in the aftermath. As the authors write, there is little research into childhood bereavement and the death of grandparents who, in today's social structure, often play an important role as caregivers. This study gives an interesting account of how they helped their son to cope with his grief. ●

**Sheila Hodges and John Bush**

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