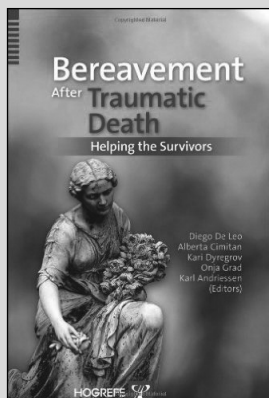


Book Reviews



Bereavement after traumatic death

Diego de Leo, Alberta Cimitan, Kari Dyregrov, Onja Grad, and Karl Andriessen (Eds)

2014
Hogrefe Publishing
£36.93
ISBN: 978 0 88937 455 3

I was keen to read and review this particular text – experiencing my husband’s sudden and unexpected death almost eighteen years ago, and ensuing work as a bereavement volunteer with Cruse, suggested traumatic deaths had several distinctive features when contrasted with anticipated or ‘normal’ deaths.

Edited by several leading figures in the field, *Bereavement after traumatic death* is indisputably a comprehensive collection of research studies, personal accounts and recommendations relating to working with survivors following traumatic deaths. The majority of the eighteen chapters contain welcome subheadings, and many use accessible bulleted information. The interspersed moving personal reflections added a human touch, though the indistinguishable use of the term ‘a bereaved person’s testimony’ for each account seemed impersonal.

However, in spite of impressive authorship, editorial board and extensive research, this book failed to live up to my expectations. The title suggests bereavement following different ‘traumatic deaths’ will be explored, and whilst the first two chapters comprehensively address theoretical and widely-accepted understandings of grief and mourning resulting from all types of sudden unexpected death, including a brief exploration of ‘complicated grief’, the emphasis in the ensuing chapters is very much on bereavement after suicide. I was disappointed that the book failed to examine the distinctive features that media, publicity, police and other legal interventions, and ‘unknowing’, amongst other issues, can contribute to bereavement following other forms of traumatic death. Chapter 14, ‘Spreading awareness for bereavement support – Working with the media’, looked promising, but rather than suggesting ways of dealing with intrusion, publicity and unwanted attention, it focused on recommendations adhered to by the press when reporting on suicides, and an annual

Media Award given in Belgium on National Suicide Survival Day.

The book’s flow was erratic, and was more akin to a collection of academic papers than being a cohesive text. Dividing the book into parts may have been helpful, and an index would definitely give more appeal. If, as it states in the Introduction, ‘(this book) is one of the few books that can be read with profit by those who have suffered the traumatic loss personally, and want to know what to expect and how best to be helped’, I believe many individuals grieving the traumatic death of a loved one would benefit from being able to look up terms such as ‘murder’, ‘disaster’, ‘road accident’, ‘autopsy’, ‘sudden’, etc in order to read what they felt they needed to at the time. I felt the abundance of research studies and findings, particularly in Chapter 16, had the opposite effect and would daunt rather than attract.

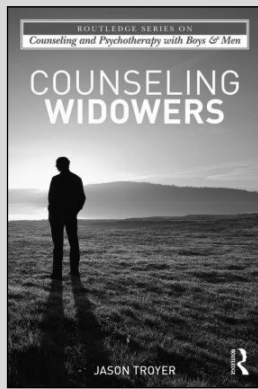
A final caveat was the way external resources focused once again on suicide groups and organisations, and specifically in Belgium and Norway – one example in Chapter 10 on ‘Postvention’ directs readers to a website only available in Flemish and Dutch. I feel attention given to a more global signposting would have been beneficial. In the United Kingdom alone SAMM, SOBS, Papyrus, Samaritans, Winston’s Wish, SCARD, Cruse Bereavement Care – to name but a few – are well established organisations working with survivors of bereavement following traumatic death.

On a more positive note, the authors and editors have provided a text that will be helpful to many professional bereaved people, whether death was traumatic or anticipated. Of particular note are Chapters 12 and 13 which provide sound suggestions for setting up bereavement and peer support groups, and my personal favourite, the brief but jargon and research-free Chapter 7, ‘Dreams and symbols in the process of mourning’. More personal and conversational, I feel this is the format books for bereaved individuals need to be written in, reassuring grieving people that dreams, nightmares, communication with the deceased and symbolic representation are all normal elements of the mourning process.

