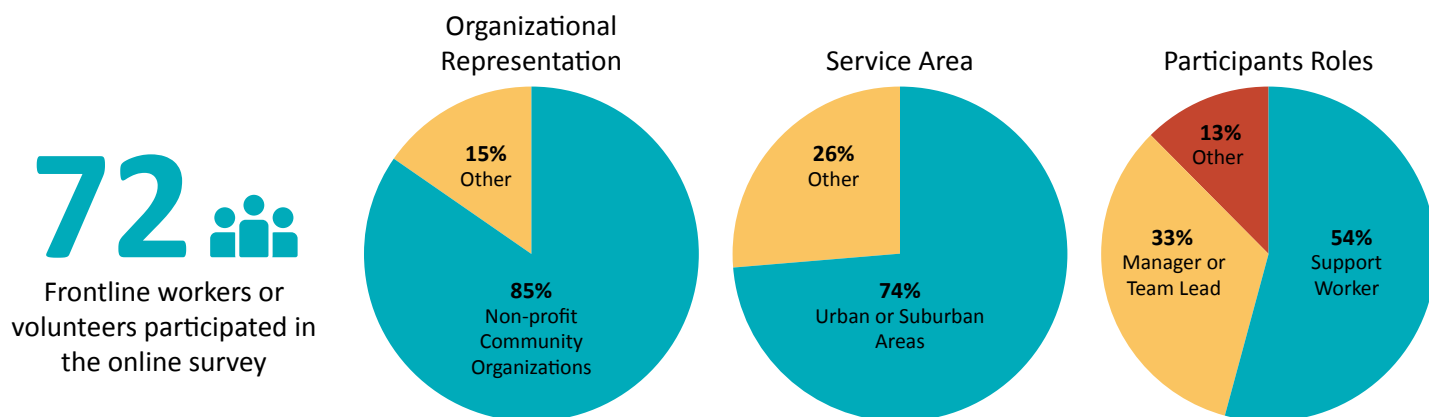


Article Summary

Frontline workers' perspectives considering the dual experience of bereavement in the context of homelessness in British Columbia, Canada (2024)

Bereavement in the context of homelessness has not been meaningfully recognized by current research. This research study explored the experience of bereavement in the context of homelessness from the perspectives of frontline workers who provide health or social support for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Online Survey Demographics



Staff Competencies and Grief Experiences

Almost half (48%) of participants thought that grief experienced by their clients was formally recognized and addressed at an organizational level. Yet only 32% of participants stated that their organization has policies and processes for supporting grieving clients (21% did not know). Training to help participants support grieving clients was mainly about mental health and crisis training, with only a few stating they had specific grief and bereavement training.

79% of participants agreed that grief has become normalized and expected within the landscape of the work they do with clients. Most participants (66%) felt they have missed opportunities to support the grief of their clients (23% did not know). Around a third of participants (37%) never or rarely asked their clients about any important death(s) in their life.

Most of the participants (89%) reported experiencing their own grief from their bond with a deceased client. Half of those who experience their own grief (53%) think their organization can do more to support it.



Almost all participants (95%) stated that they have a desire to increase their knowledge on grief and grief-informed approaches to care

“Speaking from my organization, I can say with confidence we’re not properly trained or qualified to handle bereavement scenarios. Based on that, I’m going to assume other agencies in the DTES [Downtown Eastside] area of Vancouver aren’t either, unless (maybe) those who have end of life or palliative care units under their umbrella.”

- Support Worker

Perceptions of Clients' Grief Experience

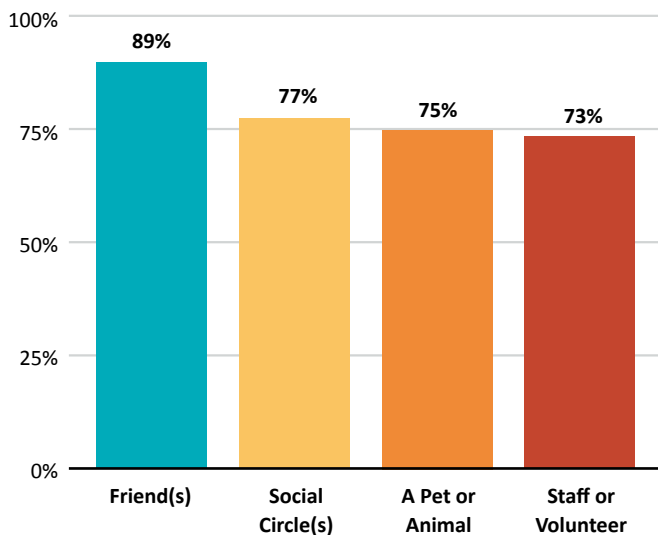
Almost all (96%) participants in the last 2 years have witnessed, listened to, or responded to a grief experience by a client following the death of someone important to them. These deaths were both before and during their clients' experience of homelessness. Specifically, 62% stated they had clients discuss deaths from prior to experiencing homelessness. Those who had clients experience a death prior to experiencing homelessness commonly (59%) stated that the death impacted their client in the loss of their housing (29% do not know).

Almost all (97%) participants perceive that some clients are suffering from unresolved grief, estimating it to be a median of 80% of their clients. The same number (97%) of participants believed that some clients were using substances to cope with the pain of their grief, estimating it to be a median of 81% of their clients.

