

Frontline Perspectives Considering the Dual Experience of Homelessness and Bereavement

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Background

- Bereavement in the context of homelessness has not been meaningfully recognized by current literature
- An urgent systemic response towards providing better bereavement support is desperately needed considering the dual crisis of the coronavirus pandemic interacting with a toxic and illicit drug supply crisis

Aim

- This research study explored the dual experience of homelessness and bereavement in British Columbia (BC) from the perspectives of frontline workers or volunteers who provide health or social support for individuals experiencing homelessness

Methods

Design:

- An environmental scan of organizations offering support to individuals experiencing homelessness across BC was conducted to invite to the study
- A mixed methods design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data from frontline workers who support individuals experiencing homelessness

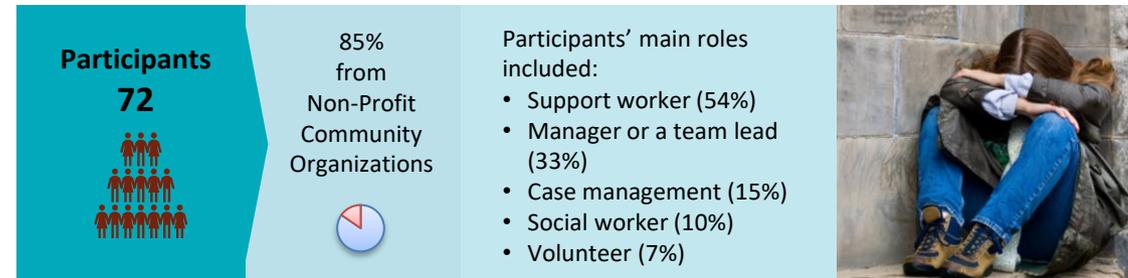
Data collection:

- Online surveys asking about their organization, role, perceptions of their client's bereavement, as well as their own bereavement responses in the event of a death of a client

Conclusions

- Participants perceived that their clients did not have adequate grief supports and participants had a strong desire to increase grief literacy
- Future research should aim to interview individuals with lived experience of bereavement and homelessness to better understand their experience and what they desire for grief support.

Results



| Questions | Responses | Quotes |
|---|---|--|
| Perceptions of their clients' grief | Almost all stated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They have witnessed, listened to, or responded to a grief experience by a client following the death of someone important to them Most clients are suffering from unresolved grief and many will use substances to cope | <i>"We recently experienced a death within our shelter community. There is a large range of emotions ranging from sadness to anger. We expect to see a higher percentage of usage in our safe consumption sites in the coming days as the residents try to cope and process the passing of a well loved resident."</i> |
| Grief supports used by their clients | Common supports indicated from checklist: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friend(s) (89%) A pet or animal (75%) Staff in non-bereavement settings (73%) Organizational memorial event (52%) Individual counselling or therapy (42%) | <i>"Speaking from my organization, I can say with confidence we're not properly trained or qualified to handle bereavement scenarios."</i> |
| Barriers to care | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Limited services/resources available Access to available support Stigma and mistrust of available support Complexity of needs of client in receiving support | <i>"Receiving grief support while in an active substance use, should be crucial to minimize harm and overuse of substances in lieu of emotional supports."</i> |
| Solutions for care | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible service delivery Increased grief training for staff Increased interdisciplinary collaboration Meet clients' basic needs and establish safety | |

Acknowledgments

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Further Information

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