At the end of the day though, the book’s format was disappointing, and I am not convinced professionals will not have not already read much of what is presented in other established texts by John Bowlby, Elisabeth Kübler Ross, Colin Murray Parkes and William Worden. ■

Trish Staples

Counsellor, trainer, bereavement volunteer and writer



Counseling widowers

Jason M Troyer

New York and London: Routledge
2014
224pp
ISBN: 9780415897341

Widowers often get overlooked, yet they face higher rates of depression, suicide and health problems than widows. Ingrained male gender norms mean many cannot risk sharing their feelings. A man can invest extraordinary power in one woman so when she dies, at the time of his greatest loss, he also loses all these investments.

In this book, from a Routledge series on Counseling and Psychotherapy with Boys and Men, Jason M Troyer starts by looking at 'mediators' of grief – factors particularly relevant to widowers like social constraints, work, money or dependent children. These are reasons why a widower is less likely to seek help and more likely to express his grief in cognitive or physical ways. An excellent overview of grief theories highlights the shifting conceptualisation from Kübler Ross to Bonanno. Stroebe purports two main grieving styles – 'instrumental' which is more cognitive, action oriented and problem-solving focussed, and 'intuitive' which is more affective and process focused. Men tend towards a more 'instrumental' way of grieving and thus frequently do not get what they need from counselling. Troyer summarises that there is no one right way to grieve, it is as individual for men as it is for women.

The author examines normal and complicated grief responses. There is no conclusive evidence that men or women experience complicated grief more than the other. Denial, though, may figure more so for men due to reluctance to acknowledge the importance of the loss and thus admit to over reliance. Anger is one emotion men tend to express more freely, though they may fear losing control. Men can experience shame for not fulfilling the protector role or for asking for help, and feel loneliness more keenly as they tend to be physically and socially more isolated than women.

In order to enhance counselling there is some evidence that each man needs to be treated as an individual, he must be self-referred, and therapy must be welcoming and empathic – to bear witness to the client's story. The book includes a 'Widower Assessment' tool and explorations of techniques such as letter writing, empty chair, and creative methods. Groups for men are explored. The book argues it has to be the right type of group – all male groups work best. A workshop approach with another reason for being together ie, cooking for one, (instrumental) might be more inviting.

Finally Troyer looks at minorities – much younger/older men, ethnic diversity, gay widowers and other examples of disenfranchised grief.

This is an engaging book packed with facts, figures and references which brings together wide-ranging research around grief and grieving, highlighting those aspects which are particularly pertinent to widowers. ■

Heather Price

Bereavement Volunteer



Helping children think about bereavement

Heather Butler

New York and Oxford: Routledge
2013
160pp
£24.99
ISBN: 9780415536851

This is a nice resource for use in school PSHE lessons or similar, helping children to consider and discuss emotions relating to a variety of situations. It consists of a story that builds and develops over four lessons about a brother and sister aged 8 and 10, their parents and a turtle. The book provides various activities and discussion topics which are sprinkled throughout the story in each lesson. Those who are less experienced with teaching whole classes will find plenty of guidance, and those who are very experienced will find plenty of ideas that they can adapt and develop as they wish (I particularly liked the figures and backgrounds that can be copied from the appendices and used to create a 3D setting for the story).

The story is accessible for children and the activities are relevant and engaging. It is differentiated so that there are versions for: 9-11 year olds; 7-9 year olds; 5-7 year olds, children who speak English as a second language; and children in early years or with learning difficulties. It provides helpful advice about how to set up ground rules for the lessons, and has sample letters and information sheets that can be copied and sent to parents and carers.

Guidance offered to the adults working with children about how to look after themselves is often added on at the end of such resources as if it were unimportant or something of an afterthought. So it was lovely to see that here it is given placed in its proper place at the very beginning. The lessons, the activities and the emotional literacy develop over the four lessons, such that death and grief are covered only in the final lesson. Helpfully, many other resources and sources of support are signposted at the end of the book. ■

David Trickey

Consultant Clinical Psychologist