

Insights Into the Bereavement Experience and the Access to Support Services in British Columbia in the Post COVID-19 Era

Joshua Black¹, Rachel Carter^{1,2}, Anica Butters¹, Nicolas Starkes¹, Jody Monk¹, Ronald Arjadi¹, Kathleen Yue¹, and Eman Hassan^{1,2}
¹BC Centre for Palliative Care, ²Department of Palliative Care, Faculty of Medicine, University of British Columbia



Background

- Many formal and informal supports for bereavement have been disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic
- These disruptions may be impacting how the bereaved are coping following the death

Research Questions

We seek to understand:

- How people in BC have experienced bereavement during the pandemic (beginning March 2020)
- How and where British Columbians access support (formal and informal)
- How bereavement support has changed through the pandemic and what forms of support were effective
- What could be done better

Methods

Design: A mixed methods design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data from bereavement support providers and bereaved individuals who experienced a death of someone that was important to them since March 2020

Data collection: Online surveys and in-depth interviews

Setting: British Columbia

Conclusions

- The pandemic caused major challenges to the bereaved and their support (informal and formal)
- Major gaps in support have been identified
- These findings will inform a provincial roundtable discussion that aims to identify effective strategies to improve bereavement experiences and access to quality bereavement support services

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Further Information

Joshua Black, PhD
 BC Centre for Palliative Care
Jblack@bc-cpc.ca

Results

Study	Themes	Subthemes	Quotes
Bereavement Service Providers Participants 43 Surveys 16 Interviews	Pandemic Impact on Bereavement Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bereavement Services: moved to virtual or cancelled • Change in Demand: many increased, but some decreased • Bereavement Education: moved to virtual or cancelled 	<i>"Offering groups online has actually been, again, surprisingly intimate and powerful and meaningful for people in a way, again, we wouldn't have expected."</i>
	Pandemic Impact on Bereaved Clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No ability or limited ability be with the dying • Death Rituals: limited, moved to virtual, or postponed • Benefits and issues with virtual support services • More clients with complicated grief • Inability to cope 	<i>"People were upset, especially with these Zoom funerals that weren't going very well. So we were there just to listen and to give support and just hear them because they wanted to complain to somebody."</i>
Bereaved Participants 182 Surveys 20 Interviews	Coping with Grief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of informal supports (e.g., family, friends, pets) • Importance of formal supports (e.g., professional services, peer support, one-on-one support) 	<i>"Friends and family ... listened to my pain, expressed sympathy and empathy, helped me talk through my feelings, made me feel supported and loved."</i>
	Access to Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of grief literacy and resources • Lack of awareness of formal supports • Challenge accessing desired services • Waitlists are a great barrier • Financial barriers 	<i>"There was no other help available to me in my community, as the local Hospice Society said they were "full" and did not follow up as promised. 18 months later, I have still not received a follow-up call!"</i>
	Pandemic Challenges & Restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitation restrictions • Changes in death rituals • No in-person support • Increase in traumatic deaths 	<i>"I was unable to be with and say goodbye to my loved ones because of covid which has made the grief worse for me."</i>