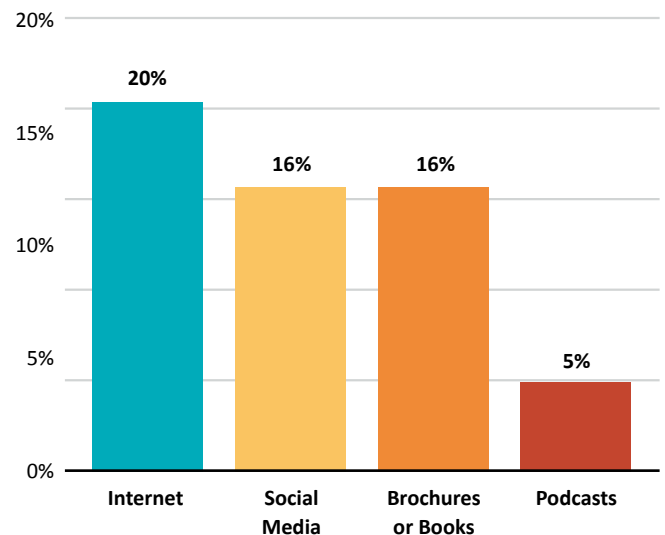
Perceived Grief Supports of Clients

Nearly all respondents (91%) feel that their clients do not have adequate access to grief support.

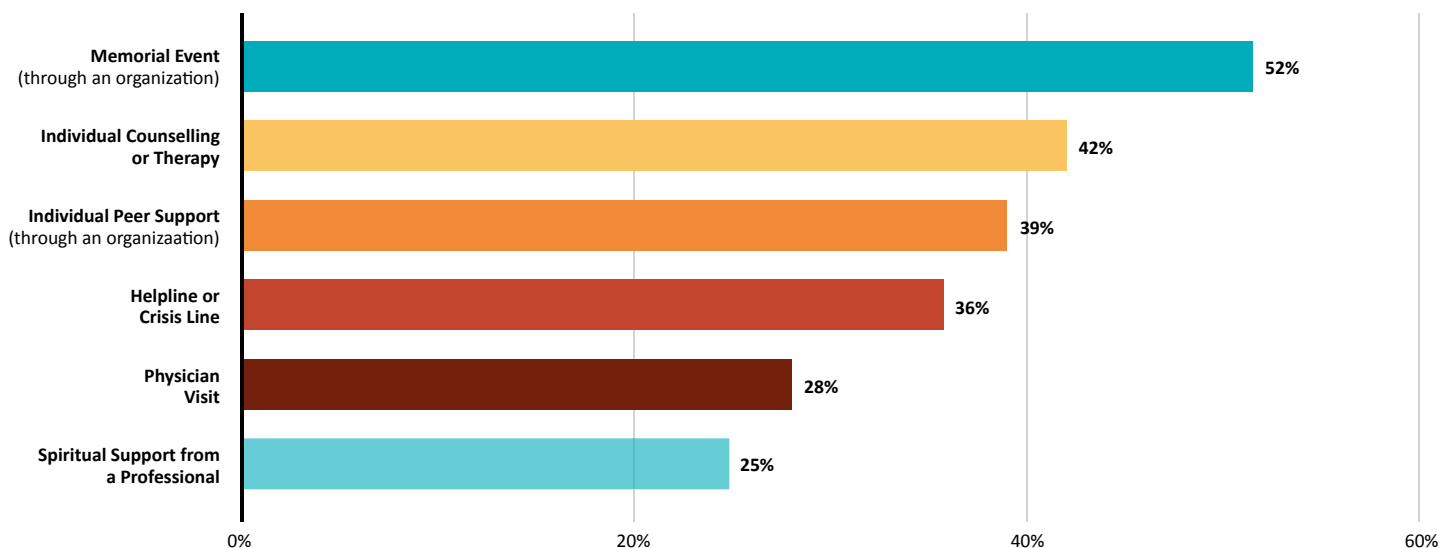
Clients' Most Common Social Circle Grief Supports



Grief Support Through Information



Most Commonly Used Professional Grief Supports



Primary Barriers and Gaps Identified

“Anyone working with vulnerable populations in this area is filling every possible role they can as there is very limited options unless the client is willing to move to a larger city. Addressing immediate survival needs (housing, food, clothing) always takes precedent over mental health.”

- *Homeless Outreach and Prevention Worker*



Limited services/ resources available to provide support
(e.g., limited grief resources or services, restrictions in who people/organizations are willing to serve, limited grief literacy with staff/volunteers)



Lack of access to available support
(e.g., long waitlists, lack of transportation, cost, challenges with communication and follow up)



Stigma and mistrust of available support
(e.g., uncomfortable joining a group with those housed because of the stigma, institutional mistrust, lack of cultural awareness in supports)



Complexity of needs of client in receiving support
(e.g., mental health disorders, intellectual disabilities, trauma severity, people who use substances, multiple deaths, lack of safety and basic needs)

“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.”

- *Support Worker and Manager or Team Lead*

How We Can Increase Grief Support



Flexible service delivery
(e.g., increased mobility, outreach, groups designed for those with multiple complex needs such as mental health disorders and substance use, choice in one-on-one or group support)



Increased grief and bereavement training for those who support clients
(e.g., knowledge on how to support a client grieving, resources available, exploring client preferences)



Increased interdisciplinary collaboration
(e.g., partnerships with housing service/shelters and grief organizations)



Meet clients' basic needs and establish safety
(e.g., food, water, clothes, a safe place to live and be supported in, a way for help to find them and reconnect with them in the future)

For more information,
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