

Abstract

Maternal bereavement is reported to be more intense and long-lasting than other forms of bereavement. This study suggests that mothers' grief is highly individualised because of culture, personality, lifestyle and family relations, yet the experiences of grief can be similar. The age of the child and each type of sudden death – accident (in the home; road accident) and murder, are the types addressed in this study – all bring unique factors with which a mother has to contend and which affect individual maternal grieving processes.

This type of grief is multidimensional and multifaceted, consisting of many physical, psychological and sociological processes. Diverse affectional bonds (eg. child to parent, parent to child, spouse to spouse, sibling to sibling, friend to friend) cannot be regarded as identical, neither can the needs generated by their loss be the same. Each type of grief is unique. Consequently review of general conceptualisations of mourning is required and new models of maternal mourning developed in recognition of the normalcy of these reactions in this type of grief, and acknowledging those aspects of maternal grief that make it unique and different from other kinds of grief.

Emphasis is placed upon the value of therapeutic contact and dialogue as a means of affirming bereaved mothers in their grieving processes.

The study highlights the necessity to increase the knowledge base of practitioners in terms of the currently inappropriate social expectations that are placed upon bereaved parents and mothers by society, as well as themselves, and in terms of misdiagnosis of normal maternal grief, as 'pathological'.